

# More Freedom Expected

By FR. PATRICK O'CONNOR  
(N.C.W.C. News Service)

Damascus, called the world's oldest city, has been the scene of the world's newest revolution.

"The people of Syria are very dissatisfied," a foreign diplomat told me in Damascus a year ago. "But only the armed forces could bring about a change," he said.

Now Syria's armed forces have done it. They have broken out of the United Arab Republic that their political leaders formed with President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt early in 1958.

Both countries are predominantly Moslem, although both have sizeable and historic Christian minorities. The number of Christians in Syria is estimated at more than 400,000 in a population of almost five million.

Why were Syrians dissatisfied?

They seemed always conscious of being ruled from and by Cairo. Their proud city of Damascus had been reduced to a mere provincial capital.

Foreign trade had suffered. They were afraid to speak their minds. And for three successive seasons Syria, a mainly agricultural country, had been hit by drought. While that is something no government could

control, it made all other grievances harder to bear. Syria's Christians felt the same pressures that Egypt's Christians have been feeling. But Nasser's government was not putting it on so heavily in Syria.

"The situation for our schools has worsened under the United Arab Republic," a worried Catholic teacher said. "But it is not as bad as in Egypt yet."

For one thing Syrian Christians seem to have shown a firmer front in protest.

About half the Christians in Syria are Catholics of six different rites, notably the Melchite, Armenian and Syrian. The rest are mainly Orthodox, some of various rites, with some Protestants.

In Aleppo, 220 miles north of Damascus, at least 30 percent of the population is Christian.

In one village near Damascus the people, Catholics of the Syrian Rite, still speak the Aramaic language Our Lord spoke.

The constitution of the former Syrian Republic guaranteed religious freedom, but insisted that the president be a Moslem and declared the state's "adherence" to Islam.

It was commonly said in Cairo that the union of Syria with Egypt in 1958 forestalled a communist takeover in Syria. Many Syrians feared the communists might gain the upper hand in Iraq, next door, with danger to all its neighbors. Last year the people of Syria seemed inclined to say the danger never really existed.

Certainly Syrian communists and their fellow conspirators in nearby Beirut, Lebanon, will try hard now to squeeze some advantage out of the latest change. Nasser has given them no chance so far. There is no reason to see communist influence in the revolt.

The chief communist of the Middle East is a Syrian, Khalid Bakdash, a lawyer, aged 49, of a Kurdish family. He prudently left Syria early in 1959 and has been traveling the communist circuit from Peking to Bulgaria since then.

# Faith Gains In Vietnam

By FATHER PATRICK O'CONNOR

Hon Honong, Vietnam—(NC)—"Five villages want to 'khop,' but I can't take them," the young priest said.

To "khop" in Bahnar language means "to pray," and that's the Bahnar way of saying "to become Christian." The Bahnar are the largest tribe of mountain folk in these highlands of central Vietnam.

"The elders came to me from the five villages," Father Marcel Arnould continued. "I had to tell them that I can't take care of them now, because I have no more catechists."

HE WAS TALKING in his wickerwork bamboo house under a roof of thatched leaves. Built on stilts, the house has a floor of openwork woven bamboo strips, so thin and springy that you are afraid you'll put your shoe through it. Kon Honong village is made up of two rows of similar houses forming one wide grassy street in a mountain valley.

Father Arnould, missionary from Saint-Die, France, has 15 Christian villages in his parish already. In eight of them the people are still catechumens that is, preparing for baptism. He has a catechist in each village. At least once every month or six weeks the missionary visits each of the villages, staying overnight and celebrating Mass.

The average population of these villages is about 150. Kon Honong, where the central mission is, has 200.

You won't find Kon Honong on your map, but it is a key position for the Faith in this promising mission field of Vietnamese mountaineers. The Viet Cong (communists) have not overlooked it. During an absence of the priest they came there to harangue the people. They tried to shoot a village teacher. Early this year they ambushed a small car in which two priests and a catechist were driving up the hill trail to Kon Honong. The catechist was killed.

"I came here in January 1957," Father Arnould recalled. "There were only about 20 Catholics in this village then and nine Christian villages in the parish. In April, 1958, I had 75 adult baptisms here. Now everybody in the village is Catholic."

We had evening Mass the day I arrived. Saturday I counted about 140 in the dim, roomy church of bamboo. Evenings are chilly in these uplands, and each of the men, walking barefoot across the bamboo floor had a light blanket wrapped Indian-fashion around his shoulders. They knelt—without benches—on the epistle side, and the women wearing home-woven striped dresses, on the Gospel side.

Led by a catechist, the congregation prayed aloud in Bahnar and sang. After Mass they stepped cautiously down the wooden stairway outside the

church. Standing in the dusk under the first stars of the evening, I heard a familiar melody from within. The people were singing the "Ave Maria Stella" in Bahnar.

The mountains loomed solemn and dark against the evening sky. Somewhere beyond those ridges was still another mission parish, closer to the border of Laos and to communist attackers.

We ate by Kerosene-lamp light. From Kontum town, 40 miles away a rare delicacy had arrived—two loaves of bread. Ordinarily Father Arnould has no bread. He eats mountain-grown rice, like his people.

Once a month he goes to Kontum for the priests' day of recollection. Then he picks up his mail—and a few loaves.

He showed me some of the superstitious objects that the people had given up on becoming Christians. The Bahnar are spirit worshippers, not idolaters. Their ancestral religion involves offering sacrifices to the special knives used by the sorcerers for sacrificing chickens, hogs and buffaloes, and the horns of a buffalo that had been sacrificed.

"There used to be three sorcerers in this village," he said. "Now there are none."

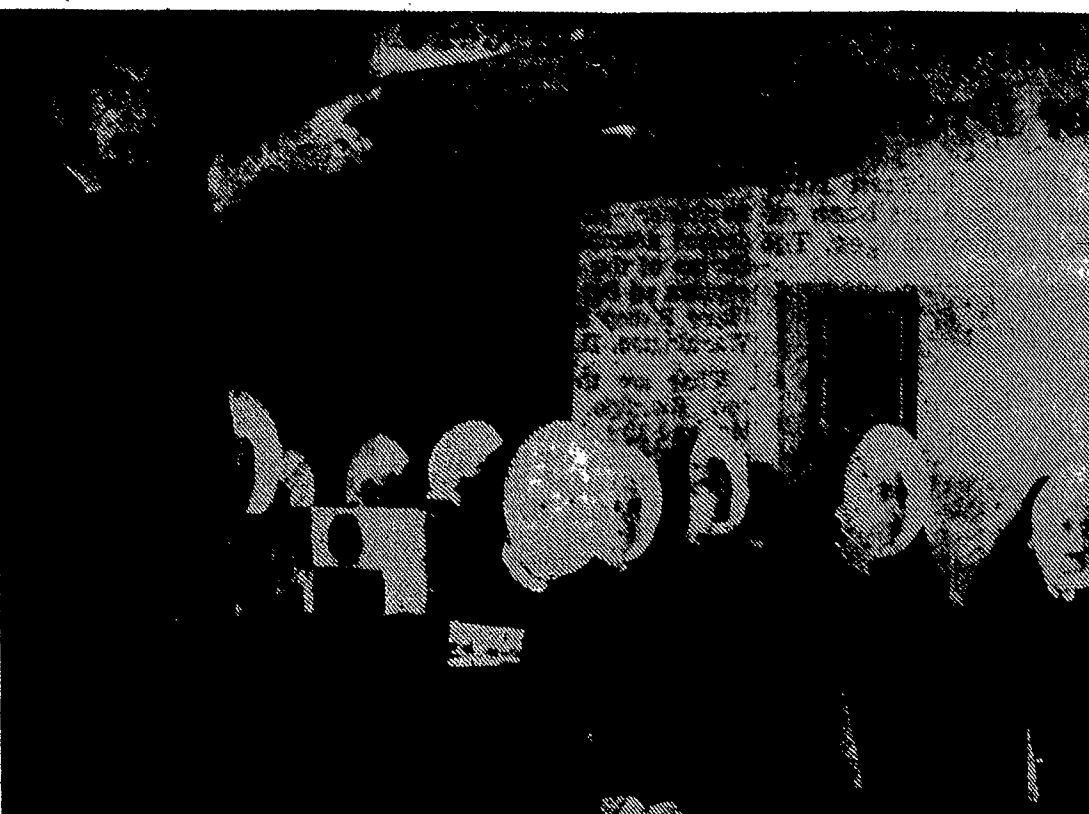
When the people of a village decided to "khop," they invite the priest to come to destroy the spirits, that is, to remove all superstitious objects.

"That means burning various things connected with the spirit worship," Father Arnould explained. "Then I baptize the infants and arrange to install a catechist. It's a big day in the village. We have a feast to celebrate it. The villagers give the rice and I donate the pig for the feast."

The night darkened, cool and starry. No light shone from the houses of Kon Honong. One could hear low voices through the darkness—of people saying their night prayers or finishing a drowsy conversation before falling asleep.

Tomorrow morning, Sunday, they would be astir before sunrise, in time for Mass.

In Kontum diocese there are about 650,000 mountain people of various tribes. Of these, 30,000 are Catholics.



# Picture Trip to Moscow

Cenacle nuns this week took a trip to Russia—by pictures.

Dr. Elmer H. Stotz, a neighbor of the nuns on East Avenue, gave them an illustrated lecture on his August visit behind the Iron Curtain.

DR. STOTZ is professor of biochemistry at the University of Rochester. He visited Moscow to attend an international conference of the bio-chemists worldwide organization.

He arrived at the Soviet capital

the day astronaut Titov received a day-long Kremlin accolade.

Dr. Stotz also visited Zagorsk, monastic city about 45 miles out of Moscow, where devout Russians have a limited freedom to take part in religious rites.

"That's where we saw the first spontaneous activity in Russia," he said. "Everything else was regimented, organized."

The Zagorsk monastery dates from the 12th century, founded by St. Sergius, and still numbers scores of Russian Orthodox monks. Dr. Stotz found no evidence of religion elsewhere in Russia although he admitted the science meeting occupied most of his time.

He told the nuns Soviet funds have been poured into the physical sciences to give them their lead in space travel but the Russians are "twenty years behind" in his own specialty of bio-chemistry which aids medical experts in the control of disease.

He reported the Russian people displayed a marked friendliness for Americans but they daily fed a strong diet of Communist propaganda by press, radio, TV and blaring street corner loudspeakers.



Saints of Unity

ST. EVODIUS preceded St. Ignatius in the See of Antioch, being ordained perhaps by St. Peter himself. He is said to be one of the Seventy Disciples appointed by Our Lord. His feastday is May 6.

# Vatican Paper Gets New Look

Vatican City—(NC)—Those who watch it closely everyday are seeing a new L'Osservatore Romano emerge under the direction of editor Raimondo Manzini.

Typical of the change in the Vatican City daily were two editorial comments—brief, clear and to the point—which were carried recently on the expulsion of a bishop and priests from Cuba and the response to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's comment on the peace message of Pope John XXIII.

Vatican prelates, diplomats and newsmen, whose business it is to look closely each day at the newspaper, the Vatican's chief sounding board of public opinion, have noticed the changes taking place gradually, almost imperceptibly, ever since Manzini first occupied the editor's chair in March 1960.

EDITOR MANZINI has said that his greatest encouragement has come from the comments on the changes made by the cardinals of the Vatican staff and by his fellow journalists.

The first visible sign of change came on December 5, 1960, when the daily switched from a six-column to a seven-column layout. A few weeks later the usual four pages were increased to 10.

Besides the graphic layout of the newspaper, there has also been a decided change in content. There has been an increase of news items of universal interest, as was deemed proper for a newspaper of L'Osservatore's character, and a lessening of news items with an interest limited to Rome and Italy. There has also been an increased use of news and feature photographs.

# School District System Upheld

Chicago—(NC)—The superintendent of Catholic schools here came to the support of his public school counterpart who has been accused of practicing racial segregation by failure to break down the public school district boundaries.

Msgr. William E. McManus said he believed the traditional pattern of neighborhood schools should be retained. He observed: "Abolishing school district boundaries will lead to the same kind of administrative and social chaos that would occur if parish lines were eliminated from the Catholic school system."

Benjamin C. Willis, public school superintendent, has been under fire by various groups who contended his refusal to shift students from overcrowded schools in Negro communities to other districts is a form of segregation. Willis has announced a building program which would remove 10,000 of the 24,811 students who are attending double shifts this year.

"I don't think the Chicago Board of Education should panic under pressure from groups that complain about double sessions in a few schools," the Monsignor said. "Unless there is definite evidence that a community's growth will continue, double shifts are a reasonable solution to handling temporary population movements, the Monsignor added. No significant difference has been found between the quality of teaching in a school on a double shift and one with a single shift, the Monsignor said.

# CIA McCone Noted Layman

Newport, R. I.—(NC)—John A. McCone, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and President Kennedy's nominee as Central Intelligence Agency director, holds high Church honors.

McCone, a Los Angeles businessman and engineer, has been a Knight of St. Gregory since 1955, and in March, 1956, was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Sylvester by Pope Pius XII.

McCone will succeed Allen Dulles in November as head of the super-secret intelligence operation. President Kennedy announced his appointment during a press conference on Sept. 27 at the Naval War College in Newport, where the Chief Executive was vacationing.

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