

A Radical New Approach to African Missions

By GARY MacEOIN

An extremely delicate yet potentially epoch-making development for the Christian missions has begun in Africa. With the approval of and some cautious help from the Egyptian government, the Institute of Higher Coptic Studies in Cairo is training Christians from countries of the Black African belt to the south and southwest for mission work in their homelands.

The Copts are extraordinarily well placed to perform this function. Inhabitants of the lower Nile valley for countless centuries, they alone have a strict right to call themselves Egyptians. Three thousand years before Christ they created the greatest of the Mediterranean civilizations.

St. Mark introduced Christianity there in the first century. A school of Christian theology flourished at Alexandria in the second. Their Fathers of the Desert developed the practice of asceticism and drafted the rules for Christian monasticism in the third.

Not even the Irish or the Poles can claim such tenacious adherence to the faith. Since the invasion of Egypt by Moslem Arabs in the seventh century, periods of intense persecution have alter-

nated with periods of intense socio-economic discrimination. Yet thirteen centuries later, several million still survive, though at a low cultural and economic level. Until early this century, most lived in the southern desert. Many today belong to Cairo's middle classes, and a concerted effort to restore Coptic culture, purify theology from the superstitions of 1,300 years of forced separation from other Christians, and build Church institutions suited to the 20th Century, has started at the Institute of High Coptic Studies.

Rejection in the fifth century of Catholic teaching that Christ has two natures separated the Copts from both the Orthodox and Rome. They repudiated that heretical teaching long ago, and early this year they and four other "non-Chalcedonian Churches" created a secretariat to promote reunion with other Christians.

Not only are the Copts themselves Africans, but they are the only Christian rite which has been adapted to the culture of black Africans. They introduced Christianity to Ethiopia in the fourth century in forms which have persisted through isolation and persecution to our times. One of our common misconceptions in the West is that the Eastern Churches have lacked the missionary dynamism which

has characterized that of the West during the last few centuries of European colonial expansion. This, however, is a shallow and misleading interpretation of a short and arbitrarily chosen segment of the history of Christianity.

Actually, though cut off to the West, the Eastern Churches spread historically to the north, east (India and China in fourth century), and south. In the 18th century, they even reached Alaska, an 18-month trip during which half the missionaries usually died. On the way, they created alphabets and translated the liturgy into the languages of primitive peoples.

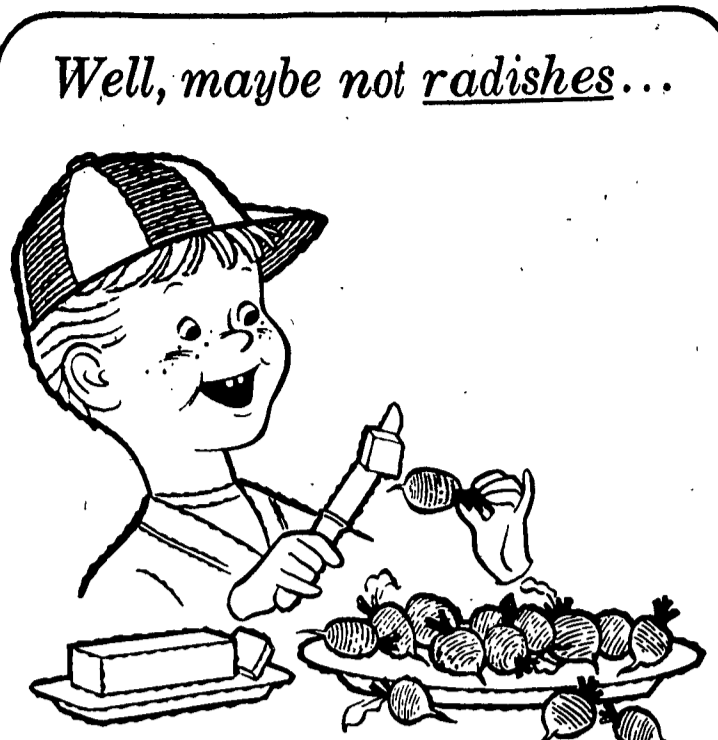
If there has been no comparable missionary work among the Eastern Churches in communion with Rome, the reason is very simple. Rome does not allow them to establish missions of their own rite. A typical situation is that of the Syrian rite which has existed in Southern India, from the earliest times. It lacks neither priests nor missionary vocations. But its priests may bring the gospel to other parts of India only by switching to the Latin rite, introduced only in the colonial era and not adjusted to India's culture.

The equality of all the Churches in communion with Rome is reaffirmed by

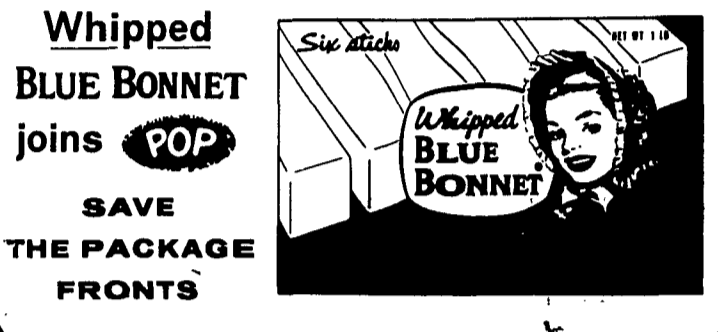
the Council's constitution on the Church, each having its "rightful place." Radical adaptation of the liturgy to "the traditions and genius of individual peoples" is commanded by the decree on the liturgy. The decree on ecumenism recognizes that the separated Eastern Churches retain the basic dogmas of the Christian faith, apostolic succession, the sacraments, the riches of spiritual traditions which lift up the whole man to the contemplation of divine mysteries.

There is a real danger that our Western missionaries in Africa will resist the new mission initiatives of the Copts. On the contrary, they should welcome them as a solution to the related problems of adaptation of rites and the aggressive expansion of Islam in Black Africa. The two big problems of the Institute of Higher Coptic Studies in Cairo are lack of contact with Western Christianity and a poverty of scholarship resulting from centuries of cultural deprivation.

I know, from my conversations with its head, when I visited the Institute, that they recognize both problems and would welcome our cooperation in solving them. This may be for us an even more urgent mission task than the routine one of sustaining our present missions.



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but otherwise
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Church Likely to Hold to Clergy Celibacy

By FATHER ROBERT A. GRAHAM, S.J.

Rome — (RNS) — An authoritative Catholic organ has vigorously rejected the view that celibacy for priests is outmoded and must be abandoned.

While many of the arguments for a married clergy are at first sight impressive, says an article in the current *Civiltà Cattolica*, they do not justify any radical departure from Church practice founded on the experience of centuries.

The author, Father Giuseppe De Rosa, is a staff member of the Jesuit fortnightly, and the article is taken here as reflecting Vatican restiveness over widespread one-sided publicity given to debates on the subject.

Pope Paul VI is on record as completely opposed to any change and in a letter to the Council Fathers of Oct. 11, 1965 he said that it was his "resolute not only to preserve with all

our energy this ancient sacred and providential law but to reinforce its observance."

The article appeared just as representatives of 14 national hierarchies of Europe met in Rome to draw up common pastoral norms for seminary recruitment and training. Addressing the delegates and national vocation directors, Pope Paul did not allude to this question but recommended special attention to the need to adapt seminaries to the psychology of modern adolescents and youth as they seek to respond to the call of Christ.

But the delegates came from countries, such as the Netherlands, where declining sacerdotal enrollment is ascribed to the celibacy requirement and where the problem is openly discussed. In recent months respected reviews of the ascetic life, such as *Christus and Vie Intellectuelle*, have devoted studies to the question.

The *Civiltà Cattolica* writer declared, "Sacerdotal celibacy

is today the object of sharp attacks. It can even be said that to attack celibacy is the fashion and he who defends it and believes in it is regarded as someone from another age who is tied to the past and cannot free himself from old idols. And there are those who therefore claim that the battle of celibacy is already lost for the pressure on the Church is so strong that in a few years it will have to yield and drop obligatory celibacy for the clergy."

"For our part," wrote Father De Rosa, "we do not share the belief that the battle for celibacy is already lost. We have, even stronger reasons for believing that on this point the Church notwithstanding the

pressures and the press campaign will hold firm."

The debate is likely to go on and recent departures by the Holy See itself have given impetus to the speculation.

Contrary to a widespread misunderstanding, the issue is not whether priests may be allowed to marry but whether married men can become priests. Even in the Eastern Church with its married clergy, candi-

dates to the priesthood must marry before their ordination. Bishops are never married and are hence usually drawn from monasteries.

Under Pope Pius XII convert non-Catholic clergymen were allowed to be ordained as priests and to exercise the ministry while remaining with their wives and children. In addition, the one-time severity of legislation has been softened. In such cases the Holy See now

readily waives the celibacy obligation and allows the person concerned to return to the sacraments without however the possibility of resuming the priestly ministry.

The Vatican Council itself contributed to the debate by recognizing the married permanent diaconate. At the same time, however, the Council in its decree on the priesthood reasserted and confirmed the prohibition of marriage for priests.

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SMOKED LUNCHEON ROLL
Although its origins are unknown and remain a mystery, this smoked meat was undoubtedly the invention of an astute European sausage craftsman.

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Stiff-Necked Attitude

Dear Editor:
I sat in my pew yesterday between songs, and heard the happy news: next Sunday our parish (St. John the Evangelist, Humboldt Street) would have a "Young Americans Folk Mass with Guitar," whatever in, or out, of the world that might be. I had expected a few harp's and mouth organ to be on the program but maybe they are saving that treat for next month. Perhaps that is a bit too sarcastic and unfair.

The Church apparently is trying to reach all segments of its people through the medium that will most arouse spirituality in each particular group. So probably the "Young American's Folk Mass with Guitar" will serve its purpose.

I cannot understand, however, why the Church for all its

recent liberalism, has overlooked one important segment. For these people I would propose another kind of Mass. It could be called "Old Americans Mass with Latin and Priests back to the People." If there was any singing, the choir could sing Veni Sancte Spiritus and the translation would be Ghost, not Spirit.

As I said, I do not understand the stiff-necked attitude toward this type of Mass when "Young Americans' Folk Mass with Guitar" is accepted.

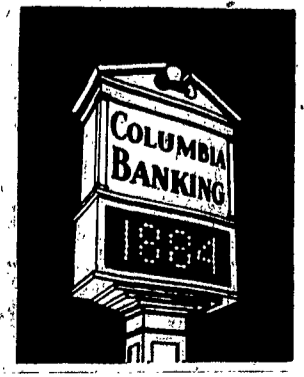
There are still lots of Catholics who want to stand quietly in the shadows and beat their breasts. There is plenty now for those who wish to trumpet and beat their tamborines. There should be something for the rest.

—T. Champaigne Rochester

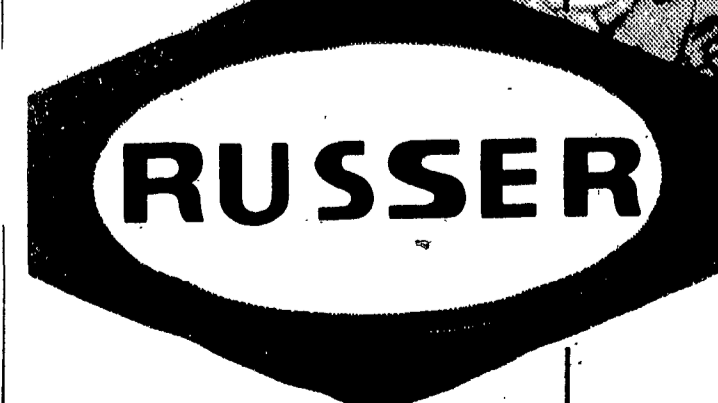
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