

By Religious News Service

Review of Religious News of 1961

1961 is likely to be remembered in church circles especially as the year when the Russian Orthodox Church, largest body in Eastern Orthodoxy, moved decisively into the ecumenical orbit by becoming a member of the World Council of Churches.

This dramatic event highlighted the WCC's Third Assembly at New Delhi, India (Nov. 18-25), the first to which the Roman Catholic Church sent official observers. The assembly was preceded two months earlier by another historic gathering, the Pan-Orthodox Conference at Rhodes, Greece, in which the Russian Church was also a leading participant.

The year saw the issuance of an epochal and widely hailed new social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, by Pope John XXIII, and notable progress in preparations for the Second Vatican Council.

Significantly, in all these developments, the various faiths showed a lively common interest as the so-called dialogue for understanding between the Churches gathered momentum on a universal scale. Of exceptional interest were informal visits paid to Pope John by President Bishop Arthur Lichtenberger of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, and by Brooks Hays, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

On the dark side, the year saw fresh impetus given the Red war on religion by the program adopted at the 22nd Communist Party Congress in Moscow. Of immediate concern in this context were anti-religious developments in Communist-controlled East Germany, Poland, and Cuba. Elsewhere—in Laos, Ceylon, Burma, South

Africa, the Congo, Angola, and Algeria—political events also had deep religious repercussions.

December marked the close of one of the most widely-publicized trials in history as an Israeli court doled out the gallows for the extermination of 6,000,000 Jews. Summing up for the prosecution in August, Attorney General Gideon Hausner paid a memorable tribute to the Christian clergyman and laymen who saved many Jews from deportation or death and in so doing brought "a spark of light in the dark night of Nazism."

The trial was seen by observers as challenging the moral conscience of people everywhere. They saw it as pointing to a new era of increased Christian-Jewish goodwill and as underscoring that the Nazi crimes were actually offenses against all mankind. In many communities, particularly in Germany, Protestant and Catholic "reconciliation" demonstrations were held as the trial progressed.

In the United States, Catholic demands that parochial schools be included in any federal aid to education, controversy over the morality of atomic bomb shelters, the activities of extremist anti-Communist groups, and the inauguration of President Kennedy's Peace Corps were headline topics. Meanwhile the U.S. Supreme Court, among other decisions touching upon religious issues, upheld the constitutionality of Sunday closing laws.

Meeting under the shadow of growing East-West tensions, the

World Council assembly stirred criticism in some circles by voting to admit the Russian Church to membership.

The Vatican Radio warned that the Russian Church would be used by the Soviet government to "confuse the world" and as "a cover for further persecution of religion." But WCC general secretary Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft hailed the entry of the Russian Church as offering "a tremendous opportunity for a real spiritual dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches that would greatly enrich our ecumenical tasks."

The Pan-Orthodox Conference, first of its kind since 1872, was attended by delegates from 12 major Eastern Orthodox bodies, and by three WCC observers. It approved theological and social subjects to be discussed at a forthcoming Pro-Synod and to be finally acted upon at the next Orthodox Ecumenical Council. The conference also agreed to renew theological talks between the Orthodox Churches and the Church of England (Anglican) which were interrupted in 1931.

International tension was heightened in October, when Russia resumed nuclear tests, a move promptly protested by Protestant and Catholic groups around the world.

In the previous month, Pope John had called on leaders of East and West to negotiate their differences and thus eliminate the nuclear threat. His appeal won unexpected endorsement from Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, who later surprised the world by formally extending 80th birthday greetings to the Pope.

President Kennedy's executive order in March setting up the Peace Corps in a temporary pilot basis was hailed with general satisfaction in religious circles, although some Protestant leaders were concerned as to whether Peace Corps cooperation with missionary organizations would violate Church-State separation.

The Church-State issue was of much more immediate concern to Protestant and Jewish leaders who opposed Catholic demands for federal school funds. In December, the National Catholic Welfare Conference challenged the Kennedy administration's position on the unconstitutionality of aid to church-related schools in an 82-page statement which contended that the Constitution permitted aid on a much broader scale than the government had been willing to concede.

The U.S. shared a spotlight with South Africa as churchmen in both countries continued to confront the issue of racial segregation. "Freedom Riders" seeking to bring about the integration of public transportation in the Southern states were given strong backing by both Protestant and Catholic

clergy. However, in July, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy urged the nation's clergy generally to play a more active part in fighting racial discrimination.

Throughout the year, Protestant and Catholic officials were concerned over developments in a number of Asian and African countries. In Laos, the future of Christian work was imperiled when missionaries were caught up, with many slain or missing, in the struggle against Communist rebel forces. Other difficulties were reported in South Vietnam, where Red guerrillas continued to attack mission stations in Burma, the proclamation of Buddhism as the state religion made missionary work seem uncertain despite a declaration of religious liberty for all citizens. Another Buddhist stronghold is Ceylon, where church schools were nationalized, visas denied to prospective new missionaries and a new special tax imposed on resident missionaries.

In the Congo, desperate plights were reported by mission hospitals and social welfare agencies. And many casualties occurred among missionaries caught in the crossfire in Katanga province between United Nations and native forces.

New troubles for the churches were reported in Communist-ruled European countries. In East Germany, the sealing of the East and West Berlin border by the Communists on Aug. 13 created a new ghetto of darkness and isolation for millions of Soviet Zone Christians.

Predominantly Catholic Poland saw new restrictions on religious instruction as the government continued to deny the Church by stepping up its birth control program in December reports from Hungary and Czechoslovakia were that the Communists were making bids for better relations with the U.S. by permitting Josef Cardinal Mindszenty to emerge safely from his asylum at the U.S. Legation in Budapest, and restoring banished Archbishop Josef Beran to his See in Prague.

In Cuba, 1961 saw Premier Fidel Castro's December boast that he had been a Marxist-Leninist from the start climax a year of intensive religious persecution during which two bishops and hundreds of Catholic priests and nuns were exiled from the country. In September, a spontaneous demonstration by 4,000 anti-Catholic Catholics in Havana was answered by a new decree outlawing all religious processions.

Not only Catholics, but religious leaders everywhere, hailed Pope John's new encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, which was especially notable for its approval of socialism, but with reservations, and its stress on the need for aid to underdeveloped countries. Catholics saw it as an up-to-date supple-

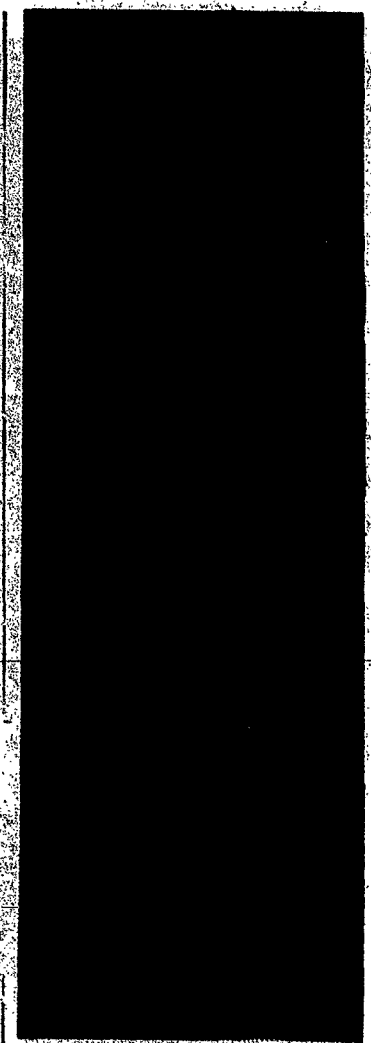
ment to the celebrated *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Leo XIII in 1891 and the *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pope Pius XI in 1931.

Both American Protestant and Catholic leaders showed intensified concern during 1961 over the future of Latin America, menaced by widespread poverty and steady Communist infiltration. In November, the National Catholic Welfare Conference's Latin America Bureau announced that at 112 Papal Volunteers would be in the Latin America mission field by early 1962 to serve as technical or social workers in dioceses hampered by a lack of priests. Previously, Protestant leaders of many denominations stressed what they said was the need not only for more extensive evangelism programs there, but for awakening a greater social consciousness among the peoples.

A new name was added to the calendar of the Catholic Church's roll of canonized saints in May when Pope John raised to the honors of the altar Sister Bertilla Boscardin, an Italian nun who died of cancer in 1922 at the age of 34. In November, Innocenzo da Berzo, a 19th century Italian Capuchin priest was solemnly beatified.

Statistics published in October showed U.S. church membership at a record high of 114,449,217, or 63.6 per cent of the total population of about 180,000,000. The breakdown was 63,688,835 Protestants, 42,104,900 Catholics, 2,698,683 Eastern Orthodox, 5,367,000 Jews and 589,819 members of the Old Catholic, Polish National Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches, and 20,000 Buddhists.

In their annual statement in November the U.S. Catholic bishops warned of a "widespread moral apathy" in America touching virtually every group. They said this makes it vitally necessary for Americans to "make open profession of religious beliefs and moral convictions."



Iron Curtain Christmas By Radio

New York —(RNS)— Radio Free Europe beamed an extensive schedule of Christmas religious services to the people of Russia's satellite nations.

Programs featuring Protestant, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox services and sermons by noted religious leaders were broadcast in a variety of languages, some of them emanating from the United States.

The schedule began with Radio Free Europe transmissions of Pope John XXIII's annual Christmas message, followed by translations of the full text in the Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Romanian languages.

RFE planned to carry several hours of Christmas programming during the holiday season. On Dec. 24-25 all political programs were cancelled, to be replaced with personal greetings from East European refugees now living in the U.S. and Europe to their families still behind the Iron Curtain.

Prelate

Archbishop Leo Binz of Dubuque, Iowa, will succeed the late Archbishop William O. Brady of St. Paul, Minn. As the new head of the St. Paul See, Archbishop Binz becomes the spiritual leader of some 500,000 Catholics in 12 Minnesota counties.

Berlin Wall

Tyrant Symbol

New York —(RNS)— Cardinal Spellman of New York, in a recorded message broadcast from St. Patrick's Cathedral here, said he had chosen to spend Christmas in Berlin because it is a divided city—divided by a wall "symbolic of Soviet Russia's tyrannical will."

Church Gains In Scotland

St. Andrews — (NC) — The Catholic population of Scotland has increased since the end of World War II by more than 100,000, according to official figures released here.

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By MOST REV. FULTON J. SHEEN

How different are our times from those of Bethlehem! Then the whole world was expecting God to become man; now the mood is one of man expecting man to become God. Then both Jew and Gentile looked forward to redemption; today, except for the loyal followers of Christ, hearts are yearning not for salvation but for prosperity. The star in the East to which deluded men now look is the Soviet star; which once again promises, as did Satan: "You will be like unto gods."

It must not be thought, however, that all evil is on one side of the Iron Curtain and all goodness is on the other. Good and bad are mixed as they were in Sodom and Gomorrah, as they will be at the Last Judgment. The point is this: the issues are now becoming clearer than they ever were before. The struggle is between the forces of the God-Man who is Christ and the man-god who is Antichrist.

But this is not reason for despair. Let us count our blessings: 1. The Church always gets the kind of Pontiff she deserves. The Lord must be pleased with the Church and the faithful, otherwise He would never have given us John XXIII. 2. The Church has had more martyrs in the last fifty years than she had in the first 300 years of her history. The martyrs in Russia, the Congo and China are purchasing future blessings for the world through their blood, which is more eloquent than the blood of Abel. 3. Our missionaries. Their poverty, which reflects the Christ Who had nowhere to lay His Head, their shepherding, which makes up for too much emphasis on administration elsewhere in the world, and their conversions, which outnumber ours by 300 per cent in many instances, are testimonials that God is with us.

We become depressed because we read the press too often and the Scriptures too little. What makes news is conflict, contradiction and the breaking of the law of God; what makes peace is prayer and sacrifice. The world is becoming worse in one direction, but it is becoming better in another. Although Christ was denied room in the Inn, the shepherds and the people from the East found Him, and the angels chanted His glory. Be happy, therefore, in Christ. Rejoice in the spread of the knowledge and love of Christ in a persecuting world. But make your merit concrete, as did the Magi, by bringing gifts to Christ and His Vicar that His Name may resound from pole to pole. Whether it be the gold of money, the frankincense of your prayers or the myrrh of your suffering, offer it to Christ through His Vicar on earth.

GOD LOVE YOU to N.H.T. for \$150 "I am a TV serviceman and have received small tips throughout the year. Please accept them now that someone less fortunate than I may be free from want." ... to Anonymous for \$5 "This is to cover the worth of an article that I unintentionally acquired and cannot return." ... to Mr. and Mrs. P.J. for \$10 "This month we celebrated our fiftieth anniversary. In return for the Holy Father's blessing, we wish to send him this offering."

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