

# A German Billy Graham in a Jesuit Cassock

Berlin — (RNS) — A Jesuit priest, Father Johannes Leppich, sometimes called "the world's outstanding Roman Catholic mass evangelist," has concluded a whirlwind series of meetings in Berlin.

Clergy of every Christian denomination in this cosmopolitan city were engaged in the task of counseling with "inquirers" of all classes who have been inspired by the dynamic "asphalt preacher" who was described by a Berlin tabloid as "more colorful, more direct and more gripping than Billy Graham."

The largest halls are too small for the Jesuit evangelist. In the winter he is confined to them, but often in that season he is on some other continent where he can preach outdoors.

A master of homespun illustrations—and pungent, slangy speech, he attracts and fascinates the world-weary crowds of this and other continents. What he is like can be gleaned in a preliminary way from the titles journalists seem fond of giving him. Here are a few:

"God's vagabond," "God's daredevil," "God's drummer," "cherapist for the religious deaf," "God's provocateur." Time magazine once called him "the modern Saverio."

Originally, as a young priest, he was called "the children's preacher." He was born in 1915 in Ratibor, Upper Silesia (now in Poland). His father was a farm laborer and later a prison guard. Johannes the boy was no angel, it seems.

In despair, the religious instructor of young Johannes sent him and "the three worst rowdies of the class" to a catechism course in a Jesuit novitiate house. "We went," he said, "to give the monks a real working over." Instead, he stayed on, enchanted with the cultural liberalism of the Jesuits.

His first enterprise as a sub-deacon was to gather children together in Silesia. These children's missions established the young cleric as a personality to be reckoned with. Then followed studies at the universities of Breslau, Munich, Vienna.

As World War II came to its

bitter end, Leppich threw himself into a spiritual ministry to the thousands of Silesians being driven from their homes to West Germany. He also gave spiritual counsel to thousands of German prisoners being transported to Siberian captivity. He was the first chaplain of the famed refugee camp, Friedland.

Next Father Leppich became known as "the workers' preacher." He witnessed the misery and nihilism of the German workers in the first post-war years. In 1946 he founded the Christian Working Youth, with headquarters in Essen. He was appointed spiritual adviser to German laborers interned in 120 work camps under British occupation.

At the turn of the century the church had gone separate ways. Labor went Socialist, but not primarily Marxist. After Hitler, the Protestant academies at Bad Boll and Tutzing pioneered in labor dialogue. At this time Father Leppich began drawing crowds with this announced theme, "Social Questions—Dynamite?" He now wades into every current controversial social-political topic.

He says, "I am not a political enunch. The church has an answer if you will listen."

The year 1948 saw Father Leppich emerge as a national figure as he began open-air meetings. Since then, in European towns and cities and in 20 foreign countries, he has spoken to more than 15 million people. There is an audience beyond this, for his radio and television appearances are frequent.

Books and records further augment his audience. They are held high in the hands of volunteers who move through his audiences. His workers say that more than 3 million books and records have been sold.

An RNS correspondent stood for two hours in the market square in Berlin-Steglitz and confirmed the reports about the evangelist's appeal: the 5,000 Berliners stayed through, though most of them had to stand. He spoke in a different

orough each night. In the mornings he held consultations with inquirers, in the afternoon he visited orphanages, hospitals, prisons, homes for the aged.

One night at 10.30, after his open-air meeting, he held a giant prayer meeting for peace and reconciliation in Berlin's downtown Protestant cathedral, the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial church. Another "after-service" was held on the ice hockey rink of the new swank complex of shopping and entertainment buildings called the Europa Center; it was interfaith in scope, with Moslems, Buddhists, Jews and Hindus, uniting with Christians in universal prayer.

A trailer caravan filled with supplies and dedicated workers accompanies him. They are a part of his worldwide "corps" who form what they call "Action 365"—at work the year around. Some 20,000 volunteers implement his mission in 26 countries by a "personal apostolate" which retains contact with inquirers, furthers his

public-mission's social and religious agencies in many lands.

Some of the projects supported by "Action 365"—10 orphanages; a leper colony in Korea; leper clinics in Asia, Africa, Brazil; a barracks hospital in Tokyo; a children's refugee home in Hong Kong; a medical airlift for developing countries with \$2 million in contributions; 100,000 Bibles in three languages for hotels, steamship and air lines.

In one year the following things were accomplished, according to an "Action" spokesman: clothing and toys for the poor valued at \$75,000; 25,420 food packages at \$5 each; support of 2,167 children in religious instruction at a cost of \$11,377. In this one year 90 volunteers for construction battalions in needy lands and 200 others engaged in social work in these lands.

The mass morale and accomplishments of Marxism fascinate and concern Father Leppich, one Berlin priest told an RNS reporter.

The evangelist takes a critical attitude toward Western complacency and materialism. His life dedication is a triple one: to help the needy, to defeat communism by true spirituality and to reform the church.

In Steglitz the reporter heard him say, "One third of the world is under communism. They believe in 'the new man. Do you?'"

## Curia Policy Said Pro-Arab

Hamburg — (RNS) — Dean Heinrich Grueber, a Lutheran clergyman famed for his efforts to save Jews from Nazi persecution; has written an article criticizing the Vatican for Middle-Eastern policies which he describes as "pro-Arab."

Dr. Grueber's article, published in the influential daily newspaper, "Die Welt," said that this policy was based on "old anti-Jewish sentiments which are still active in the sub-consciousness" of some members of the Roman Curia, on the fact that there are more Christians among Arabs than among Israelis, and on the fact that "the great Arab world offers greater (missionary) possibilities than little Israel."

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## Researching To Continue

Jerusalem — (RNS) — The American School of Oriental Research in the formerly Jordanian sector of Jerusalem will open for its 68th academic year on Sept. 1. Rev. William Van Ellen Casey, S.J., director for 1967-68, announced.

Other Christian scholarly institutions on territory formerly taken from Jordan have also indicated their intention of continuing operations as in the past.

Eliyahu Elath, president of the Hebrew University, was the host to scholars from these institutions at a meeting held to discuss methods of promoting scholarly cooperation. Besides the American School, institutions represented at the meeting included the Dominican Ecole Biblique and the Franciscan Archaeological Institute.

The American School, founded in 1900, as a research institute for scholars, is now supported by 160 U.S. colleges and universities as well as some 2,000 individual members.

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## Maryknoll on the Air

RIBERALTA, Bolivia — (RNS) — Surrounded by curious children, Father Bernard B. Garrity, American Maryknoll missionary, goes on the air with his weekly literacy broadcast to jungle regions of Bolivia. The 47-year-old priest, who comes from Chelsea, Mass., broadcasts alphabetization classes to remote homes in Bolivia. He has prepared special texts and charts for use by listeners of the radio language programs.



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