

# Laity Reveal Momentum for Renewal

By ARTHUR MOORE  
Special Correspondent

Mr. Moore, editor of World Outlook, Methodist missions magazine, is a lay theologian who has written widely on ecumenical developments.

**Vatican City — (RNS) —** Before it opened, some observers here expected the third World Congress of the Lay Apostolate to be merely a giant pep rally.

By the time the 2,400 participants had finished their eight-day Congress, this view was drastically revised. The Congress took the spotlight briefly but emphatically away from the Synod of Bishops meeting nearby.

From the opening address by Thom Kersteins of Holland onwards, it was obvious that the mood of the Congress was blunt and aggressive.

Two subjects immediately began to surface as being of intense interest to the delegates — birth control and democracy in the Church. It would perhaps be more accurate to refer to them as two aspects of the same problem — the wish of the laity to make their own decisions.

In a series of workshop discussions, these subjects kept recurring with greater intensity. The question of elected representatives to be the voice of laymen in Rome ran into a snag: devising a practical method of choosing candidates who would not themselves be the kind of clericalized bureaucrat now in control.

(Interestingly enough, there seemed to be no personal animosity against many of the pres-

ent office holders, who were spoken of affectionately in private discussions.)

The final compromise was a series of requests presented to the Synod of Bishops. Although much watered down from many of the original demands, these requests do contain the essential idea of a world representative body whose officers and membership would be elected. This in itself is a strong enough challenge to the whole curial system to cause shock waves of astonishment and displeasure.

In the middle of the Congress, Pope Paul VI tried to put the damper on the exuberance of the laity. During a Mass that he concelebrated in St. Peter's with 24 bishops and archbishops, the Pope delivered another of his "stern warnings" in which he reasserted that the layman's duty was to assist the hierarchy or dry up "like a trickle of water in the desert."

Incidentally, the mixed style of this service seemed indicative of the current mixed state of life within the Roman Catholic agglomeration. It began with the vast congregation singing the hymn "Lobe den Herrn" (known in English as "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty") while the Pope was carried in on his throne, rather than walking with his concelebrants.

One was reminded again that periods of transition have their own momentum. The papal entrance certainly wasn't like the old pre-Council style, when the congregation was passive and the choir in some remote distance was chanting "Eus Petrus." This was but one revealing detail out of a morning crowded with them.

Whatever the purpose of the papal warning, it did not work. The laymen and women would not be silenced. The resolution, asking the Pope to leave the

decision on the choice of means for birth control "to the conscience of parents in consultation with trained and scientific advisers," passed only after a stormy debate in the meeting of heads of delegations but it passed hardly.

The action of the Lebanese delegate in calling the resolution heresy and storming out of the meeting indicates the contradictory forces bringing pressure on the Pope in his now long-drawn-out decision on this topic. But the passage of the resolution in the face of the papal exhortation reinforces the impression that Pope Paul has delayed so long in his decision that he has lost control of the situation.

A resolution not completed in time for a vote by the laity called for the easing of restrictions on mixed marriages. This was the subject then being considered by the Synod of Bishops in their deliberations in the Vatican. In fact, they had been overshadowed by the freewheeling laity.

The debate on mixed marriages was perhaps not too flattering a time to have the spotlight returned to the Synod. The background pushing and

showing which had gone on over this matter is reminiscent of the more uncertain days of the Second Vatican Council.

Originally, a memorandum on the subject had been prepared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the ex-Holy Office). This was considered so unsatisfactory by the Secretariat for Christian Unity that the latter group had threatened to issue a minority report.

As a result, the Pope appointed a mixed commission of the two groups to draw up the working paper for the bishops. The paper they produced was considered the most impartial of any presented to the Synod since it gave arguments for and against proposed changes without coming to conclusions.

It was disconcerting, therefore, that in presenting the subject to the Synod Paolo Cardinal Marella (chosen presumably for his neutrality) abandoned this approach and leaned heavily to the conservative side.

The impression of stage managing in favor of the status quo was strengthened when John Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia, hardly a darling of the progressives, was chosen to give the

official press conference on the subject.

All of this may be simply a searching for evil portents. The proposals themselves (to allow local bishops to decide whether mixed marriages can be performed by Protestant ministers or others, whether the "promises" to raise the children as Catholics can be dispensed with if the priest is convinced of the serious intention of the partners to be concerned with the children's upbringing, etc.) are good, if not yet perfect. Only the final result will tell whether optimism or pessimism is proper.

This remains true of the Synod as a whole. It should be reported that the bishops themselves, progressive and conservative alike, seem contented enough with the way things are going. But very little has actually been decided and much remains for the closing days. These in turn are bound to be dominated by the historic visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras to Rome. There is already a mounting and justified sense of excitement about this visit, but it is essentially separate from the Synod. On the Synod itself, the verdict is still out.

## Four Catholic Colleges Linked in Detroit

**Detroit — (RNS) —** Four Roman Catholic institutions of higher education here have begun a two-year test of a consortium program which will enable students in any of the four to use the facilities of all the rest.

Participating in the program are Madonna, Mercy and Marygrove Colleges, all women's institutions, and the co-educational University of Detroit. They have a combined enrollment of over 11,000 students.

Under the program, students will be able to enroll in another institution for any class not offered in their own school.

Father Malcolm T. Carron, S.J., president of the University of Detroit, said a tentative be-

ginning for the consortium came two years ago between the university and Marygrove. Students at the university were able for the first time to major in art and music by attending classes at Marygrove.

"The wider plan now being inaugurated," Father Carron said, "opens up to a student at any of the institutions the broad spectrum of the various disciplines and courses offered at all the institutions combined."



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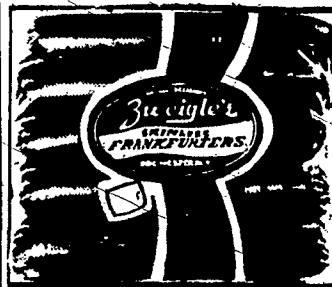


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