

# Catholic Faith Stifled in Ceylon

Colombo—(NC)—The Church in Ceylon is facing one of the greatest crises ever, in its 450-year-old history in the country: the tangible danger of Catholics losing their faith.

For nearly a hundred years, from 1869 until 1960, the Church was free to run its schools without any obstruction.

In 1960, the socialist government of Premier Sirimavo Bandaranaike took over almost all the government-assisted private schools, about 700 of which were Catholic.

At present, out of a total of 934 schools on the island, the Church has only 36 schools that it can call its own. But these are among the biggest in the country, with an average attendance of more than 1,000 students. A few of them even have as many as 3,000.

The rest are subject to a degree of state control that makes it difficult to organize the teaching of Catholicism to Catholic students attending many of them.

Because of this difficulty, some Catholic children take Buddhism as a subject for their public examination, for which religion has recently been made a compulsory subject. The situation sometimes results in these children subsequently practicing Buddhism.

In January, 1966, the present government abolished Sunday as the weekly holiday and replaced it with the days coinciding with the four phases of the moon as being of greater significance to Buddhists. These are called Poya days.

This makes the fulfillment of the Sunday Mass obligation difficult for school children, especially for those attending state schools. Private schools either have Mass during school hours or start school late on Sundays to enable the students to participate in Mass in their own parishes. Students in many rural areas where there are no evening Masses often miss their Sunday obligation.

It is in the light of such difficulties that the catechetical movement has become of great significance in Ceylon.

Catechetical endeavors in Ceylon are based on the acceptance of one reality: the position of the Catholic schools has changed radically.

In the past, the Church used the school as the primary medium of giving religious instruction to children. Much importance was laid on the creation of a Catholic atmosphere in schools.

For more than four-fifths of the Catholic student population, the schools can no longer be considered as the center for gaining a sound knowledge of Catholicism. With some exceptions, where priests or religious are still the principals, Catholic schools that have been taken over by the state provide little or no facilities whatever for the teaching of Catholicism.

The insufficiency of Catholic teachers to teach Catholicism in government schools places a grave handicap on Catholic children.

In some of these schools, there are no Catholic teachers who could undertake to teach religion to Catholic students. In others, even though there are Catholic teachers willing to do so, principals of these schools do not release them on the ground that they are more urgently needed for other subjects.

In state schools, frequent transfers of teachers make it difficult to plan a catechetical program in advance.

Where teachers of Catholicism are not available, priests and nuns have volunteered to go to these schools to teach Catholicism. Their efforts, however, have not been accepted, because, it is said, they might lead to other "complications." It is feared, for instance, that the admission of such volunteers would lead to similar requests from some other religions and that the situation would then become unmanageable.

The scheduling of the periods set apart for religious instruction is dependent on the caprice

of individual principals. These classes are usually held either during the first period in the morning, when all the students may not yet have arrived, or during the last period at the end of a day or session, when student concentration is low.

In a pastoral letter, Bishop Leo Nanayakkara, O.S.B., of Kandy has insisted that religious bodies must have the right to organize "adequate religious instruction and observance" for their children attending state schools in the country.

The bishop said that, although in the future the Catholic atmosphere in education should come mostly from the home and parish, "a certain religious atmosphere" must be maintained even in state schools.

Bishop Nanayakkara also said that the post-conciliar changes in the Church in Ceylon have provoked an "identity crisis" for the country's Catholics.

The external signs on which Catholic identity was largely built have disappeared—or are fast disappearing, the bishop said. As examples, he cited Catholic acquiescence in the government's decision abolishing Sunday as a public holiday and the non-insistence on a written guarantee from the non-Catholic partner in a mixed marriage.

It is in this context that the National Catechetical Commission is waging its struggle to conserve the faith of Catholic students. Under the directorship of Father W. Don Sylvester, the Colombo Catechetical Center, with the aid of volunteers, is seeking to create efficient, permanent, outside-school structures to insure the religious formation of all children and also to establish similar structures for adult religious education.

It has already organized correspondence courses in Catholicism for the public school examination and made available textbooks and teachers' handbooks. It has also conducted several diploma courses in catechetical for nuns and lay teachers (700 have qualified so far) and seminars for priests and Religious. Some field work has been done by trained catechists.

Some catechetical work has been done in the dioceses as well.

The commission hopes to establish a national center soon. This is for the specific purpose of publishing catechetical books at a low cost, and producing audio-visual aids for teaching religion. The national center is also expected to recruit adult catechists and conduct a parent-educator program.

In the present context, it is widely felt that the catechetical movement has a vital role to play in saving Catholicism in Ceylon.

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## Mass Change

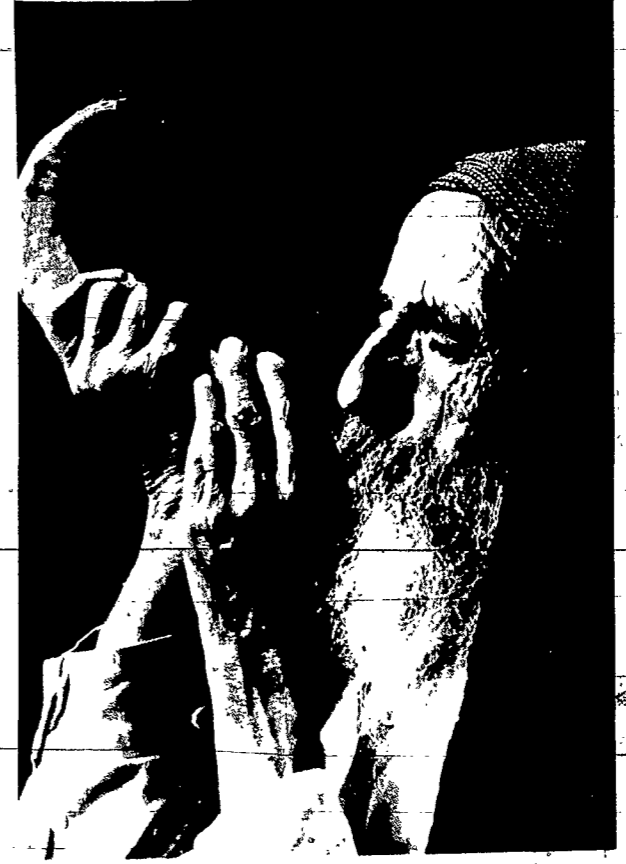
### At Resort Area

Duluth—(RNS)—The Roman Catholic Bishop of Duluth, which includes many of Minnesota's Summer resorts and ski areas, said here he is personally sympathetic to the move to permit Catholics to fulfill their weekly Mass obligation on either Saturday or Sunday.

But Bishop Francis J. Schenk said he has not yet decided whether to seek Vatican permission for the change in his diocese.

He would like to consult his priests and "see what their needs are" and to learn what enabling faculties the Vatican will grant.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference, at a recent meeting in Chicago, said it would have no objection if individual bishops sought the Saturday option.



NOW, AS IN ancient times, a Hebrew dressed in the traditional "kapota" goes through the streets of Jerusalem on Friday sounding the shofar to announce the arrival of the "queen of the Sabbath." At left is the Shrine of the Book which houses the Dead Sea Scrolls.

# Jerusalem, entrance to Israel

By REV. C.J. McNASPY, S.J.

One of the most poignant features of the Holy City is, of course, its deep division. Though most of the ancient shrines are on the Jordan side, no pilgrim will want to miss those in Israel.

Before leaving the Old City, you will want to visit the remaining bit of the fabled wall known as the "Wailing Wall." Since the division of Jerusalem into Arab and Israel sections, Jews may no longer come here to lament the destroyed temple.

You cross at Mandelbaum Gate—not a gate at all, but a hideous reminder of the state of war between the two countries, now held in uneasy abeyance by a truce and the kind offices of the United Nations. You leave the Jordan side, walk several hundred lonely feet through No Man's Land, surrounded by barbed wire and destruction. Then you enter the Israel zone, where suddenly you seem in a Western land. Customs officials are courteous and understanding, and they eagerly welcome the pilgrim—your drive through a modern city, almost forgetful of antiquity.

NEVERTHELESS, in Jerusalem-Israel are several other most precious Christian and Jewish shrines. On Mount Zion you visit the traditional Tomb of King David. Very near this is the Church of the Dormition, a modern, handsome structure cared for by Benedictine monks (most of the other shrines are served by Franciscans). Inside, all is peace and tranquility, and in the crypt is a traditional spot where Our Lady is said to have died. (Another, probably more substantial tradition, places her death in Ephesus.)

Here is a reclining statue of Mary, represented as in death awaiting her Assumption. Dormition means "falling asleep," and this is the term used by Orthodox and Eastern Catholics. Here, as elsewhere throughout the Holy Land, you will certainly want to recite the appropriate mysteries of the Rosary—Bethlehem, Nazareth, several places in Jerusalem.

Within easy walking distance is the traditional site of the Cenacle, where the Last Supper was eaten and where the great mystery of Pentecost took place. The present room seems to go back to the 12th century, but the general area is probably correct. You are just across the boundary from the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, though the trip here has been a long way around, through Mandelbaum Gate.

WITHIN ISRAELI Jerusalem, you will want to visit several interesting new buildings. Noteworthy is the recently completed Shrine of the Book, a most impressive modern structure built to house the Dead Sea Scrolls. From the outside, it may remind you of a flying saucer or other space-age creations. You enter by a long, low corridor suggestive of the caves where the scrolls were found.

Small bits of scrolls are first seen, containing passages from the Old Testament. The large circular room contains at its center the principal complete pages of Jeremiah and other sacred books. They are carefully preserved, with precise atmospheric pressure and controlled moisture, and if your Hebrew is fresh, you may read them as though they had just been copied. This is one of the most striking monuments in the world.

In addition to the university, several government buildings, and other recent monuments, you will want to visit the new synagogue at Hadassah Medical center. There, the illustrious painter Chagall has created a set of the most exciting stained glass windows to be found anywhere: Twelve windows, each full of symbols of the Tribes of Israel.

ALTHOUGH MOST of the population of Jerusalem (on the Israeli side) is Jewish, there is a small but interesting Christian community too. At Notre-Dame-de-France, for example, and other Catholic chapels, you will have the rare privilege of attending Mass in Hebrew. It will be thrilling to hear the "Lord Have Mercy" chanted to the ancient sacred words—"Adonai rahem, ha-Mashiah rahem"—and to hear Epistles and Gospels and homily announced in the prayer language used by Our Lord Himself.

Indeed, one of the greatest surprises to the pilgrim on his first visit to Israel is to discover that this ancient tongue of the Old Testament is now fully alive. Hebrew (not Yiddish, which is a Germanic dialect written in Hebrew characters) has been completely revived and is used in government, business, ordinary conversation, newspapers, and wherever living language is used. One senses a wonderful continuity with the very first pages of divine revelation.

Before you leave the Jerusalem area to travel north toward Galilee, it will surely be worth your while to pay a visit to Ein Kerem, a picturesque village near the Holy City. This is the traditional birthplace of John the Baptist, and, accordingly, the spot of the Visitation. Several churches dot the area, long sacred in Christian tradition.

TURNING NORTH toward Galilee, you pass within a few miles of the probable spot of Emmaus (where Christ walked with the disconsolate disciples, late on that first Easter evening), past the home of Samson; near the spot where St. Peter cursed Ananias (Acts 9:34)—not far from Lod, Israel's great airport; up the famed Plain of Sharon, fertile again as it was when David was a shepherd; up past forbidding Aramagaddon (described as the spot of the final battle between the forces of good and evil), into the Plain of Esdraelon.

Now you are in Galilee, where Our Lord spent most of His life on earth. But that is another chapter in our pilgrimage.



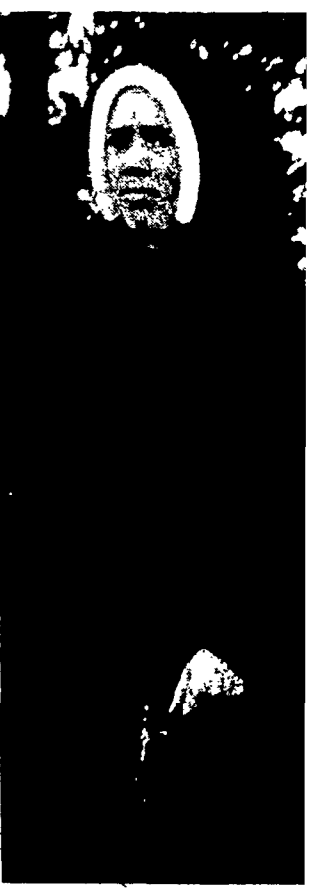
PILGRIMS walk through Ein Kerem, which tradition says is the birthplace of St. John the Baptist. Mary journeyed here from Nazareth to visit her cousin Elizabeth.

THIS IS THE SIXTH in a series on "The Crescent of Christianity" written by the Rev. C. J. McNaspy, S.J., associate editor of AMERICA. Photos below by the Rev. Elmo L. Remagosa of the CLARION. Copyright, Feb. 1967, CLARION Herald.



JERUSALEM, like Berlin, is a divided city. An ugly wall and warning signs in Hebrew, Arabic, and English remind visitors that Jerusalem is really now two cities, Jordan on one side and Israel on the other. At left is the reclining statue of the Virgin Mary in the crypt of the Church of the Dormition, thought to be the spot where Mary fell asleep in the Lord. At right is the Wailing Wall, all that remains of the Temple of Herod. Before the division of Jerusalem devout Jews visited the site to bewail the Temple's destruction.

Pope Paul will be in Saturday, May 13, to spot where three saw a series of apparitions of the Virgin Mary in 1917. First



Only survivor of the 1917 apparitions is Sister Lucy, a Carmelite nun. Other children died in an epidemic soon after end of World

