

Christian Layman, a Light, not just a Pillar

"The call of the layman of tomorrow is primarily a call not to be a pillar of the Church but to be the light of the world," —that was the theme of a profoundly theological talk by Jesuit Father Thomas E. Clarke, of Woodstock College at the first ecumenical religious service held in the Rochester Diocese.

Father Clarke spoke from the pulpit of the United Church of Christ, Irondequoit, Wednesday evening, Oct. 27, to a congregation of Protestants and Catholics.

Two priests and three ministers conducted the rite—prayers and hymns for religious unity.

Father Clarke's talk traced the hopes and the hazards on the road to a united Christendom.

He cited Pope Paul's statement at the United Nations as also relevant to the quest for Christians for religious peace—"Not one against the other, never again, nevermore!"

Father Clarke admitted there yet remain "differences yes—at least until God answers our prayers for perfect unity, in difference, never again, never more! This is our desire, our hope, our prayer."

He described "two significant developments in Roman Catholicism and what they imply for the Protestant-Catholic dialogue." The first he termed "horizontal"—the ecumenical development, and the second he called "vertical"—the growth of "secularity" within Roman Catholicism.

"From the time of St. Augustine in the west (fourth century), there took shape the tendency to view all who had not been evangelized and baptized into the Catholic Church as beyond the possibility of salvation, justly left to their fate as sinners by the inscrutable mystery of divine providence," Father Clarke explained.

"The contrasting truth, that Christ had died for all men, tended to become a recessive element; the necessity of membership in the one Church of Christ was the dominant theme. With the Renaissance and Reformation, this tradition was both shaken and rigidized. It was shaken by the great discoveries which revealed countless multitudes untouched by the saving power of the Gospel. It was rigidized in the Catholic polemic against the Reformation which was conceived to have rent the seamless robe of Christ and to have led whole nations from God's house out into the wasteland of heresy.

This centuries-long attitude is now giving way, Father Clarke said, to a "certain pluralism in Catholic thinking."

He quoted "the famous change" in the Vatican Council's constitution "De Ecclesia—About the Church" from the original text which said "the Church of Christ is the Roman Catholic Church" to the final text which says "the Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church."

Nun Heads U.S. Charities

Washington — (NC) — The new president of the National Conference of Catholic Charities — first nun in the NCC's 55-year history to hold the post — firmly believes in professional education for Sisters.

"You do a much better job if you're trained for it. Spheres of influence widen as Sisters are equipped to join professional organizations," Mother Mary Charles Keane commented in an interview.

In the past two decades Mother Mary Charles' "spheres of influence" and of service have extended far and wide. Since 1963 she has been head of the Omaha province of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union, directing the work of nuns in a nine-state area that includes 17 hospitals, 57 schools, four homes for the aged and two child-care institutions conducted by members of her community.



Priest's Book Given Award

FATHER GILBERT HAY, editor of the "Father Prayer Book" recently was given an Award of Excellence in the graphic arts from the Mohawk Paper Mills. Theodore A. Imbach, right, made the presentation for a book judged to be "of excellent design, superior typography and flawless printing." The author is Mission Procurator of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, who maintain over 90 parishes and missions in rural America.



Clergy join congregations in singing at ecumenical service in United Church of Christ, Irondequoit.

Catholics can now admit "ecumenical elements — elements of holiness and truth outside the Roman Catholic Church."

Father Clarke said these factors may seem to those who are not Catholics to be "small and grudging concessions but they are of great significance for us."

This significance, he said, included not only the "universal acknowledgement of the possibility of salvation for all men of all religions" but also "the very respectable body of theological opinion, numbering such distinguished names as Jacques Maritain and Yves Congar, which suggests that even the professed agnostic and atheist, beneath his sometimes vehement repudiation of the pseudo-God whom he finds in the commonplace and mediocre lives of the religious, may by his profound commitment to justice, freedom, peace and all human values, be in reality a secret believer, an anonymous Christian."

The second development in Catholicism, Father Clarke said, centers on "secularity" — from

the Latin word "saeculum — world" — the relationship "between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the temporal, the churchly and the worldly."

During the medieval period, Father Clarke stated, an ecclesiastical, clerical and monastic culture eclipsed specifically human, earthly and secular values — "the world was either a hostile force or an area of compromise."

In the present era, however, art, culture, science and technology are recognized as containing "human values placed there by God and these values must be loved and respected for themselves." This realization, Father Clarke said, constitutes "the emergence of a Christian secularity which keeps the world in relationship to the Church while denying that it is the mere tool of the Church."

He then indicated what he thought were the "implications" of these two developments for the Protestant-Catholic dialogue.

The ecumenical dimension which admits "God's plan of

salvation is being realized outside the Catholic Church as well as within it" enables Catholics to confront other Christians, members of other religions and agnostics and atheists "with less nervousness than was previously the case, without the conviction of the need to proselytize."

"We can now permit you to be what you want to be and what the Spirit of God wants you to be," Father Clarke stated slowly and emphatically.

He added, "We have not become thereby indifferent to our real differences in faith. We are deeply convinced that we were not made to be separated brothers but fully united in faith, worship and Christian fellowship. . . (but) we can allow the Spirit of God, who is working in both you and us, to do with us all what He wills, as He wills, when He wills."

This ecumenical development, Father Clarke said, raises the need to debate the causes of the blame for the divisions among Christians — but imposes a "common pastoral task" — to speak "to modern man in his secularity, his adulthood, his indifference, his isolation and his indifference to the Church, in language which is meaningful and challenging for him."

As a symbol of the Catholic Church's efforts to fulfill this task, the Jesuit priest pointed to the Vatican Council, "I would understand the general significance of the great Council now coming to a close as being an effort, both cautious and bold, always ambivalent and still perhaps somewhat ambiguous, to move closer to the secular pole of the Church-world tension."

He said Catholics look for a similar symbol in Protestantism. "Is it the World Council of Churches and its utterances?" he asked, or "the Honest to God movement in Great Britain and the 'death of God' movement in our own country?"

Father Clarke admitted that the current controversial "death

of God" theology is revelatory of a reality some Christians may prefer to ignore. "Is there not a sense in which God has died even in the hearts of professed believers?" he said. "When the believing Christian devoutly worships on Sunday and then on Monday condones injustice, political, social, racial, economic injustices, or is indifferent to the great cause of working-for-world-peace—has not God undergone a kind of death in his life?"

The "key figure" for Father Clarke in keeping God "alive" in the modern world is the layman—the "prophet" and the "apostle" to the world.

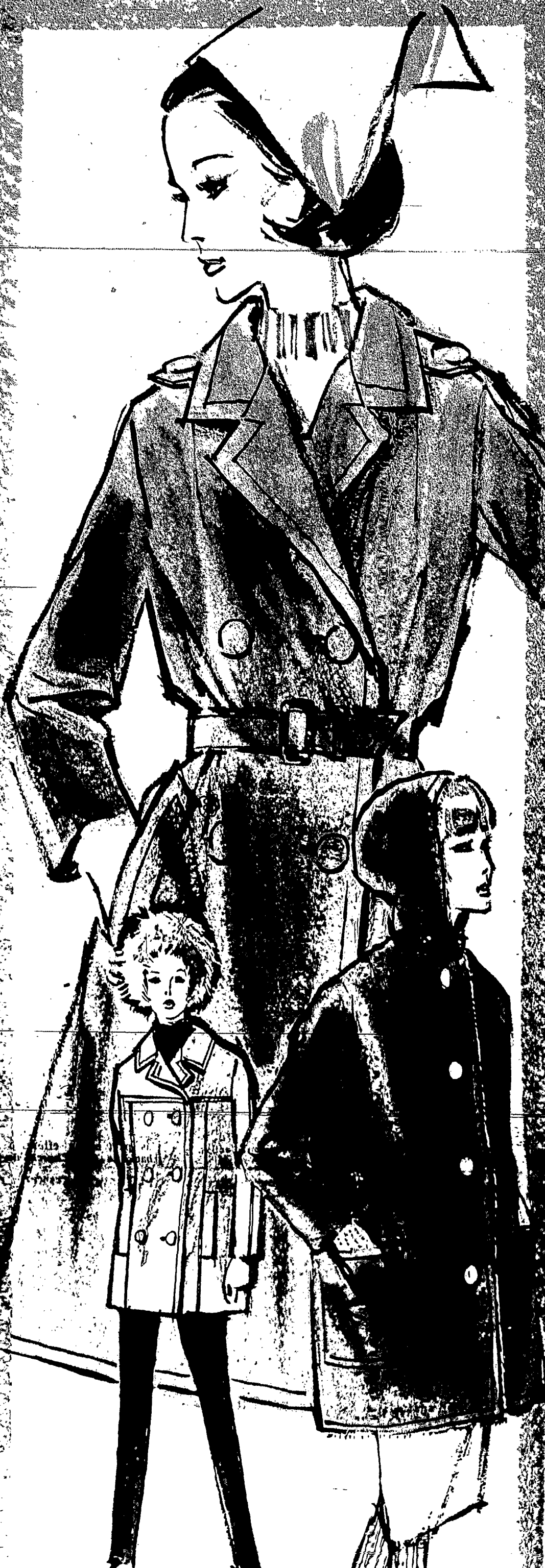
"He is most a lay apostle not when he lifts the collection or teaches Sunday school or takes care of the parish finances, but when he joins with all men of good will in the rehabilitation of his neighborhood, in the battle for civil rights, in the task of world peace, in the progress of science and technology, in the promotion of the world and its values."

Father Clarke said, "A healthy Christianity of tomorrow will not necessarily be a Christianity which has many large and prosperous churches; it will be a Christianity totally committed, totally available for the work of building a better world."

The layman's double task—"fidelity to God and to His word, to speak only the message that He gives and no other, but at the same time to be present to men where they are, addressing them in a language which, though it announces judgment as well as salvation and though it calls them to transcendence as well as to fulfillment"—this twofold burden of the layman as prophet will mean "he will have to suffer for it."

"If we are faithful," Father Clarke concluded, "and with God's help we shall be—our service will be accepted and our suffering will be redemptive."

Participants in the service included Monsignor Richard K. Burns and Rev. William Schifferl, pastors of Catholic parishes in Irondequoit, and Rev. Carlyle Smith, Rev. David Cull and Rev. Harleigh Rosenberger, Protestant pastors. Another ecumenical service is planned for early in 1966 to be held at St. Thomas the Apostle Church.



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