

Orthodox Monks Live With Ancient Memories



Panelists at Catholic Interracial Council meeting are Michael Fitzpatrick, Robert Rhodes and Dr. Prentiss Pemberton.

A Different Kind of Gun

Malcolm X of New York City came to Rochester this week to defend the rights of his Black Muslims sect—a Negro group frequently in the news recently for turmoil over racial issues.

Rochester police, according to Malcolm X, interrupted a religious service of the sect when told "a man with a gun" was at the site.

The Black Muslim episode needs much more study before we can decide who's right or wrong.

In most cases, however, it's the white man who has the "gun"—perhaps not a rifle with bullets but a weapon just as effective in robbing the Negro of his rights.

This was the viewpoint of a victim of current bias in Rochester-area housing practices.

Robert Rhodes, a General Dynamics Corporation engineer, described his six weeks search this past summer for suitable living quarters for his wife and two children. An agent of the Barry Realty Company told him there were no vacancies in the Culver Way apartment building although three subsequent white applicants were accepted. Rhodes had to live in a motel and hire a tutor for his oldest child until he finally was able to buy a house.

He said the money he had to spend for motel rent, restaurant meals, pay for the tutor and storage of his furniture was "stolen" from him just as actually as if it were.

Rhodes described his costly and discouraging quest for housing in a talk to the Catholic Interracial Council at its meeting in Annunciation Church hall Tuesday evening.

Dr. Prentiss L. Pemberton, social ethics professor at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, reported a survey his students made when Negro families moved into white neighborhoods in Rochester and its suburbs.

The on-the-spot survey indicated most white neighbors resented the Negroes' coming and frequently had high praise for their "behavior" and the way "they kept up their property."

Michael Fitzpatrick, a member of Bishop Kearney High School faculty, said racial discrimination violates justice and charity, duties that must be fulfilled by every Christian.

What puzzles us is how so many Negro people remain so patient in so many intolerable situations. We marvel that they haven't all long ago joined the Black Muslims or some other organization that would turn the "gun" in the other direction.

We are not thinking of the disreputable elements which disgrace the Negro race. "No-good Negroes" deserve no special privilege. Not all Negroes, however, are in the "no-good" category. And we must admit there are some disreputable white men too. No race or nation or even neighborhood is immune from unfortunate members.

But when a hard-working, Christian-living, well-educated Negro looks for a home in a decent neighborhood and meets with all kinds of obstacles and excuses, it's amazing that he is able to control his impulse to seek a violent solution. Perhaps it is precisely because he is a better worker, a better Christian and far wiser than the white men who block his way.

The purpose of the Catholic Interracial Council is to find the Christian solution to this thorny and highly emotional subject of racial relationships. The Council has inaugurated a program of presenting informative sessions in the various parishes. We hope the Council draws a better attendance at subsequent meetings. This past Tuesday only one Annunciation Church parishioner attended—and he was the parish priest.

If our Catholic people are apathetic or callous in discovering their Christian duty on this topic then we have no one to blame but ourselves if victims of prejudice look for an answer elsewhere. The tragedy is compounded by the fact that we then betray not only our fellowman but our Saviour who said what we do to His least brethren we do to Him.

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The author of the following column is a Jesuit priest of the Byzantine Rite who is assigned to the Russian Center at Fordham University, New York, spent several weeks making a close study of Orthodox monastic life on Mount Athos, the spiritual spring of spirituality in the Orthodox Church in view of current efforts to establish interreligious closer understanding this article provides American Catholic readers with an unusual insight into Orthodoxy.

By REV. GEORGE A. MOLONEY, S.J.
(N.C.W.C. News Service)

It has often been said in the Orthodox world that reunion between the Orthodox and Catholics will come about only when the monks of Mount Athos are ready to accept such a reunion.

In the Orthodox theological world these monks exert practically no influence. Yet in the mind and heart of the ordinary Orthodox believer there is the conviction that on this "Holy Mountain" live the true preservers of the traditions of Orthodoxy. These monks, dedicating all their energies to an austere life of constant prayer and fasting, are held to be the spiritual fathers who are guided in a special way by the Holy Spirit according to the traditions of the early Fathers of the Church.

So it was with great eagerness that I spent several weeks on Mount Athos visiting most of the 20 main monasteries and several of the hermitages in order to converse with these monks on the question: What do they think of Christian reunion?

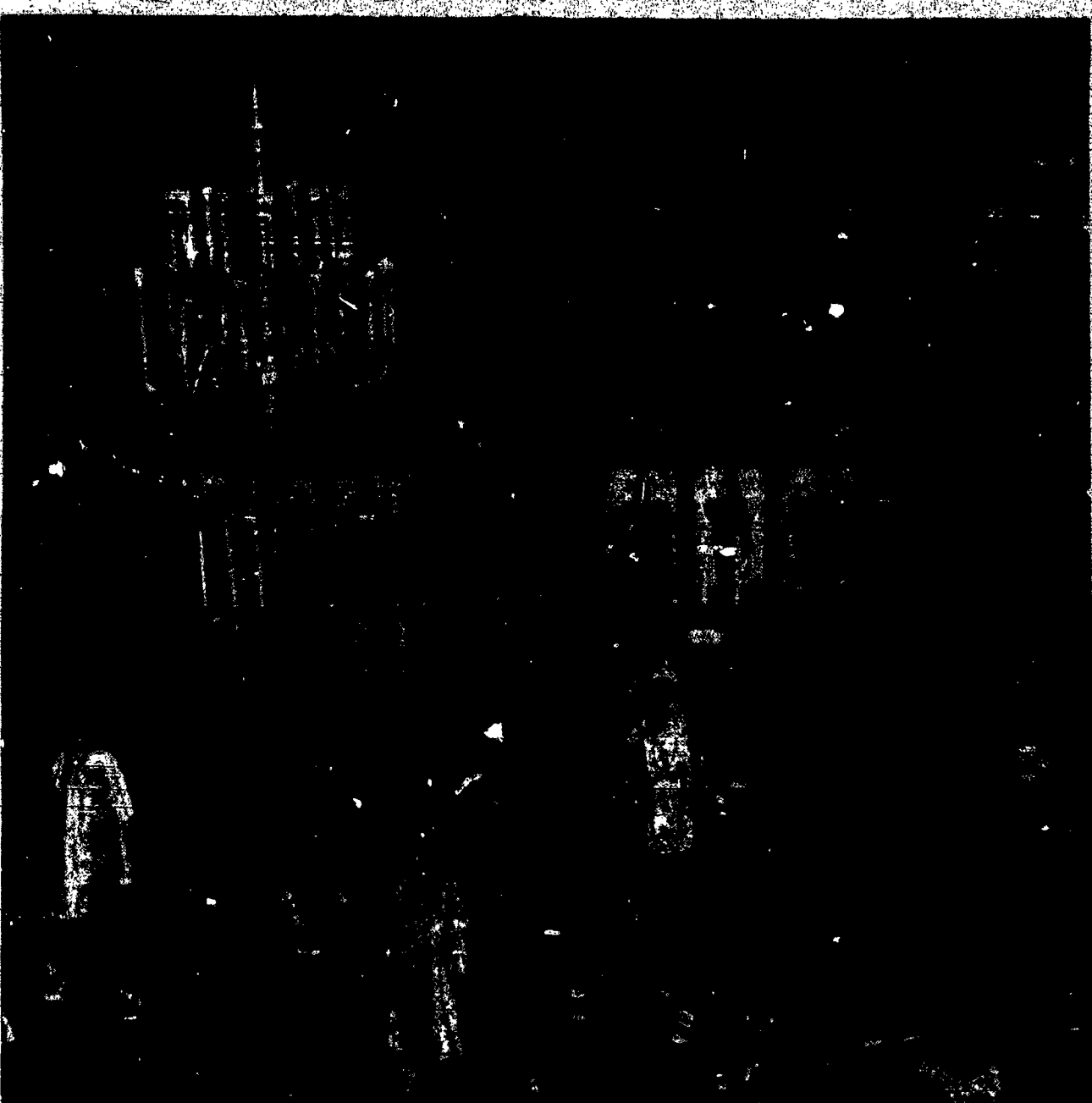
A Westerner must, however, as I quickly learned, keep two factors ever in mind when he speaks with these monks on such a delicate yet pressing topic.

First, for the most part these monks of Greek, Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Rumanian Orthodox background—come from a very simple, often peasant origin and received very little education before coming to the mountain. Once there, they center all of their intellectual pursuits on the interior life of self-perfection. They have no contact with the outside world through radio and newspapers, nor do they care to have any. They are completely absorbed in the art of purifying their souls in order to receive the gift of contemplation.

So popular movements, such as the ecumenical movement for the reunion of all Christian churches which is stirring in the West among Catholics, other Orthodox and Protestants have, if not escaped their attention, at least have very little interest for them.

Secondly, being of simple origin and not too well educated, they have escaped the spirit of scientific investigation to discern, through objective scholarship, truth from falsity, facts from myths and legends. They possess very little idea of historical evidence. The result is that legends about the Catholic Church are handed down from one generation to the next with the same tenacity as legends of miracle-working icons.

In the minds of most of these Athos monks, the Catholic Church is the Church of the Latin crusaders and the Catholicism of the 13th and 14th centuries did suffer from crusade and Catalan persecutions is a matter of history.



Mt. Athos. Orthodox monks devote a major portion of their life to solemn rites of divine worship. (R.N.S. Photo)

During the fourth crusade, the Latins captured Constantinople in 1204 and established a Latin empire in place of the former Byzantine one. Mt. Athos was entrusted to a papal legate. The Catholics, in their effort to extend their commercial supremacy from Barcelona all the way to Constantinople, raided Athos in 1302-1303 and set up a citadel of defense on the southernmost tip of the peninsula on which it is located.

Over and over in conversation with the monks, the story of the monk-martyrs, victims of Latin persecutions, was recounted in great detail, but with very little attention to historical evidence or fact.

Briefs of history, names and events are taken from the time of the fourth crusade (1204), from the period of the Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople John Beccos and his efforts to enforce the reunion agreed on at the Council of Florence with the Orthodox Church. All were woven into one "historical" event.

Upon my arrival at the Bulgarion monastery of Zographou, the first thing to meet my eyes as I entered the courtyard was the centrally-placed monument to the 26 martyred monks. Their ashes are buried below this stone which bears the engraved story in Bulgarian and Greek that every monk on Mt. Athos knows by heart and never forgets.

One of the ruling elders recounted to me with a fanaticism bordering on frenzy this story, perpetuated in graphic form by an icon on the north wall of the central church:

The Blessed Virgin had warned a monk-hermit living near Zographou that the Latins were marching on the monastery to force the monks to apostatize to the pope of Rome. They were to flee if they wished to escape, but 25 monks refused to run, preferring rather to shut themselves up in a tower. The icon shows the 25 in the tower while below is the pope himself with the Latin, red shaven and wearing wide-brimmed hats, a certain sign in days gone by of Westernization. Because the monks valiantly indicated that their head was Christ and not the pope of Rome, the Latins burned them. To this day a lamp burns continually on this spot above their ashes.

At Vatopedi, other monks pointed out to me the ridge near the monastery where the Latins dragged the monks and hanged them. At the Great Lavra it seems that the monks yielded to the Latins and the legend is that at this spot above their ashes.

For most of the monks the two great difficulties they have against Catholics are the changing as they say of the Creed with the Latin innovation of the "filioque," that is that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son, and the claims of infallibility of the pope of Rome, which for them always connotes personal impeccability.

The young monk Ambrose,

who had recently returned from a full theological training in the Patriarchal Seminary at Halki and is now serving as the secretary of Bishop Nathaniel, apologized to me for such an attitude and insisted, along with several other young monks, that this is typical of a passing generation of monks, but not of the majority today, at least among the younger and better educated monks.

A fresco in the "katholikon" or central church of the Serbian monastery of Hilandar well illustrates the general attitude inherited by the monks of Mt. Athos from preceding generations. The Orthodox Church is pictured as a box of ships on the sea of life. She has successfully escaped the clutches of Mohammedan and Latin. The fresco also shows the pope extending a grapple-iron in an attempt to ensnare this ship of Orthodoxy, but the ship successfully withstood the Roman temptation and safely entered port with St. Paul at the helm.

Introducing The One and Only Hong Kong — The Chinese never go anywhere without a formal letter of introduction. Catholic priests receive many of these letters.

One afternoon recently a monk came into a Maryland mission house asking for work. He showed Father Arthur F. Dempsey, M.M., of Peckskill, N.Y., a fine letter of introduction from a Mrs. Chan.

When the veteran Maryknollist of more curiosity asked who Mrs. Chan might be, the man replied matter-of-factly: "My wife."

drop anchor. On shore one sees the Greek priests drawing the ship to land, while a smaller full headlong into the pit of hell.

But this attitude is rather one of the past. The majority of the monks knew about the ecumenical council convened by Pope John XXIII and all seemed most impressed by his love for the Orthodox.

No one, however, admitted any possibility of reunion in the proximate future. Many of them, like the Russian monk, Father Nikon, who I visited among the hermits of Lavra, felt that reunion was an impossibility, not because of intrinsic dogmatic differences, but because of the psychological differences between a predominantly Western culture and one built on the traditions of the Byzantine Empire.

"The West will never understand our spirituality and we will never accept the juridical categories of the Roman Church," Father Nikon said.

I countered with the notion that I did not believe in two essentially different spiritualities, one of the West and one of the East, but in one, basically the same, derived chiefly from the same evangelical and apostolic inspiration, with accidental differences in the manner of expressing that spirituality. Nikon said that he as a holy monk close to God should pray for this reunion.

"Yes," he said, "we pray in the Liturgy each day in the very first litany for peace among all the churches of God. What more beautiful prayer of reunion?"

Yes, Father Nikon and others on Mt. Athos prayed this prayer each day at the Liturgy, yet he insisted, with

a dogmatism which frightened me, that a reunion of the two churches was impossible. I presented two examples to him: an express desire for Christian reunion at the summit of the Mt. Athos, and a desire expressed by the Archbishopric of Athens and the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Archimandrite Gabriel of the monastery of Dionysou, which has the reputation of being one of the least in discipline and regularity observed, is also one of the few authors on Mt. Athos. In our conversation about his writings, he stressed the glaring weakness in Orthodoxy today.

"Nationalism and a superficial (indecently titled) church are the two deadly enemies of the Christian vision that the early Church had of its universal mission. We must uproot from this spirit of nationalism and petty prejudice that have bound us to our nation and our culture."

He applauded the efforts of Pope John and hoped that the Second Vatican Council would prepare the way for a mutual meeting and eventual reunion of the two churches.

Archimandrite Elias of the Russian monastery of Pantokrator surprised me with his statement: "There will be reunion between the Catholics and Orthodox in 60 years, not even sooner," he said. He lamented the weakness of Orthodoxy and indicated that this constituted for him a proof that Orthodoxy has lost something that the Roman Catholics have retained and developed.

He declared: "Look at us the Russian Church. We have no great scholars, no eminent theologians. Before the Revolution we had first rate scholars and journals of a high caliber. In our connection with the projects of Catholic scholarship, your works of mercy and missionary activity, we are nothing. We need the learning of your Church, its strength, its fortitude before communism. Yes, without reunion we will wander away before communism."

Thus I found many varied opinions among the monks of Mt. Athos on this topic of reunion. There was no fixed policy and in recent years, especially among the young monks who have gone abroad to study theology, the atmosphere is definitely one of friendliness and readiness to study the problem. Bigotry among the less educated with a blind acceptance of the differences that they learned from the Greek polemists of the 13th and 14th centuries still exists.

Yet they have in contact with the West, the "Holy Mountain" is doing much to dispel such prejudices. Such studies, not seeking to meet them on a polemical ground, for prejudices are never argued away, but rather coming to its realization of Orthodoxy in order to learn of the treasures that were once the heritage of a single, united Church, can do more to prepare the day of reunion than any other single factor.

There will be reunion the day the monks of Mt. Athos realize that Holy Mother Church does not merely wish to tolerate them, but has the right to meet them on the same level. It is a testimony to a primitive monasticism that exists nowhere in the West in the same manner as on Mt. Athos and which has still a message for all Christians the whole world over.

Reapings at Random

UN Peace Role Vindicated in Cuba, Congo

By GERARD E. SHERRY
Editor, The Georgia Bulletin

One of the most sorry messes left over from 1962 is the situation in the Congo. It appears that President Moise Tshombe of Katanga is going down fighting carrying out a scorched earth policy. It is a shortsighted policy because the major harm will be committed against his own country and its mining treasures.

The United Nations has the major role in attempting to bring Katanga under the control of the Central Congolese Government. The United States Government supports these aims and is backing the U.N. effort with military as well as verbal encouragement.

The U.N. role in the Congo has come in for scathing criticism from Right Wing Groups and individuals in this country ever since the crisis developed, after the Congo's first Prime Minister, Lumumba, was disposed of in a rather mysterious manner. The main thrust of the Right Wing argument is that Tshombe is a confirmed Anti-Communist and should be encouraged rather than condemned for his refusal to join the Central Government.

This is an over-simplification and is by no means pertinent to the central issue—that of getting the Congo unified and self-supporting economically. It is generally supposed that the leader of the Central Government, Premier Abdullah, is also Anti-Communist.

Why then should the Right Wing want to idolize only Tshombe?

I think the major reason is their disenchantment with the U.N. The political right in this country has no faith in the world organization and clutches every straw it can in an effort to deny. This is their prerogative, but they do an injustice to the world organization. They wrongly equate it with the ineffective previous world body, The League of Nations, and at the same time expect it to do things which are outside its competence.

Of course, it all boils down to the fact that to some Americans no organization, either national or international, is any good unless its members wear the lapel pin stating "We are Anti-Communist." Actually, it is a ridiculous attitude to have because the world body is made up of Communist and non-Communist nations. Significantly, the Communists are only a minority in the U.N. and, since its inception, have not had the influence they expected to wield.

Naturally, there is plenty of evidence that the Communist members of the U.N. have been able to thwart the intentions of the majority in various situations. But taking its overall performance the U.N. has an excellent Anti-Communist record.

Nobody need deny that the U.N. has made mistakes. What organization hasn't? But the majority of responsible Americans agree that

without the U.N. our world as it is might not even exist today.

Winston Churchill, the man who invented the term "Iron Curtain" and a confirmed Anti-Communist, has said "It is better to live under a tyrant than to have no government." The United Nations has encouraged this dictum and has contributed in the avoidance of a nuclear holocaust.

Naturally, there are some bellicose people among us who wish to rattle sabres over unnecessary, life-caring about any other view but their own. It is easy to be courageous when other people's lives are involved. Like any country, we have our share of arm-chair generals and presidential aspirants who, without the necessary knowledge, advise their fellow citizens in a warlike manner.

President Kennedy gave a very important lesson to all of us in his handling of the Cuban crisis. Externists label him "A Liberal Appeaser" because he refused to be rushed into foolish actions over the Russian missile bases. Far from rattling sabres, the President "Jaw-Jawed," until it was necessary to prove he meant business. He then faced the showdown calmly and without any hysteria—this is the American way.

And while the two most powerful nations in the world were engaged over Cuba over Government brought the situation to the attention of the United Nations. The U.N. debate over Cuba proved the effectiveness of the world organization. The Communists'

double dealing was laid bare for all to see. And America's resoluteness in the face of Moscow's threats gave new courage to those nations flinching on the edge of so-called neutrality. The Cuban crisis again proved the usefulness of the United Nations. We were able to use it to get over our point of view and our determination to stop Red encroachment in this hemisphere.

One of the troubles with much opposition to the U.N. is that it is based on negative premises. These people do not want the U.N. to succeed, fearing it is the base for world federation or some other such poppycock. Thankfully, these opponents of the U.N. do not have much sway with intelligent citizens. Naturally, they appear more influential than they really are because they are more vocal. He who shouts the loudest is heard the most.

This brings me back to the situation in the Congo. We should be thankful that it is the United Nations which is fighting there rather than the United States and the Soviet Union. If we wait until this crisis is over, it could be the prophetic doom in our midst.

What we need in this country is less bellicose pessimists and more prayerful Optimists. For one, we should all, this New Year, be grateful that the United Nations exists to encourage the "Jaw-Jaw" instead of leaving it to individuals to "War-War." If the critics call this appeasement, then so be it.