

'No Finer Test'

Father LaFarge, Champion for Interracial Justice

New York — (RNS) — In his autobiography published nine years ago, Father John LaFarge, S.J., wrote that "I know of no finer test of a man's sincerity than his willingness to work constructively for the world reign of love, justice and law."

On Nov. 24, death came peacefully here to the 83-year-old Jesuit priest, member of a distinguished family, whose own lifelong leadership in movements for interracial and interreligious goodwill and understanding had made his name one of the most revered among Americans of all beliefs, both white and Negro.

Harvard graduate, author, editor, man of multiple interests, and top leader of the Catholic Interracial Council of New York until his retirement last year, Father LaFarge was once cited by the Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in New York having done "perhaps more than another single man... to induce Catholics of the United States to be conscious of their twin obligations as Christians and Americans and to work for the removal of race prejudices and its horrid train of hate, poverty, misery and injustice."

As the country's No. 1 Catholic champion in the fight against racial bias and discrimination, Father LaFarge lived to see the Catholic Interracial Council of New York founded chiefly by him in 1934, expand and grow to embrace some 60 similar groups in key cities around the country, all now actively supporting the growing civil rights movement.

Despite his advanced age, he joined many other prominent persons in the momentous March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom last August. Explaining why

he did so, he sounded a vital challenge to American Catholics by saying:

"The hour demands a dramatic action. We cannot escape a sharp confrontation of issues. We are faced with a yes or no to the question of taking part in public demonstration. Are we prepared to witness publicly to our belief, as did the early Christians? To witness even if it means scorn, suffering and even physical hardships?"

Father LaFarge was no less insistent in urging Catholic participation in what he called "seasoned, reasoned dialogue" on religious issues and their bearing on contemporary problems.

Speaking in 1959 at celebrations honoring the Protestant and Catholic founders of Maryland as the first colony in America to guarantee religious liberty, he said that "a growing sense among American citizens that such dialogue is possible between Protestants and Catholics, between Christians and Jews, between believers and non-believers, is a healthy sign."

In addition to his other activities, Father LaFarge had a special interest in the Catholic Church in the Scandinavian countries. He was for years chaplain and director of programs for the St. Ansgar's Scandinavian League, which was founded in New York in 1910 under the patronage of John Cardinal Farley, the then Archbishop of New York.

The octogenarian priest is remembered especially for his 36-year-long association with America, the national Catholic weekly, of which he was editor-in-chief from 1944 to 1948, and to which he continued to contribute, as an associate editor, virtually up to the time of his death.

Churches United For Race Rights

New York — (RNS) — Protestants, Catholics and Jews must work together to solve the country's race problems, an interracial congregation was told here at a Mass for the advancement of civil rights.

In a sermon, Father John F. Cronin, assistant director of the social action department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, observed that religious groups should take the lead in promoting effective dialogue between Negroes and whites at the community level.

"We should have strong, functioning interreligious committees in every community that faces a problem of racial tension," he declared.

Some 400 persons, about half of whom were Negroes, attended the fourth annual Mass held under auspices of the St. Thomas More Society, an organization of Catholic professional men and women.

Celebrant at St. Francis Xavier church was Father William Houston, Negro curate at St. Peter Claver parish, Brooklyn, N.Y., and a June graduate of Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, N.Y.

Father Cronin told the congregation that one of "the historic religious events of this year has been the 'irreconcilable' unity of church and synagogue in seeking racial justice."

He went on to observe that

Surveillance Cut in Hungary

Bona — (NC) — Communist Hungary has withdrawn the last two government "supervisors" who have been stationed in diocesan offices, according to the German Catholic news agency KNA.

The government agents were removed in June and July from all but two diocesan offices, Szekesfehervar and the Byzantine Rite Diocese of Hajdudorog, KNA said. They have now been removed from these.

The aim of the program was to limit the contacts of Hungarian bishops with their priests and people. The agents sat in on all conversations with visitors, monitored phone calls, read all incoming and outgoing mail, and even kept the official episcopal seals.

Requiem Held For SVD Head

Washington — (NC) — Father Leo Hotze, S.V.D., provincial of the Eastern province of the Divine Word Fathers, offered a Requiem Mass for Father Louis Schaffhauser, S.V.D., rector of Divine Word College here, who died Nov. 20 after a heart attack.

FATHER SCHAFFHAUSER, 68, was stricken while serving the Mass of a student priest in the college chapel. He had been rector of the college since it was built in 1951.

the task confronting religious leadership today is that of implementing ideals on race in a practical, realistic manner. "We should do more than merely state that church and synagogue should be open to all," he added.

"Religious leadership must be specific in its endorsement of civil rights," he stated. "It is not enough to speak of justice for the Negro. We must take definite stands on concrete issues, such as civil rights legislation and housing integration."

Father Cronin also stressed that religious groups must learn techniques for promoting racial harmony. "We must learn how these (racial) issues are best faced, and adopt the best means developed by trial and error," he said.

In addition, the priest said, religious groups should concentrate "on the one area in which they have special competence: that of healing the wounds caused by tension and struggle; and that of rebuilding those who have been demoralized by poverty and discrimination."

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FATHER JOHN LaFARGE, S.J.

Shortly after his 72nd birthday in 1932, more than 1,000 Protestants, Catholics and Jews gave Father LaFarge a testimonial dinner in tribute not only to his work with America, but to his work in other areas. These activities embraced not only the field of international peace, a subject on which he spoke and wrote many times, but the promotion of ecclesiastical art, especially through his active support of the Liturgical Arts Society in New York of which he was one of the organizers.

Father LaFarge was also honored on this occasion for his strong interest in the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, of which he was one of the founders in 1922.

An accomplished linguist—he was proficient in Russian, Slovenian, Bulgarian, Polish, Czech and Slovak and fluent in French, German, Italian and Latin—Father LaFarge was also at one time or another director of the Conference of Science, Philosophy and Religion, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a vice president of the Catholic Association for International Peace. He was a close student of the Bolshevik Revolution and wrote many articles denouncing communism.

Urbane and mild in manner, gentle in his philosophy, Father LaFarge proclaimed himself as "fundamentally a realist." In an interview in 1960 in which he viewed the current American scene, he said: "I am seriously concerned about the moral fiber of America. I'm more afraid of internal decay than I am of external danger... I see in this country a moral erosion which is the result of our very great affluence, our comfortable living, our preoccupation with personal security and our lavish expenditure on luxuries, stimulated by the ever-increasing pressure of advertising."

Born at Newport, R.I., on Feb. 13, 1880, Father LaFarge belonged to a family of French stock noted for its artistic and literary achievements. His father, John LaFarge, was particularly outstanding for his mural and stained glass work and wrote several books on art techniques. Father LaFarge's brothers, now dead, also were successful painters. His mother, the former Margaret Mason Perry, was a convert to Catholicism, was a lineal descendant of Benjamin Franklin. Among his relatives were the late

Other red letter days in his life were to be meetings with three other Popes — Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII — with the future Pope Benedict XV, then Archbishop of Bologna, Italy. At audiences with Popes Pius XI and XII, the American Jesuit received personal encouragement in his efforts on behalf of the underprivileged Negro minority in this country.

Four years after his ordination, Father LaFarge joined the Society of Jesus. He began his priestly career in the U.S. by teaching at Jesuit colleges. Later he served as chaplain in hospital and penal institutions on Welfare Island, New York, and in 1911 was sent to Ridge, Md. From this pastoral post he was assigned to America magazine in 1928.

It was his work at Ridge that first brought Father LaFarge into contact with the problems of anti-Negro discrimination and inspired him to take a leading part in the formation of the Catholic Interracial Council of New York.

Soon regarded as the nation's leading exponent of Catholic interracialism, he was the author of "Interracial Justice" (1937) and "The Race Question and the Negro" (1949), two books which constitute a veritable "Bible" on Catholic teachings on race relations.

Father LaFarge was the author also of "Jesuit Missions in Modern Times" published in 1927, "No Prejudice" (1930), which discussed the race problem against the background of national and international peace; "The Catholic Viewpoint on Race Relations" (1934). Published also in 1934 was "The John LaFarge Reader," a collection of some of his most notable articles and lectures.

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