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# Prelate Describes Dialogue Hopes with Non-Christians

(The following is a translation of excerpts from a study written by the archbishop of Vienna, who is the president of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers. A French version appeared in La Croix, national Catholic daily published in Paris.)

By **FRANZISKUS CARDINAL KOENIG**

God has called the Church to start out again, to penetrate into new lands. He knows the way and he understands the goal. For us the way often ap-

pears obscure and the goal uncertain. In this sense, humanly speaking, the Church's wayfar- ing in a new epoch is marked by uncertainty and risk.

Uncertainty and risk are inscribed above the doorway which the Church entered the world, not to be identified with that world, but to put itself in relation with all men. In all clarity, the Church has therefore said that it knows itself to be responsible with regard to all men, that all men are the object of its care—and of its love—those who believe in Christ, those who believe in God, but those also who do not know God or wish to affirm his death.

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The relation between the Church and the world, recognized as necessary by one and the other, can be established only on the basis of dialogue. John XXIII began this dialogue. The enthusiastic echo that the Pope aroused in the world shows to what extent the world was awaiting this communication.

Paul VI systematized this dialogue. In his encyclical Ecclesiam Suam, he listed its three spheres: dialogue with the separated Christians, with non-Christian religions, with unbelievers. For each of them a secretariat has been erected. The Church — it must be understood — is no longer enclosed in a self-sufficiency and a self-justification, as it has been reproached with being. It wants to speak with the others: with the separated brothers, with the non-Christian believers, but also with those who do not believe, who reject the faith and even sometimes combat it.

The Catholic is not simply an anti-Protestant, an anti-Muslim, anti-Buddhist; nor is he any longer simply an anti-atheist. From a position of combat, of contradiction, from a hostile, purely negative attitude, the Church has passed to the attitude of the interlocutor who asks questions, who wants to understand and help.

The only thing in common between believers and non-believers, between Catholics and atheists, is at the same time the most profound. No man can fall from the hand of God, not even the one who repulses that hand or wishes to strike it. No one can erase God's imprint from his human face. All are children of God because all are men, they and we. The only thing and at the same time the most profound thing which binds us to them is being men.

Human nature is the common denominator, the human is the common basis. The dialogue with them cannot, therefore, be at first theological, but human.

If it is so, common grounds on the human level must first be sought — for example, the very existence of humanity, that is to say, the strengthening of world peace. The common striving for a peaceful organization of the world, for a life in common in peace in the midst of a world that is unifying depends at least indirectly on some of the secretariat's tasks.

Such common efforts for peace and for everything that serves peace shows ways by which one can arrive at establishment of contact. The common conviction that it is necessary not only to avoid the worst, that is to say, the atomic devastation of the world, but further to eliminate everything that can nourish hatreds and discords, ranks on a purely human level.

Since Pacem in Terris, it has become clear that, on the subject of peace, Catholics can easily convince the associates with whom they are seeking dialogue that they are sincere; that also creates a favorable atmosphere.

From what facts must the secretariat start off in its work? Before all, from the fact that a post-Christian atheism is spread in the world and manifests itself more clearly than in the past. It is necessary to examine from the theological point of view how this fact can be reconciled with the old maxim according to which the soul is "naturally Christian."

At present, no exhaustive study on this point exists. Nevertheless we can start from the fact that atheism manifestly plunges its roots in the Occidental world and not in India or some region of Asia or Africa. In the judgment of specialists who deserve to be taken seriously, the first bases for a stronger affirmation of atheism are found in the division of the Church in the 16th century. The Enlightenment and the Deism of the 17th and 18th centuries subsequently destroyed the supernatural order founded on the Incarnation until the attempt was made, in the 19th century, to drive God himself from the world.

It could be necessary to wonder if this evolution did not al-

ready begin with the separation of the Churches of the Orient and Occident.

To this responsibility of Christians (for atheism, everything being considered, takes its origin, in great measure, from the bad behavior of Christians) must be added their false attitude in social and economic matters.

Another root of atheism must be sought in the false ideas many Christians have of God. Either one establishes such an opposition between God and the world that one reaches the Hegelian conception of the limits of human liberty; or one makes God the cause of all the phenomena that one cannot explain by the process of the natural development of the world; or one considers God, in the last analysis, as man's consolation, a view which approaches the notion of religion as "the opium of the people."

Finally, atheism is also based on a false image of man.

The foregoing already shows

clearly that, on the level of our secretariat, a collaboration of all Christians will be necessary, and this in all areas where divergences in faith pose no obstacle.

In the course of this post-conciliar period, we will have to concern ourselves also with introducing everywhere in our educational enterprises, and especially in the education of future priests, a complete exposition of the causes of atheism and of the Christian response.

The Church, through the work of the secretariat, will express clearly that it condemns no one; that it is, on the contrary, quite ready to live in community and peace with all men of good will.

In the face of militant atheism, it must, nevertheless, be insistently emphasized that it is not permitted to constrain believers, adherents of a Christian confession or of another religion, to embrace atheism, because very man has an in-

alienable natural right to liberty of conscience. It would be necessary to invite atheist governments to undertake, following the example of the council, the elaboration of a document on religious liberty based on the natural law, for there is no longer any doubt today: in the countries of the East, believers are second-class men, excluded from a whole series of jobs and professions.

Post-Christian atheism pretends that science renders God superfluous, and that the evil in the world contradicts the existence of God. According to Marx, man could be his own master only if he owed his existence to himself alone, and if no creator God were coming to destroy this reclamation of a total mastery of man over himself.

These theories and other similar ones, which from Nietzsche to the French existentialists, from Camus to Sartre and Malraux, find an impressive literary expression,

constitute for the Catholic Church and the whole community of Christians a far-reaching challenge. The Christian community thus finds itself put on notice to purify itself in all forms of the "too human" in which one of the principal causes of atheism is found.

To hurl this challenge at itself, to put in operation in the midst of the Christian community a process of spiritual purification: there is one of the great spiritual confrontations of the postconciliar period.

The history of modern atheism testifies to what Blaise Pascal said: "Atheism is the sign of a spiritual force, but only up to a certain point." The humanist construction preparing a world without God already shows the cracks and the tragedy of the horrible. Nietzsche himself, precursor of atheism, had a presentiment of it in one of his aphorisms:

"For you, never any more prayer, nor adoration, nor repose in an unlimited confidence; no more pause before an infinite wisdom, goodness, power; no more guarantee for your thought — you have no guardian, no faithful friend for your seven solitudes; you will live without the horizon of a mountain with a snow-crowned summit and a blood-gorged heart. For you, no more rewarder, no more supreme administrator of justice. In your present, there is nothing more to understand; in your future, no more love; your heart no longer has access to a place of repose which would assure possession without quest. All definitive peace, you reject. Man of renunciation, all that is what you are going to renounce. Who will give you the strength for it? This strength, to this day, no one has had" (The Gay Science, No. 285).



## New Home-School Unit

Superintendent of schools of the Rochester Diocese, Monsignor William M. Roche seated left, was guest speaker at the first meeting of the newly organized Home-School Association of St. Aloysius Church, Auburn, held in the church hall April 3. Others in the photo are: Mrs. Robert Tint, treasurer; Mrs. Joseph DeMaio, secretary; Rudy G. Scuderi, vice president; Father Edward Shamon, pastor; and Francis L. Bennett, president.

## Unbelief under Study

Dallas — (RNS) — Although statistics indicate otherwise, "non-believers" in the United States outnumber believers in Christianity, according to a noted Roman Catholic expert on philosophies of persons not having a professed faith.

Father Richard Butler, a Dominican priest from Chicago, is a consultant to the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers.

Saying that he would have to qualify his claim on the statistics Father Butler added, "I mean—the non-believers—predominate if it is taken into account the actual number of persons who go about in a practical way of living, according to their professed religious faith, or the ones who practice what they profess to believe."

Father Butler is a member of the U.S. Bishops' commission which is working toward a dialogue with non-theists in the U.S.

He said that non-believers would include atheists, agnostics, humanists and Marxists.

Father Butler said that the Vatican secretariat concedes there must be a complete absence of polemics in the discussions with non-believers. Although each group ostensibly is not seeking to persuade the other party to accept its point, he added, it will be only natural for each group to secretly hope

to win the other to its convictions.

"Non-believers tend to be in areas in which there are large university communities," Father Butler said, "and also in the fields of scientific research.

"In that Dallas and Houston are such areas, it would be expected there would be some activities of the secretariat in each area."

Father Butler said his association with the Vatican secretariat and the U.S. Bishops' commission resulted from his long association with Newman Centers on American college

campuses and his study of the philosophies of non-believers.

He said he cannot be optimistic that Christian forces are gaining.

"In some ways you would say the good are getting better," he said, "and the bad are getting worse."

Father Butler expressed slightly more optimism on the spiritual outlook for college students.

"At least today's student is aware of the issues that concern himself and society," he stated.

## Anarchy in 'New Crusade'

Cardiff, South Wales — (RNS) — Critics of authority in the Roman Catholic Church were condemned as "modern Neros who fiddle while Rome burns," in a hard-hitting pastoral by Archbishop John A. Murphy of Cardiff.

He said there had been criticism in the Church in every generation but it had now taken a new and dangerous twist. Today's attacks are not just on those in authority but on authority itself, and there is a "smell of anarchy" about it, he charged.

This "new crusade against authority," Archbishop Murphy said, is led by "a mitred army of columnists, pundits, playwrights, producers, interviewers" who had set themselves up apart from their fellows as keepers of the public conscience.

"To this particular group," he went on, "everyone who exercises authority is a sadist, a masochist, an inquisitor, or any other of the 'hurrah' words in common coinage.

"They are the modern entertainers—who smell a story—or rebellion against authority, and are out to exploit it. Into their satire goes everything that smacks of authority—marital fidelity, filial piety, the moral code, nothing sacred, nothing sacrosanct; the modern Neros who fiddle while Rome burns.

"When there is little left from the bonfire but a nation of drug addicts, sex maniacs, abortionists and criminals, and the glorious affluent society has become an effluent one, it will be poor consolation to know that it wasn't serious, that it was all done for a giggle."

## How to Talk With Atheists

Vatican City — (NC) — The Holy See's press officer hinted that the post-conciliar Vatican Secretariat for Non-Believers may be preparing a formal document on the Church and atheism.

Msr. Fausto Vallone, the head of the Holy See's press office said in response to a journalist's question that "the possibility is not to be excluded that one of the goals of the secretariat is to prepare a document on how dialogue is to be conducted between the Church and atheists."

He said he did not know whether such a document would come in the form of a papal encyclical or declaration, or would be published by the secretariat itself.

The new post-conciliar body held its first plenary session in Rome on Jan. 30 and 31.

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