

# Underground Church Becomes More Visible

The "underground church," a phenomenon that has been growing in American Catholicism is becoming less and less underground, more visible and vocal.

Some of its members are now calling attention to the movement with public statements, demonstrations, books and conferences.

A Boston College conference on the "underground church" stressed the widening gap between the Roman Catholic Church's "institutional" officials and its "charismatic" forces.

The three-day institute on "Church Renewal and Intra-Church Conflict" was sponsored by the Jesuit university's department of theology. It is believed to be the first conference of its kind conducted on a Roman Catholic campus. Some 800 clergy, nuns and laity participated in the sessions.

Reaction to the movement has been mixed. Auxiliary Bishop James P. Shannon of Minneapolis-St. Paul, considered one of the most liberal Catholic bishops in the United States, has severely criticized the underground.

Many of its members object to the term "underground." One alternative frequently suggested is "the Resistance." Both terms, perhaps significantly, referred to the activity of patriots in Nazi-occupied territory during World War II.

Other terms coming into growing use are "freedom churches" or, simply, "the movement." Some scholars are referring to "group churches" or "house churches."

**Many Common Characteristics**  
Whatever they may be called, and whatever individual differences may be found among them, the small groups which generally make up the underground have a number of common characteristics:

Their members feel alienated from authority or from the mainstream of their nominal churches.

They find little satisfaction or personal meaning in the usual activities of these churches and generally seek

## Keep School Aid, French Leaders Ask Parliament

Paris — (N.C.) — The French government has decided to seek parliament to extend and modify the law on aid to private education.

The law, due to expire next December, provides varying amounts of state aid to Catholic schools, coupled with different degrees of state control. In general, the greater the aid, the greater the control.

Under the law, four plans are available to private, mainly Catholic, schools. They can remain without state aid, but even in this case they receive indirect help from the state through financial grants to parents.

At the other extreme, any school has the option of becoming part of the public school system, with all expenses paid and complete control by the state.

A third choice, known as a "contract of association," gives the government control over methods, schedules and the selection of teachers.

Since the government assumes all costs, associated schools may not charge tuition fees, but they may require a small fee for elective classes in religion, taught by a chaplain, and for the upkeep of the school chapel.

The fourth choice, called "simple contract," available only to elementary schools, provides that the state pay half the salaries of teachers. Local governments may pay other operating expenses.

The law, recently called a "pacification law" by Premier Georges Pompidou, was passed in December 1959 for a nine-year period. The government wants to renew it for another nine years, with those modifications suggested by experience.

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## 'Underground Church' Hit

Miami Beach, Fla. — (RNS) — Robert L. Durham of Seattle, president of the American Institute of Architects, lashed out here at the "underground church" movement for what he called its abandonment of the sanctuary in favor of the factory and coffeehouse.

Addressing the 29th National Conference on Religious Architecture, he told 500 architects and churchmen that religious architecture can be a "tool for better communities" in a day when "man is awakening to the need for better environment."

Durham asserted that a part of the better environment should be the churches and synagogues whose buildings "make possible a more meaningful expression of society's religious conviction."

A de-emphasis on structures for religious purposes has been voiced in recent months among exponents of the "underground church" and other groups.

What must be achieved, Durham concluded, is for buildings for religious use "to provide the environment in which contemporary American man can find religious fulfillment."

The underground assumes a position in line with that of its Church but further out and more intense.

Bishops make statements deploring the horrors of war; underground clergy go to jail for their peace activities. The Church revises a liturgy which had been virtually unchanged for over 1,000 years. Underground groups, finding the formal changes insufficient, make radical experiments with improvised liturgy.

The Churches enter into ecumenical dialogue. The underground virtually dissolves denominational distinctions and accepts intercommunion as a matter of course.

In general, underground groups tend to view the mainstream churches as too large, impersonal, cautious and slow moving, exclusive and unduly concerned with their own power and prestige.

The serious charge, divisiveness, was leveled at the movement by Bishop Shannon. This is probably the basic indictment

He warned that the underground church "can be a radically divisive element in the Christian community" when it militates for a "complete dissolution of present ecclesiastical structures; spurns the ministerial priesthood and office; and concentrates on 'narrowly ecclesiastical issues' such as liturgical innovation and experimentation, authority and obedience, and clerical celibacy.

"The proponents of the underground church must know that it is this image which they most frequently project, and not that of a zealous, socially conscious, prophetic minority which seeks to realize the Gospel in every area of the political order," Father McBrien said.

"But the underground church can also be a source of promise, an earnest of a better Church in the future, the 'first fruits' of a renewed Christian community," he added.

**The Crucial Issues**  
The issues on which the underground disagrees with the mainstream include questions of Church authority and structure, doctrine, ethics, liturgy and modes and orientation of social action. Not all groups, of course, are equally involved in all of these concerns.

Frequently the disagreement between the underground and the mainstream is one of degree rather than total opposition.



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of the underground by the mainstream.

"Unity of Christians" is not being promoted by the underground, Bishop Shannon said. "People gather at liturgical services to join in acts of worship as a symbol of their unity. The underground church, on the other hand, results in a small coterie or clique, cut off from the main body of the Christian community."

"I do not say that it necessarily has a snob appeal, but it has the result of drawing together exclusive groups of similar and somewhat narrow view."

"In this it is divisive, rather than cohesive, and until it surfaces and integrates into the total Christian community, it will continue to be so."

**Fear of Discipline**  
Underground spokesmen maintain that, in some cases at least, it is impossible for them to become public and integrate with the mainstream. One result that many members fear is opposition and disciplinary action from the Church structure.

An alternate threat is loss of their special group identity and function, submergence — or ceasing to exist — in what they call the faceless mass of a large congregation. Underground priests have frequently said that their liturgy cannot be effective with a large congregation. Varying maximum numbers are given, ranging from 50 down to about 20. Most groups lean toward the smaller figure.

Father Joseph Fichter, a Jesuit sociologist at Harvard University whose public statements and writings indicate at least some sympathy for the underground, told the Boston College conference that he finds part of the underground's program unrealistic.

In a statement from the floor, he said that he perceived a movement, a trend but "I don't

## Today's Churches Accent People Not Buildings, Architect Says

Miami Beach, Fla. — (RNS) — People, not buildings, are accentuated in today's churches, the chairman of the National Conference on Religious Architecture said here.

Nils M. Schweizer of Winter Park, Fla., vice president of the Guild for Religious Architecture, told the 29th annual conference that the renewal going on in churches is reflected in architecture. That is why "we no longer build cathedrals," he said.

"We don't just build a church today, as we once did," Schweizer explained. "We program it. We study with the congregation the function of the building, national trends and the nature of worship."

He noted that worship is no longer just hymn-singing, creed-saying and preaching, but also involves other types of music and drama.

"Spaces we build for worship have to do many things, yet retain the aura of worship," the

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