

# Monastery's Wobbly Legs Puzzle Engineers

BY JAMES C. O'NEILL  
Assist.—(NC)—The architectural legs of the 700-year-old basilica of St. Francis are wobbly—and art lovers are worried and engineers puzzled.

The more than 700-year-old complex of churches which makes up the basilica—three churches piled one on top of the other—is cracking. Even in worse condition is the adjoining monastery.

The towering nest of churches with their treasures of medieval art mark the burial spot of St. Francis. The "lower church," second of the three, was begun on June 15, 1228, the day before St. Francis was canonized.

A crypt church was built below this church to hold the body of the Saint. Its location was kept secret for fear that the people of the rival, neighboring town of Perugia would steal the body. The body was not discovered in its small church until 1818.

The third, or "upper church," was added in 1253. Together with the enormous cream-colored monastery and other monastery buildings, the entire structure resembles a fortress more

than it does the last resting place of the gentle saint of Umbria.

Art lovers are particularly worried about the basilica because over the centuries cracks have appeared in the walls, damaging somewhat the precious 13th-century frescoes of Giotto and Cimabue.

Even more ruinous to the frescoed walls and ceilings of the upper and lower churches has been the effect of air and water. Many of the frescoes have been partially or almost completely obliterated. Yet, there remains a tremendous amount of art that still can be saved.

Among the most curious frescoes in the lower church is a series on the Crucifixion by Cimabue. Centuries have changed them from their original form so that today they are negatives of the original painting.

According to experts, Cimabue used too much lead in mixing his colors for these frescoes. The action of time and atmosphere have reversed the effects of shadow and light. For instance, the white of Christ's body is today black in color. But the ribs, originally shaded,

are now light in color.

To halt the ravages of time and weather, the provincial authorities have begun a series of projects. Money for the work was provided by the Italian Parliament, which passed a special law in 1937 providing \$23 million over a period of 10 years. But these funds are supposed to serve all the major Franciscan monuments in Assisi, not just the basilica alone.

The first project undertaken was repair of the roof. Professor Quintino Aello, chief of the Umbria Province civil engineers, said "Restoration of the upper church and of the lateral chapels of the lower church has already been completed with reinforced concrete."

Restoration of some of the frescoes has also been undertaken but only a small portion of the necessary work on one of the world's greatest art treasures has been completed. Still facing engineers are the tasks of reinforcing the walls of the monastery and of the upper church.

The problem puzzling engineers today is how to go about this matter. For apparently the

growing cracks in the walls of the basilica and monastery may be due to the fact that the ground under the structures is imperceptibly moving.

Tests have shown that there are large empty spaces deep in the earth under the basilica. The engineers have speculated that rock formations below the surface have shifted within these voids over the centuries, causing strains on the buildings above.

For the past year, engineers have poured thousands of tons of concrete into empty spaces with the hope of filling them up and thus halting the earth's movement. However, there has been no end to the amount of concrete that can be funneled in and the project has been halted temporarily.

The hole theory is not entirely satisfactory, according to

Aello. "We've found that the cracks contract and expand in relation to heat and cold weather changes. So we have decided to halt operations and see what, if any effect, the injections will have or if there is a better way of dealing with this problem."

Whatever happens, it is clear that more than \$3 million will ultimately be needed to restore and reinforce the entire complex of buildings. In the meantime, the engineers continue to fill up cracks, repair roofs and reinforce walls.

So far, however, despite the vicissitudes of the upper and lower churches, the church housing the tomb of St. Francis remains untouched.



### Noted Lawyer Gets Kennedy Award

Holyoke, Mass. — (RNS) — James B. Donovan, noted New York attorney and prominent Catholic layman (left), receives the John F. Kennedy Memorial Award from Bishop Christopher J. Weldon of Springfield. Looking on is William F. O'Brien, head of the annual award to an outstanding figure in connection with the feastday of Ireland's patron saint. Donovan has won fame as an international mediator and negotiator with Premier Castro of Cuba for the release of prisoners taken in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of that island in 1961. He also negotiated the release in 1962 of U-2 pilot Francis G. Powers by the Soviet Union in exchange for Col. Rudolph Abel, Russian spy convicted by the U.S.

### Pope To Keep Audiences

Vatican City — (NC) — Pope Paul has styled his weekly general audience "a truly ecumenical occasion" and has promised to continue his custom of holding it.

However a subsequent announcement from the Pope's Maestro di Camera declared that the Pontiff would discontinue his private and special audiences from July 9 to 20.

The Pope said that the weekly audience has become "a considerable and significant part of our apostolic ministry."

His remarks and the announcement following took on special meaning because of the pressure being brought to bear on the Pope to cut down his heavy schedule of work and audiences. While he has been in excellent health, some of his associates have warned him that he is overtaking himself.

But Pope Paul, noting that in the past the general audience "came rather infrequently" and now has a "tendency to assume a more frequent rhythm and bigger proportions" exclaimed: "Let us praise the Lord!"

THE POPE admitted that some practical problems have arisen concerning the general audience, citing the problem of finding room for the growing number of pilgrims. He said the answers for such problems will be found "with the help of God."

The Pope was apparently referring to plans to build a new audience hall just outside Vatican City. The hall, to be designed by architect Pier Luigi Nervi, would occupy the present site of St. Peter's oratory, a boys' club next to the Holy Office.

The Pope said some "spiritual problems" are also arising from the weekly audience. He said he wondered what form an audience should take when those attending it represent every variety of profession, education and religion.

"We will ponder how best to answer these obvious questions. But we say immediately that we will take care to preserve for this encounter the essence of a brief dialogue, as we have until now."

The Pope added that the awareness of his responsibility is "like a torment," and that it "gives us no peace." He quoted Christ's words: "I have compassion on the multitude"; and: "Come all to me."

### 25 Years Ago

(From files of Catholic Courier, July 13, 1939)

Reported in the forefront of the Bishop's Campaign for Decent Liturgical was immaculate Conception parish, Ithaca, according to General Chairman Frank E. Wolfe of the Rochester Diocesan Holy Name Union campaign committee.

Dr. Walter B. O'Neil, Rochester dentist was elected chairman of the Central New York Chapter, Knights of Columbus at the chapter's annual meeting in Columbus Civic Center. Thomas H. O'Connor was appointed chapter secretary.

Final tribute to Dr. Arthur B. O'Brien, widely known Rochester physician was paid at a Solemn Funeral Mass in Sacred Heart Pro-Cathedral by fellow staff-physicians of St. Mary's Hospital nurses, American Legion members, Knights of Columbus, Order of the Alhambra, Monks of William H. Hart, vicar general and 20 other priests including three from Ellicottville were present.

Marriage Courses Popular

Ottawa — (NC) — More than 500,000 marriage preparation courses distributed in Canada, the United States and 14 other world countries during the past 20 years owe their origin to the Catholic Center of the University of Ottawa.

In addition the Catholic Center has distributed 15,348 specially prepared courses for married couples, and another 7,371 courses dealing with domestic economy.

### Catholic U. Graduates 6

Six area graduates receiving degrees from the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. in June and announced this week are:

Beverly Mary Schotta, B.S.N., of Caledonia, a bachelor of science in Nursing.

Sharon M. Murningham, M.A., of Elmira, a master of arts in education.

Robert M. Eymard, B.S., of Elmira, a bachelor of science in engineering.

William J. Gallagher, B.S., of Elmira, a bachelor of science in engineering.

John Connell, D.O., of Elmira, a doctor of osteopathy.

John J. Kelly, B.S., of Elmira, a bachelor of science in engineering.

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### Help Wanted

TEACHERS, summer openings available, call Mrs. E. L. Edwards, DU 1-3310.

### Pilgrimage

ST. JOSEPH'S, ST. ANNE DE BEAUPRE at Three Rivers, Canada. Leaving July 28th, returning July 30th. Call HU 2-8833 or Cl 4-8114 for information and reservations.

### Situation Wanted

HOUSEKEEPER companions to elderly lady, experienced. Phone FA 1-4574.

### Wanted

STUDIO APARTMENT or privilege near bus and church or would consider companion employment. Semi-retired nurse. References, White CO Box 186 Cordeiro, Ontario.

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