

American Indians Mired in Culture Backwater

(By Religious News Service)

While many religious and government leaders have been struggling to solve and to understand the recent racial strife in many U.S. cities, attention has also been focusing on the plight and future of a minority group whose history pre-dates the founding of the nation: the American Indians.

The admission, long made by churchmen, that the nation has not solved the problems surrounding the Indian population is stated in the preface to a Congressional bill called "Indian Resources Development Act" now being studied in Washington.

The bill says: "Congress recognizes that notwithstanding the significant social and economic advances the American Indian has made, his progress has not been sufficient to enable him to share fully in our national life."

Missionary efforts among Indians are as old as the coming of priests with the first Spanish explorers to the New World, and governmental activity involving Indians is as old as the first "peace treaty" at Jamestown. The efforts and attitudes of current interest, however, is far broader than attempts to convert or to establish geographic spheres of control.

Dr. Harry S. Komuro, director of the Section on Church Extension of the National Division of the Board of Missions of The Methodist Church, explained to Religious News Service that church initiative today includes the fostering of improved community relations as well as "missionization."

Robert Bennett, U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the first Indian to hold his position, recently told members of the National Fellowship of Indian Workers that the government is committed to a future of self-determination for American Indians with full participation as citizens.

The National Fellowship of Indian Workers is an ecumenical organization, including Indian leaders and Protestant and Roman Catholic non-Indians, whose work reflects the growing willingness of religious groups to be informed and advised by the Indian people themselves.

The agenda of speakers and events at the triennial conference of the NFIW in Estes Park, Colo., during early July brought churchmen into contact with a wide spectrum of Indian views. Among the participants were Indian college students involved in a workshop in Boulder. They discussed

their problems and expectations in 20th century American society with members of the Fellowship.

Of the 600,000 Indians in the nation, fifty per cent are under 17 years of age. The Indian birthrate is higher than that of any other segment of the population, running between 40 and 50 per thousand as compared with 21 for the average. Approximately one-half to two-thirds of all Indians live on or near 200 reservations, according to information from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

One of the major activities of the Estes Park conference was consideration of a document to be called "Goals for the Indian Mission: The Decade of 1967-1977." Though not yet released, the report is the product of several years of intensive study by qualified sociologists, churchmen and consultants under an ecumenical National Advisory Committee on Goals.

Among those involved in its preparation have been Mrs. Elizabeth C. Rosenthal, Consultant on Indian Work for the Protestant Episcopal Church; Edward E. Walker Jr., Assistant Professor of Sociology at Washington State University; the Rev. Russell Carter, director of Special Ministries for the National Council of Churches and Jesuit Father Rev. Robert A. White, currently with Roman Catholic mission work in Honduras.

According to the minutes of the conference, one of the most crucial issues which the Goals report attempts to treat is that of the confusion caused among Indians by the existence of so many denominations. The development of a sense of community, both on and off the reservations, is the alternative seen as a solution to the splintered facade of Christianity, the summary minutes prepared by the Rev. Cecil Curbett of Sacaton, Ariz., said.

The minutes quote Father Robert A. White as saying: "If the Christian Churches are to be true to themselves, they must begin the long slow process of teaching the Indians on the reservation the meaning of community and fostering real community action."

The same emphasis is found in a statement of policy adopted by the governing body of the Cook Christian Training School in Tempe, Ariz., a school administered by a private board of trustees. The statement says: "It becomes clear that the church faces new and urgent demands to define its mission in terms of total individual and community needs, and to see its responsibility in the development of leadership for both church and community."

A specific example of the Churches working within a given Indian community is the establishment of the interreligious Fellowship of Navajo Christian Missions among Churches engaged with that tribe.

The initial consultation was held last year under sponsorship of the Department of Indian Work of the National Council of Churches and the

National Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions. Representatives of 10 Protestant bodies and the Catholic Church were present. With the Roman Catholic delegation was the Rev. J. B. Tenally, S.S., director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions.

The report of a Findings Committee of the consultation recommended that "a new, fresh start" be made on the problem of "churching the reservation." "Adequate representation" from the Navajo people is a part of the project. By stimulating cooperative church attitudes it is hoped that churches may more constructively deal with the issues raised by improved educational opportunity and industrial development and confront the suspicion which the committee report said the Navajo felt toward churches.

Although the report did not indicate the nature or sources of the suspicion, a marked increase of interest among the Navajo for the Native Church of North America has been noted. This body, chartered in a dozen western states, fosters an Indian form of worship which includes use of the hallucinogenic peyote. Despite Navajo Tribal Council disapproval of peyotism, one-third of the 90,000 residents of the reservations in 1966 were said to be affiliated with the Native Church.

The "Indian Resources Development Act" on which a first series of hearings has just been completed in Washington, D.C., is also aimed, according to Commissioner Bennett, at more autonomy and self-determination for Indians. The bill includes provisions for tribal loans, bonds and corporations to be initiated and controlled by tribal personnel.

Mr. Bennett gave credit to Indian leadership for the framing of the legislative proposals, and he said that his bureau was seeking authority to use federal funds in developing educational programs not included in it. Indians are now eligible for projects under the Office of Economic Opportunity. In New Mexico, the Home Education Livelihood Program, sponsored by the New Mexico Council of Churches has received \$1,117,534 from OEO to provide adult education and job training to migrant workers, many of whom are Indian.

Some questions about the value of new federal legislation were raised earlier in the year when the measures were first under study. Lawrence E. Lind-

ley, executive director of the Indian Rights Association in Philadelphia, told Religious News Service that the bill as presented is "much better" than previous indications might have suggested. Dr. Harry Komuro said that some Indian people will not be pleased with it but that it was "favorably received" by most Indian leaders when presented by Commissioner Bennett at the Estes Park conference.

The thorniest problem surrounding the government's role in Indian affairs is that of the termination of land trust relationships between tribes and the federal government. Most Indian land has been held in trust by the government since the late 19th century when the reservation system was established. Since 1953 it is government policy to move toward termination of the trust agreements and, according to the 1953 statute "as rapidly as possible to make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens."

Terminations have been effected for the Menominee Indians of Wisconsin and the Klamath Tribe of Oregon. The Colville Tribes of Washington and the Seneca Nation of New York are now involved in such processes. Mr. Bennett told the NFIW conference that the termination with the Colville Tribes was at the wish of the majority of the tribal members.

Dr. Komuro explained that many Indians greatly fear termination. He said that they fear losing what they have as tribal property, because it is divided among the members, and the holders thrust more directly into the competitive world. It was the opinion of Mr. Bennett at Estes Park that terminal plans are "premature" until the federal government has met its commitments and responsibilities to the Indian people.

To some, a part of that responsibility is the assuring of continuing rights of use to land which is especially significant to Indians. Another Indian would return 50,000 acres of land in New Mexico to the Taos Pueblo. In 1965 the Indian Claims Commission declared that the tract, plus 80,000 acres more, was illegally seized for national forest in 1906.

The Taos Pueblo is willing to receive financial compensation for all but 50,000 acres sur-

rounding Blue Lake. It claims that this section is a "sacred precinct" vital to their people's religious life. The assertion, and the bill, has received the endorsement of the National Council of Churches.

The Taos Pueblo Council fears that if the heavily wooded land is not returned that it will be plundered by commercial interests. In a public statement, the Taos Pueblo declared: "It is said that this small area should not be returned to the Indians, nor should it be preserved as a wilderness and a religious sanctuary, because it has some commercial potential for the personal profit of non-Indians."

"In disregard of our rights and interests," the statement continued, "it is proposed that substitute lands having no value for others be good enough for Indians. Our people have long been painfully familiar with statements like these. They belong to the time of intolerance and discrimination when Indian lands were raided and stolen to satisfy the white man's greed. They have no place in this country today."

Though many problems—such as that of the Taos Pueblo—are still to be solved, both religious and governmental agencies are seemingly becoming acutely aware of the ill-effects of intolerance, discrimination and greed, and are working, in Commissioner Bennett's words, to have "a second chance to take a good look and a new look" at what the original Americans have to offer.

Jesuits Seek Link to Yale

Woodstock, Md.—(RNS)—Authorities at Woodstock College, a leading Jesuit institution, have forwarded to the Vatican a request for permission to transfer the institution to New Haven, Conn., where it would affiliate with Yale University.

If approved, the transfer would have significant academic and ecumenical implications. A spokesman for the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington, D.C., said he does not expect an answer from the Vatican "much before a month from now."

Although NCEA has had no part in the negotiations between Woodstock and Yale, the spokesman said the move would be in the interest of upgrading secondary exchange and standards. At Yale's Divinity School, the Jesuit seminarians would have ready dialogue with their Protestant counterparts.

The move, which has the Yale Divinity School's approval, also would permit an exchange of courses and lectures. The Jesuits would attend classes with Protestant seminarians in their fourth year.

Negotiations have been under way since February 1966, and had the endorsement of the president of Yale, Dr. Kingman Brewster, and the faculty at the seminary school west of Baltimore.

The request for approval was sent three weeks ago to the Jesuit Father General in Rome, Father Pedro Arrupe, S.J.

Preliminary talks indicate that the Jesuits would live in the New Haven area in temporary quarters until a decision was made as to what type buildings would be constructed for them.

A combination library is anticipated should the move be approved. In this way, Protestant

seminarians would have benefit of Catholic volumes while the Jesuits would have similar benefits from the Protestant shelves.

Under such a merger, Woodstock would remain a separate entity for accreditation and other purposes, but a cross-section of lecturers would provide both groups with the thinking of leaders of each branch of Christianity.

Woodstock College is the final stage of training that Jesuits undergo in their 15-year education before ordination. At present there are 210 men at the school.

The Washington Post said the move appears destined to make Yale "an outstanding world theological seminary."

The merger would pool the efforts of such theological educators as the Jesuits' Father John Courtney Murray, an expert in church-state affairs who often has served on national study groups in conjunction with the government. Father Walter J. Burzhardt, S.J., of the Catholic Theological Society of America; and Father Avern Dulles, S.J., famed author.

At Yale, such men as Dr. Paul Minear, of the World Council of Churches; Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther scholar; and Dr. George Lindbeck, a leading Protestant ecumenist, would share views with Catholic seminarians.



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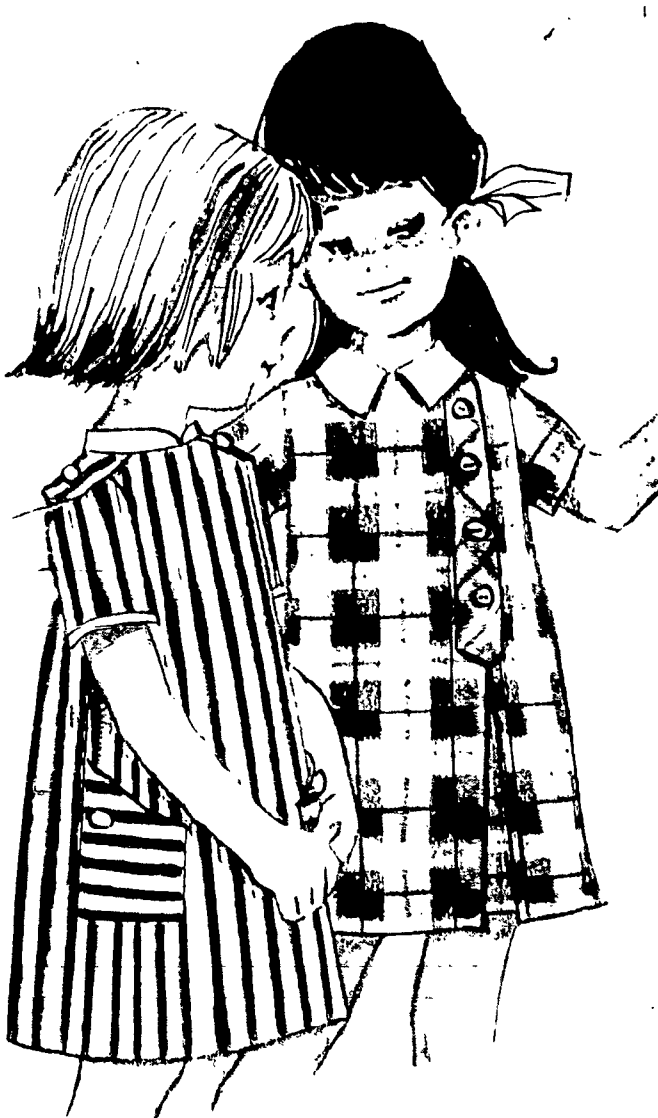
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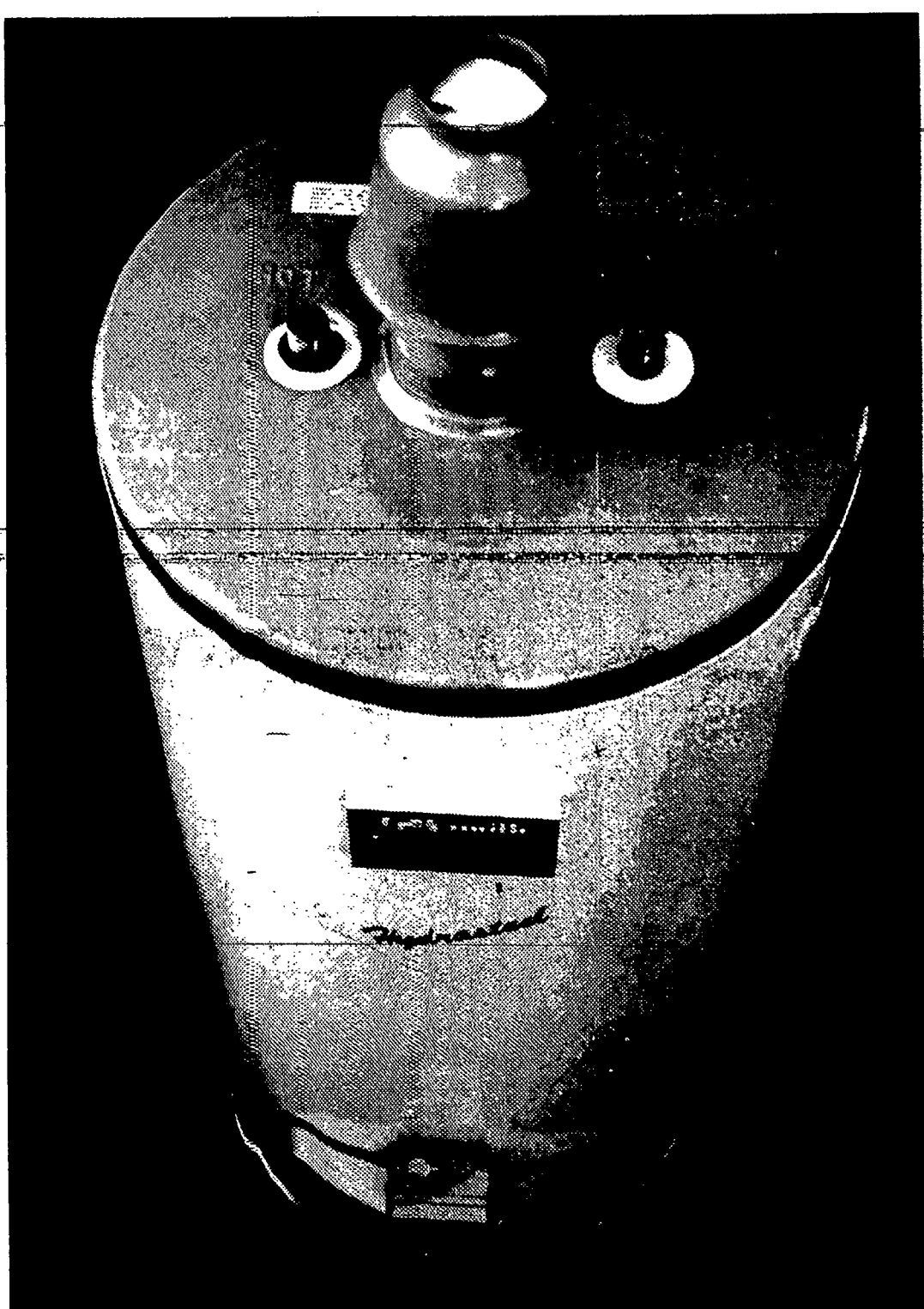
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