

Christians Leave Holy Land

By MAX LAZEGA

Haifa — (NC) — Israel's only residential bishop said here that he is afraid that there may be no more Christians left in the Holy Land within 15 to 20 years.

Melkite Rite Bishop Georges Hakim of Acra said this project is "a source of great anguish" to him. He was interviewed by the NCW News Service on the situation of the Church in Israel and Jordan.

THE ARAB prelate, deploring the lack of unity among the Holy Land's Christians as a whole and among Catholics of different rites, pointed out that Christians here "have a minority outlook and, when they are discriminating, feel strongly about the damage caused by their divisions and declining numbers."

"The only possible solution" to the problems caused by the Christian exodus from the Holy Land, the Bishop said, "would be for the Christian world to show more interest in this little minority here which believes in Christ and which, should it disappear, would doubtless not be replaced."

He added that the January pilgrimage of Pope Paul VI to the Holy Land was "a great stimulus in this respect."

Bishop Hakim concluded that in both Israel and Jordan "Christians are aspiring to a more secure future, to greater unity among themselves, a unity necessary for that future; and to frank and real collaboration among the different Catholic communities as a means to greater unity with other Christians."

The Bishop gave the interview following publication by the Italian weekly, *Oggi*, of what was said to be a report he gave to the Pope in which he allegedly criticized the Israeli government. Bishop Hakim had earlier denied giving any report to the Pope during his visit here. In the interview he stressed that he is in no way anti-Israeli and voiced no criticism of the religious policies of his country's government. He said that the position of Christians in Israel and Jordan is about the same and added that the situation of Israeli Christians has many positive aspects.

To substantiate his fears of a "Christianless" Holy Land, Bishop Hakim pointed out that Christians — even now a tiny minority in Israel and Jordan — are fast emigrating from both countries.

In Jordan, he said, relations between Christians and the vast Moslem majority are relatively relaxed because of King Hussein's good will toward the Christians. But widespread poverty and lack of job opportunities, he continued, are causing Jordanian Catholics to leave for other Arab countries and America.

As an example, he cited the case of Christ's birthplace, saying that "Bethlehem, which only a few years ago had only Christians, about 25,000, is today populated by Moslems who have replaced the Christians who have gone elsewhere."

The major factor behind the departure of Christians from Israel, he said, is the fact that the great majority of them are Arabs. Detailing the reasons for the exodus, he said:

"Because of the tension existing between Israel and neighboring Arab countries, Arab Christians, as well as Moslems, have been subjected to special regulations. The official alleged reason for this is the security of the state. Israel's Arab population is looked on as a fifth column."

"For this reason most Arabs were placed under military law — their movements were under surveillance and their work and employment, especially of those in government service, were subjected to security considerations. Some of these restrictions have been done away with in recent times and are no longer maintained except along the border."

"Another source of serious difficulty for the Christians of Israel comes from the laws passed in 1948 and 1962, under which a large part of their lands were expropriated to be given to immigrant Jews. Compensation was offered to the owners, but it was so unjust that in general it was refused."

"Because of these facts, Christian life is at a standstill," Bishop Hakim reported that because of the flight of Arab refugees during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the Church in this country lost half of its members, including its elite. He recalled that his own diocese lost 20,000 people. Moreover, he said, most Christian doctors, lawyers and higher civil servants fled at that time and have not returned. Because of the large-scale departure, he added, many churches and schools were closed and several congregations of nuns left.

In addition, he went on, Israel's Eastern Rite communities have been cut off from the seminaries that used to supply their priests. "It is for this reason," the Bishop said, "that the Melkite Rite diocese has more than 15 parishes without



Few Christians remain in the Holy Land — a land divided by two nations officially at war, Jewish Israel and Arab Jordan. In either nation, Christians find themselves a shrinking minority, often considered as "foreigners" despite their long residence there.

a priest and that the Maronites, that there is no future for them, many — particularly among the intellectual elite — think they would be better off elsewhere and leave us." Although Christians are a small minority in the Holy Land, Bishop Hakim stressed that they are themselves divided into many groups which often do not cooperate with one another.

Only 100,000 — about 9 per cent — of Jordan's 1,200,000 people are Christians. The rest are Moslems. The Christians include 45,000 Catholics, split between 30,000 members of the Latin Rite and 15,000 members of the Melkite Rite. There are also 45,000 Greek-Orthodox, 4,000 Gregorian Armenians, 1,500 Anglicans, 1,000 Copts and 3,500 others.

Israel has 55,000 Christians, about 2.5 per cent of its population of 2,400,000. It has 2,100,000 Jews, 228,000 Moslems and 20,000 Druses. The Catholic community consists of about 22,000 members of the Melkite Rite, 8,000 members of the Latin Rite and 3,000 members of the Maronite Rite. Other Christians include about 18,000 Orthodox and more than 2,000 Protestants.

He told newsmen that the existence of the Index in the 20th Century "offends many Catholics. A lot of people would like to see the whole idea of forbidden books eliminated from the image of the Church."

The priest said he thought no one would object to an Index of "non-recommended books," but held that the "obligatory character of the Canon Law" behind the Index of Forbidden Books is opposed by Catholic scholars and teachers.

The Society has members from 143 universities and colleges. It reportedly is the first U.S. Catholic body to make a formal appeal for reform or elimination of the Index.

First draft of the Society's resolution, withdrawn in favor of what was regarded as a "stronger" stand, urged that "the laws of the Index be liberalized (if the Index must be retained in any form) to the end that Catholic students may no longer be impeded in their reading and professors in their research, but that they may freely take their place in the intellectual world."

A spokesman said the Index constituted an "anomaly" in the modern world. Some 395 priests, Sisters and Brothers voted on the resolution adopted at the Society's annual meeting.

Two resolutions were prepared; the first, considered "weak" by a majority of delegates, was withdrawn in favor of the following stand which asked the U.S. bishops to:

"... support at the next session of the Vatican Council the effort to reform thoroughly that section of Canon Law dealing with prohibited books and the Roman Index, so that Catholic scholars, teachers and students may be able to enter into more meaningful dialogue with the contemporary world."

A priest said that the phrase "reform thoroughly" was tantamount to a request that the Index of Forbidden Books be dropped entirely.

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Advisory Group For Schools

Atlantic City — (RNS) — The National Catholic Educational Association was urged at its annual meeting here to organize a nationwide advisory commission which would help all Catholic school systems in the country work for solutions to educational problems.

John W. McDevitt of New Haven, Conn., supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, Catholic men's organization, proposed the commission to help meet Catholic educational needs today.

He said there was a crisis in Catholic education caused primarily by the phenomenal growth in enrollment and lack of funds.

Functions of such a commission, he said, "would be to collect and disseminate information on every phase of the present problem and to offer counsel where and when it might be desired with regard to any of the dimensions of the issue at hand."

The commission, he said, "would help coordinate and unify attempts of diocesan and local groups to solve current problems." It would facilitate the exchange of information, both descriptive and evaluative about action taken in any diocese.

McDevitt also spelled out a four-point program for greater participation of the laity in Catholic education which, he said, was essential today to meet changing times.

"First, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the lay teacher be given increased responsibility in decision making at the administrative level," he said.

"Not only would this be advisable because of the rising percentage of lay teachers in Catholic education, but more significantly a policy which would actively solicit the opinion of the lay teacher would tend to identify him more intimately with the educational enterprise, to make him an integral part of the Catholic school rather than a temporary teacher, a mere employe, or, as in former times, a substitute teacher."

Secondly, McDevitt recommended strengthening liaison between the school and the home, and "here again the laity

Everybody In Town Is A Tertary

St. Francis Village, Texas — (NC) — Late last year the first occupants began moving into this new community in the resort area of Lake Balcones, just 12 miles from Fort Worth.

Like many of the new communities springing up here, the residents are retired and elderly people — but with one unique difference.

All the residents of this village are members of the Third Order of St. Francis.

St. Francis Village, built on 50 acres of rolling, tree-side property, was created by the North American Federation of the Third Order of St. Francis as a residential development for living with Franciscan joy, dignity and independence.

The self-contained community will have a chapel, a recreation center, a 32-bed infirmary, a cafeteria and a neighborhood shopping center. The temperature ranges from a winter low of 25 degrees to a high of 85 in the summer, with low humidity.

The Franciscan tertaries who move into the village will have their choice among efficiency one-bedroom and two-bedroom unfurnished apartments, with low rents ranging from \$80 to \$185 a month.

Pilgrimage

London — (RNS) — Four hundred Anglican Protestants and Roman Catholics left Southampton aboard the Norwegian liner *Venus* for a 25-day international pilgrimage to the Holy Land.



Oldest Priest

New Bedford, Mass. — (RNS) — Most. Antonio P. Vieira, pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel church who was believed to be the oldest active Roman Catholic priest in the country, died here at 88.

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