

Franciscans — Caretakers of Holy Land Shrines



A priest in Newark, New Jersey, hears Negro reports of disorders there — a situation duplicated in many U. S. cities, including Rochester, as black discontent mounts across the nation.

What's Happening In Our Cities?

Far wiser minds than ours are at work these days searching for a solution to the nation's present dilemma — what's happening in our cities?

Rochester again joined the increasing ranks of cities where ghetto rioting will ultimately cost the country more than the whole Arab-Israeli war of early June, a war that now seems so trivial compared to the racial turbulence rocking one U. S. city after another.

The Arab-Israeli conflict, however, is not totally irrelevant to the American scene.

Negro leaders meeting at Newark, New Jersey, this week inaugurated what could be described as a "Black Zionism" movement — a bid to build a separate homeland for Negro Americans. Beyond the separate homeland idea, however, the parallel ceases quite abruptly.

We ignore the implications of the proposal, nonetheless, only to our peril.

A Christian response to the present turmoil must include, I'm convinced, something far more than just a restoration of law and order and the status quo — the very breeding ground of more and undoubtedly worse turmoil.

Although written for a different context, a book titled "Scratches on Our Minds — American Images of China and India" by Harold R. Isaacs of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology can, I think, help us discern the inner meaning of what is happening in front of us also —

"Laugh, cry or gape . . . what confronts us is no mere speedy change of scenery, flag, costume, posture or facial expression, no frantic flashing of new pictures on propaganda screens. It is the beginning of a change in the underpinning of the total relationship between Western and Asian and African men. For nearly three hundred years this underpinning was the assumption of Western superiority, a whole vast political-military-social-economic-racial-personal complex was built upon it. Almost every Western image of Asian and other non-Western peoples was based on it. This assumption can now no longer be made or maintained. The whole structure based upon it is being revised. All the power relations that went with it are being changed. This is history in the large, a great continental rearrangement, bringing with it a great and wrenching shift in the juxtapositions of cultures and peoples. Western men are being relieved of the comforts and disabilities of being the lords of creation; Asian and African men can no longer merely submit, nor live on the rancors of subjection, nor revitalize their own societies by the ideas or sanctions of their own more distant past. All must move from old ground to new, from old assumptions to new ones, and as they move, must constantly refocus their views. They will all be engaged, for some time to come, in more or less painfully revising the images they have of themselves and of each other."

If what he says concerning that wider context is also a true assessment of our own local contemporary scene, as I think it is, then we shall continue to be unprepared for developments that are inevitably likely to occur in more and more cities with more and more frequency and with more and more intensity.

Racism, we now should understand, breeds only more racism and, as Max Warren in his book "Challenge and Response" states, "in the intolerance born of mutual suspicion and hatred, common sense and the art of compromise . . . become casualties. A feast of unreason follows, and," he concludes grimly, "there is melancholy evidence that feasts of unreason, in the end, serve only to provide a feast for the vultures."

This is the dark cloud whose shadow covers so much of our country today.

We cannot wish it away nor dare we ignore it.

Had not Christ our Lord taught us always to have hope, one would be much tempted to think that perhaps we are already beyond the time for solution and simply await the deluge.

—Father Henry A. Atwell

This is the third in a series of articles in which Courier editor Father Henry Atwell describes his late June trip to Israel with photographers Louis Ouzer and Mel Simon to study aftermath of Arab-Israeli war of June 5 to 11.

Christians, particularly Catholics, are a minority in the land where their faith was born.

There are so few of them that there isn't even one Catholic parish church in all of Jerusalem — the section that has been under Israeli control since 1948.

Out of a quarter million city population, Roman Catholics number a total of only 300 church-going members.

Their "parish" is the chapel of Terra Sancta College and their parish priests are Franciscan friars.

The Franciscan tradition in the Holy Land dates back close to a thousand years.

Father Kevin Mooney of Philadelphia, whose priestly life of over 25 years has been spent in Cairo, Cyprus and Jerusalem, told us the past and present situation of Christians in the Holy Land.

He told us the story while we took pictures of Jerusalem at sunset from the roof of his monastery, St. Saviour's, near the historic Holy Sepulchre Basilica in the formerly Jordanian sector of Jerusalem.

He pointed out over the squat stone buildings of the ancient city toward Mount Sion and the Mount of Olives east of the city. "That's where the battle for the city took place," he said. "I heard the guns just before dawn and I went to my window and I was able to watch it all without leaving my room."

He interrupted his ring-side view to say Mass.

Shortly afterwards a mortar shell landed in the monastery's courtyard and blasted out most of the windows but, fortunately, no one was hurt. Breakfast and lunch were served on schedule, he said, and even the meal-time reading went on as usual — except that the gunfire was obviously by then going on nearby in the city's narrow streets.

By the end of the day, the Israelis had taken the "Old City" and clamped a curfew on from 7 p.m. to 4 a.m.

Religious services were held with only a slight shift in schedule at the Holy Sepulchre Church, he told us, and within a few days, life resumed its usual routines.

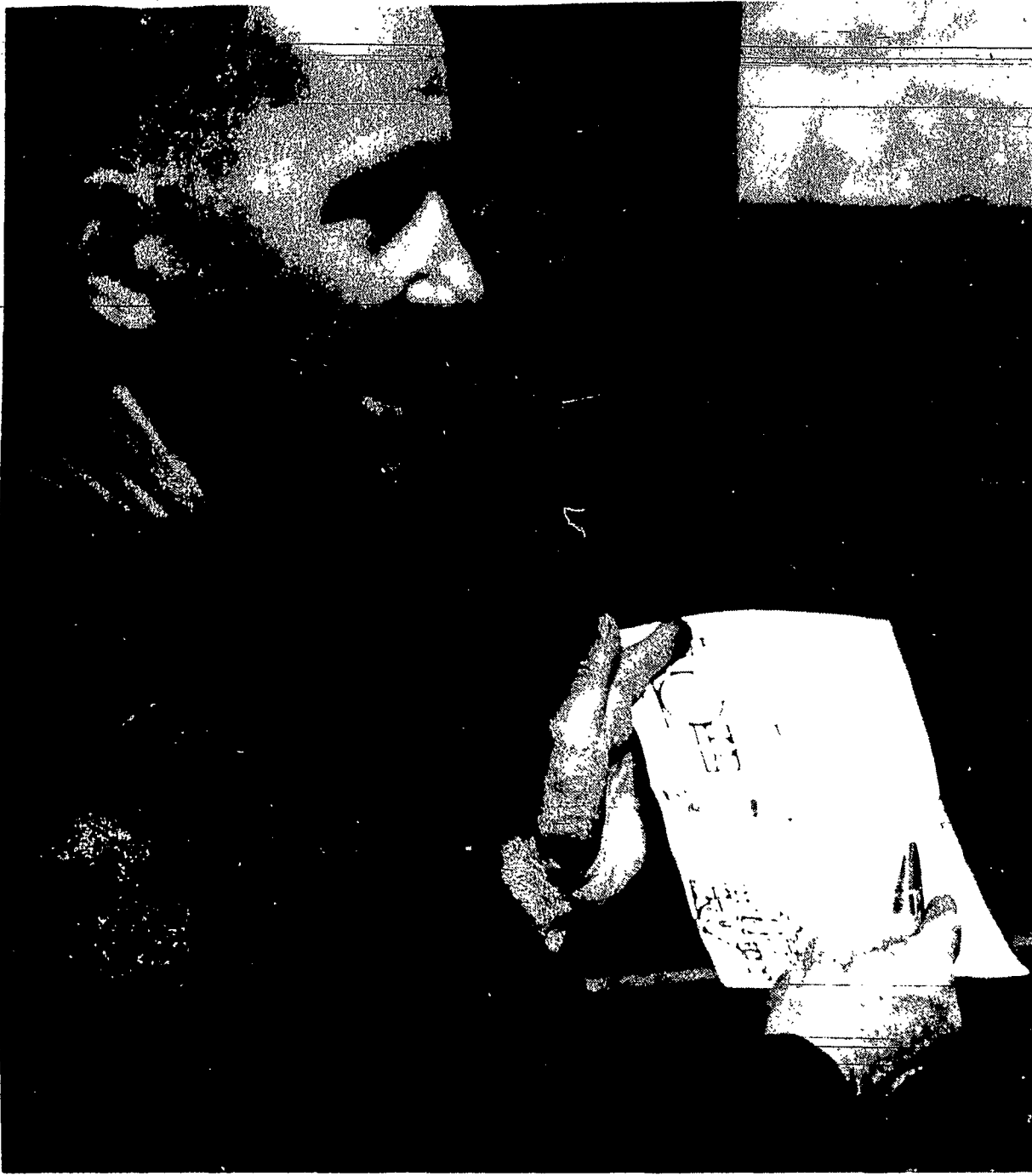
His monastery was actually damaged far more severely after the six-day war than it was during the battle which raged around it.

Father Mooney wrote the Courier this past week that Israelis blasted down an abandoned building wrecked in fighting in 1948. The building, once a school, was adjacent to the Franciscan monastery. The demolition blasts, Father Mooney wrote, did "a lot more damage than the war caused us — windows and frames and shutters, doors and interior walls."

Father Mooney is the Jerusalem correspondent for the National Catholic News Service in Washington and his reports have provided U.S. Catholics with an on-the-spot viewpoint of the situation there.

Another Franciscan who shepherded us to spots we would have otherwise missed was Brother Francis Kreuzer, the affable little sacristan of the Holy Sepulchre basilica.

His home is Kansas but he's been in Jerusalem for 29 years.



Brother Francis points out details of comp'x Holy Sepulchre basilica on outline map of ancient structure.

He arranged for me to say Mass at the eleventh station, where Jesus was nailed to the cross on Golgotha. After the Mass, he took us into the Greek areas of the church, showed us the stonemasons at work on the renovation of the ancient structure, through the Franciscan portions of the church and up to the roof to the living quarters and the chapel of the Ethiopian clergy.

He knew everyone we met by name and they obviously respected him and welcomed him — something that could not have been said over long periods of time during the turbulent centuries when even the famous church was a battleground and the scene of bloodshed.

During this year's battle, the church was one of the few islands of peace and today an Israeli and an Arab guard are

posted on duty at the doorway more as traffic policemen than as soldiers.

That they are needed for such duty is even more apparent now that Jews are able to enter that section of the city for the first time since 1948. Father Mooney remarked in his letter to the Courier: "Jerusalem just teems with people all the time now, and I don't care to go out much until it slacks up a bit."

Father Mooney, Brother Francis and other Franciscans we met in Jerusalem were delightful as well as informative companions during our stay in Jerusalem.

Father Henry A. Atwell



Brother Francis with Ethiopian clergy in Jerusalem.



Father Kevin Mooney holds rock which was blasted onto Franciscan monastery roof during battle for Jerusalem.



Franciscan friars conduct Way of the Cross in narrow Jerusalem streets along route Jesus took on first Good Friday.



A stonecutter chisels away at task of renovating ancient Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

usalem. They exemplify in a very unpretentious way the ideals of simplicity and humility which also characterized their founder, St. Francis of Assisi.

The Franciscan tradition in the Holy Land actually dates back to this thirteenth century saint.

He himself visited the Holy Land in the year 1219 and obtained permission from the Egyptian Sultan, Melek el Kamel, who then ruled the area, for members of the Franciscan order to live there and visit the Holy Sepulchre without hindrance. When the Crusaders finally abandoned their efforts to capture the Holy Land at the end of the century, the Franciscans stayed on as guardians of the shrines built at the places made holy by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Pope Clement VI in 1342 appointed them officially as custodians of these holy places on behalf of all Catholics, a task they have performed — often at the cost of much suffering, even death — to the present day.

Many American Catholics who can't manage a trip abroad have visited instead the Franciscan monastery in Washington where the Holy Land shrines are reproduced with remarkable accuracy.

Peace, even as much as war, poses problems for the Franciscans in Jerusalem.

On the Friday afternoon of the first week Israeli Jews could mingle freely in the crowds shopping at the souqs in the narrow streets of the old city, the Franciscans resumed their weekly Way of the Cross devotion, interrupted by the war and the two weeks of readjustment to the new political situation.

The procession, always somewhat disorganized due to the twisting roadway, was virtually swamped by the crowds who had little or no notion of what it was all about.

Brother Louis Sweeney, another American Franciscan, nonetheless, bravely led the way through the throngs and stood serene as if in a quiet sanctuary while another friar led the prayers, somewhat incongruously, through a bullhorn.

A guide-book for pilgrims to the Holy Land, written by Franciscan Father Eugene Hoade in 1962, says, "The Land is more than ever in a state of flux." That assessment was not only true for 1962, it was also prophetic for 1967.

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Take six clergy and 18 college students; mix t and what do you

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The Catholic COURIER Journal

Vol. 78 No. 43 Friday, July 28, 1967

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Published weekly by the Rochester Catholic Press Association
MAIN OFFICE 35 Selo St. — 464-7050 — Rochester, N. Y. 14604
ELMIRA OFFICE 317 Robinson Bldg., Lake St. RE 2-5658 or RE 2-8423
AUBURN OFFICE 168 E. Genesee St. AL 2-4446

Second class postage paid at Rochester, N. Y.
As required under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.
Single copy 15¢; 1 year subscription in U.S., \$6.00
Canada \$8.50; Foreign Countries \$9.75