

Overtones Alter Stand On Cremation

Washington — (NC) — A change in the "overtones" associated with cremation led the Church to relax its opposition to the practice, according to a canon law professor.

Whereas in the 19th century cremation was often an expression of an "anti-Christian spirit" and was "equivalent to a challenge thrown in the face of the Church," today it has "lost its historical overtones," according to Father John Russell, S.J.

"It is so common and accepted a practice today that it no longer serves as a gesture of rebellion against the Church," he says in explaining a Vatican instruction that "accelerates" cremation of Catholics.

Father Russell, a canon law professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, gives these views in an article in the American Ecclesiastical Review published here.

His article interprets an instruction on cremation sent by the Holy Office to local Ordinaries in July, 1963, and made public last fall.

THE NEW instruction allows a Catholic who chooses cremation to be given the sacraments and receive Church burial, "unless of course, it is clear that the choice of cremation was made from irreligious motives," Father Russell says.

However, he adds, it is still the position of the Church that "she only tolerates the cremation of the bodies of her children." Burial is still preferred, he says.

Father Russell says the local Ordinary's permission is not a condition for the "lawful choice" of cremation.

"Bishops are encouraged to do all they can to preserve intact the Catholic tradition of inhumation — but by instruction and persuasion . . . This is an example of the tendency today to allow Catholics the positive value of following ecclesiastical precepts and not to force them into line through fear of the consequences of disobedience," he says.

Historian, Author Dies in France

ALLES-BAINS (NC) — Henri Daniel-Rops, 64, member of the French Academy and writer on Church history and other religious subjects, died at his country home near here July 27.

Daniel-Rops was the author of 70 books including the biography "Jesus and His Times," which has been a best seller in several countries. Another popular work is his "History of the Church of Christ." He was general editor of the monumental "Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism" and editor of the Catholic review Ecclesia.

Daniel-Rops was born Henri Jules Charles Patiot in 1901 and subsequently majored in law, geography and history at the University of Grenoble. He adopted Daniel-Rops as a pen-name in 1928.

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Prayer Lands German in Jail

Berlin — (NC) — A 30-year-old East German was sentenced to six years' hard labor for composing a prayer.

Government authorities considered it an "inflammatory statement endangering the security of the state." It read:

"Dear God, make me blind so I may not see the wall.

"Make me deaf, that I may not believe RIAS.

"Make me speechless, that I may not end up in prison.

"Then, when I am deaf and blind, shall I be Ulbricht's chosen kind."

RIAS is the broadcasting station in the American sector of Berlin.

Vatican Radio Advises Keep Sunday Better

Vatican City — (RNS) — Vatican Radio broadcast a long exhortation for a more reverent observance of Sunday as a day dedicated to Christ, with attendance at Mass, family prayer and rest.

Although the broadcast was not attributed to any official Vatican source, some observers claimed it had all the signs of having been written by a high Church authority, possibly Pope Paul himself.

The station noted that the Bible says one must work for six days and then mark the seventh as the "Sabbath of the Lord, your God," dedicated to God and to spiritual and physical reinforcement.

But, the broadcast asked, "In our world, troubled as it is, can it be truly said that Sunday is the Holy Day of God and a day of rest? Unfortunately, it is not."

Prayer, Fast Before Feast

New York — (RNS) — Archbishop Iakovos, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, issued an encyclical calling on all Orthodox to "fast and pray" during a two-week period in August for world peace and "all Christians."

The archbishop said the special period should precede the Orthodox observance of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary on Aug. 15.

On that day Orthodox attend Laudation Services at which special prayers are said, hymns sung, and Holy Communion distributed. The feastday coincides with the Catholic observance of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

Filtering Friendships Down To The Parishes

London — (RNS) — A striking call for closer relations between Anglicans and Roman Catholics at all levels was made by controversial and outspoken Anglican Bishop Merwyn Stockwood of Southwark in the August issue of his diocesan review, The Bridge.

"It is my hope," he wrote, "that the friendship which exists (between Anglicans and Roman Catholics) at official levels will spread to every parish. The more the clergy and congregations of the Anglican and Roman rites meet the better."

Bishop Stockwood, 52, has headed the Southwark diocese since 1959. Last October he became the first Anglican prelate to be present in episcopal robes at a Catholic service in Britain. He attended High Mass in the famous Farm Street Jesuit church in London's West End on the feast of St. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuit order.

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