

## Dialog Group Dates From 1928

By FATHER JOHN A. EOLEY  
(NC News Service)

Philadelphia — It was the spring of 1928.

A stockbroker riding the train from his suburban Main Line home to his downtown Philadelphia office could hardly believe his ears.

A prominent Philadelphia lawyer was sitting beside him, commenting on New York Gov. Alfred E. Smith, probable Democratic candidate for president.

"He's a Catholic," the lawyer said, "and no Catholic could ever be head of this nation without having the Pope of

Rome come over here to live—and that would be intolerable!"

"Do you know," the broker replied, "that I am a Catholic, and that what you just said is illogical and ridiculous?"

Hardly a way for ecumenical dialogue to begin — but that train conversation was the beginning of Philadelphia's Round Table, a religious discussion group of Catholics and Protestants that has met almost every month since 1928 for an evening of dinner and dialogue.

The broker, Lindley Johnson, suggested that the lawyer and some of his Protestant friends should have dinner with him and some Catholic friends. Seven attended the first dinner meeting. The

frank exchange of views, especially on areas of disagreement, was so interesting the men arrived at one agreement—the meetings ought to continue.

A regular format soon was devised. One month, a Catholic would present a paper, a Protestant would serve as chairman, and each member would have an opportunity to comment on the ideas expressed. The following month, a Protestant would present the paper, a Catholic would serve as chairman.

Another "instruction" unchanged from the beginning is Lindley Johnson in the post of secretary. The 82-year-old Johnson says he can't find anyone else who will take the job of notifying the constantly changing roster of almost 100 members of the monthly meetings of the more difficult job of finding some member or qualified visiting expert to prepare the well-researched papers which have become a hallmark of the group.

Johnson's devotion to the Round Table stems from his conviction in founding it—that there exists a vast amount of religious ignorance which can be dispelled only by candid discussion.

Attendance at the third-Tuesday-of-the-month meetings usually numbers between 25 and 30, usually evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics.

Membership in the loosely knit group comprises Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Quakers, Swedenborgians, Dutch Reformed, Polish National, Orthodox, Mormon and Seventh Day Adventist. Four members are unaffiliated with any denomination. Public officials, lawyers, physicians, clergymen, clerks and farmers have all been numbered among the Round Table's membership.

The topics have often been the fundamental areas of disagreement between Catholics and Protestants—the infallibility of the Pope, the manner of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, the history of the Reformation, the necessity of confession, the validity of Anglican orders.

Attorney John B. Gest, a "charter member" of the Round Table and the speaker at the last meeting, noted that the discussion of areas of mutual agreement "unintentionally anticipated the Second Vatican Council's advocacy of ecumenical dialogue." He said that post-conciliar discussions have often focused on areas of cooperation in social action—a shift in the original emphasis of the "Round Table."

Johnson said the Round Table has been an "eye opener" for many Catholics—disclosing the holiness of life of many Protestants. It also has led to a deeper appreciation of the unity and clarity of their own faith by all members.

Johnson recalled two priests who played key roles in the history of the Round Table—the late Bishop Joseph M. Corrigan, rector of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary here when the Round Table was founded and later rector of the Catholic Union of America in Washington, D.C., and the late Msgr. Edward Hawkins, a former Episcopalian seminary professor who became a Catholic priest and was pastor of the Philadelphia parish of St. Joan of Arc.

Both Johnson and Gest have emphasized that conversion is not the purpose of the Round Table. They both are reluctant to claim any credit for the Round Table's influence.

One Round Table member, however—the late Carl Rogers—not only became a Catholic but founded the Narberth Movement, a group interested in lay activity in convert-making.

## Priest-Scientist Finds 30,000-Year-Old Society

Santiago, Chile —(NC)— A 64-year-old Belgian priest doing anthropological work in the Atacama desert as a lone researcher reports that he has collected evidence of a civilization some 30,000 years old, now buried in sand, salt and rocks.

Father Gustave Le Paige, S.J., who went to San Pedro de Atacama parish in 1955 from the Belgian Congo, has unearthed human fossils, tools, weapons and clothing in 30 "ghost" villages.

His private museum at the local parish has been visited by scientists from several countries. The governments of Chile and Belgium have awarded him decorations for his work.

Current research estimates man in America is only a few centuries older than the Christian era.

"I have dug some 4,000 burial

sites in these 13 years, some of them dating from 1,000 to 6,000 years before Christ," Father Le Paige said. "At some 120 of these tombs located in what I call the primitive man shops, fossils and other remains are much older, as shown by comparison with the Paleolithic man."

"I am now working on a fossil of a human jawbone and some tools that can be attributed to a culture existing in this land some 30,000 years ago," Father Le Paige said.

"However fascinating such an undertaking might be," he added, "my main concern here is the development of the existing villages. I am primarily a missionary and a priest. The villagers need help badly."

The Atacama desert covers much of northern Chile. It has been a source of nitrate and salt.



## Pope Cheers Bedridden Children

Rome — (RNS) — Pope Paul VI found time during New Year's Day to visit young patients at the Child Jesus Hospital in Rome. The pontiff distributed

Holy Communion to some of the children and asked all to pray for world peace and an end to the Vietnamese war.

## Bishop Chides Flock For 'Childish Consciences'

Northampton, Eng.—(RNS)— Roman Catholics who go through life with "childish consciences" were chided by Bishop Charles Grant of Northampton in a pastoral letter read at all Masses recently.

He declared that a great deal is said and written these days about conscience being the final rule of whether one acted right or wrongly. "It is true, of course," he added, "that we must each of us follow our own conscience."

does not mean that I am free to make up my mind as to what is right or wrong by my own unaided efforts, paying no attention to God's revelation through Christ, taught to us by the Church."

childhood in the Catholic school or catechism class—especially when we are prepared for our first confession.

"For some Catholics, unfortunately, this, which should be only a stage in the development of the conscience, becomes more or less the end and they go through life with childish consciences, a list of one or two 'dos' and a large number of 'don'ts'."

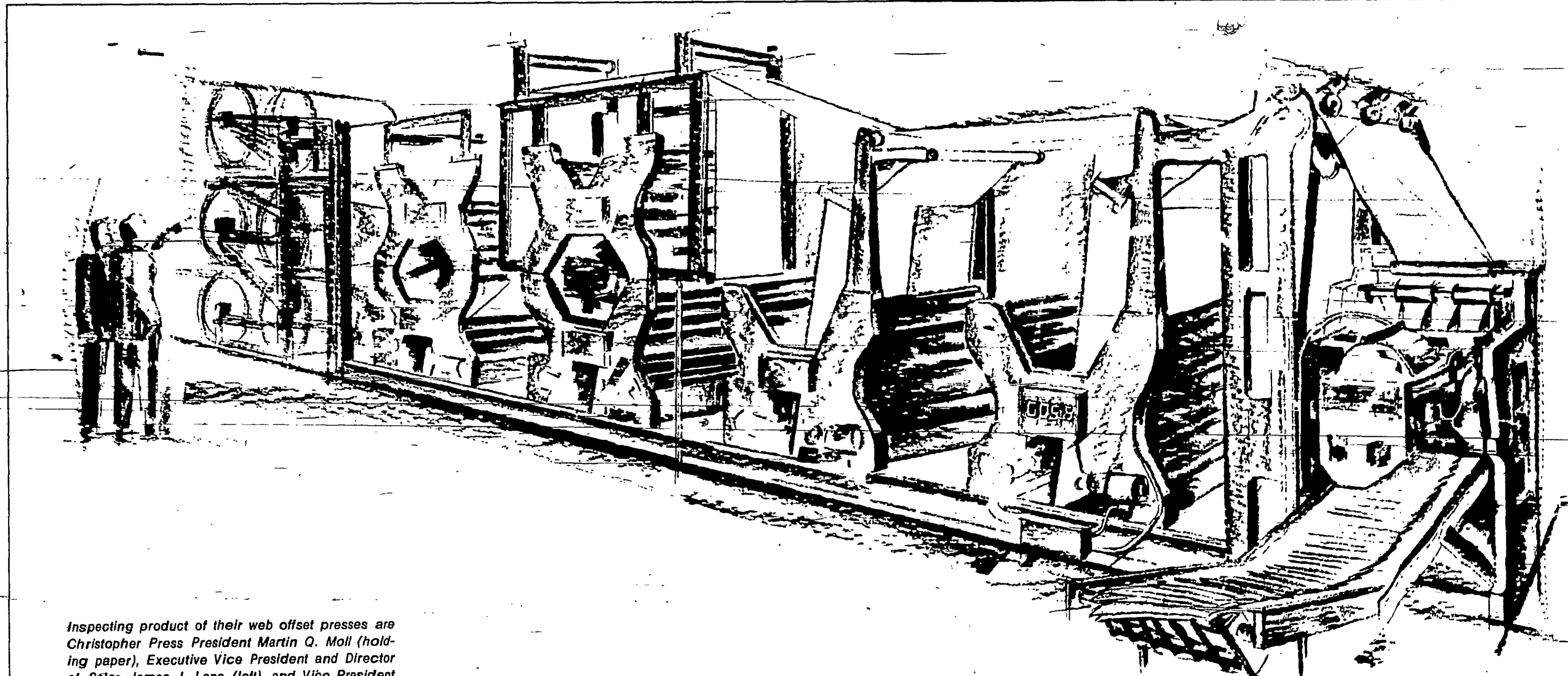
Bishop Grant devoted his pastoral to the subject because I consider that the renewal of the consciences of Catholics is a vital foundation of the renewal of the Church."

"This means that if I truly regard some action as right, then for me at that moment it is right, even though I am mistaken in thinking that it is right, but it most certainly

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