

CHURCH, CASTRO AND CUBA

By JAIME FONSECA
(NC News Service)

The Church in Cuba is searching for a way to make "constructive Christians" in a socialist nation. Her own survival depends on this.

The trials of this nation—underdevelopment, blockade, high-pitched political tensions and ideological confrontation—might help to produce that Christian, or as a bishop describes it, "a functioning member of a Revolutionary society." The framework for this new pastoral effort is a frantic effort to increase production.

Each Wednesday, a group of seminarians, 23 at least, leave their old seminary in downtown Havana and travel to the sugar cane fields to cut cane with machetes or to work in the "Green Belt," a string of fruit and vegetable gardens surrounding Havana. Sometimes they go to work on the coffee plantations.

And many priests, as soon as they put away their Sunday Mass vestments, join the brigades in which thousands of Cuban urbanites do "voluntary work" — which for many is forced labor — in the fields or the cities. These priests want to be close to both the believers and the unbelievers in a new ministry of personal relations.

On other days they join street cleaners and road gangs.

In spite of this new ministry and the exemplary life of thousands of laymen and women, Catholics face great difficulties, many by government design. In examining these conditions, a group of Cubans in exile, the Student Revolutionary Directorate, was prompted to write: "Should things go on this way, in 20 years no Catholics will be left in Cuba."

But the seminarians and priests and lay leaders living literally "inside" the Revolution feel otherwise.

We work for it with sincere enthusiasm," said one young theologian, laying down the machete while he dried his forehead with the back of his hand. "Give us 20 years, and we will make this revolution a human, Christian one."

The rector of the San Carlos seminary, Father Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, fosters that hope.

"Christians have an active, positive role to play in the process of the Cuban revolution," he said. "They are called to infuse human values into the social and civic structures, through personal relationships, a keen awareness for the needs of the people, their aspirations. Christians are also called to develop a critical sense, to see the bad and the good in the present course."

Many young people seem to agree. The Movimiento de Estudiantes Cristianos (MEC), with about 100 leaders in high schools and the university — most of them from Protestant denominations — issued these statements after a meeting in Havana at the end of last year.

"The Church is called to a two-fold task: to humanize and to be a prophet. Humanize the Revolution by working together with society in all that is good, creative, fruitful, positive. . . . In its prophetic task of justice, the Church must point out the dehumanizing elements which occur in the process of change."

The dehumanizing factors are many, from the loose, casual way of running the administration to the terrorizing methods of the secret

police. The bad includes the practices in "netting out" justice, jailings and executions without fair trials, conditions without compensation and constant discrimination for political reasons. And these things are the target of sharp criticism from young revolutionaries.

"I know a worker living in my parish," one priest said, "who was called by his superior and praised for his performance and devotion on the job, but also was told that 'unfortunately, we cannot promote you to department head because you are a believer.'"

Such injustices pose a real problem to the Christian conscience: what about the many innocent victims of the Revolution, the 60,000 in Cuban jails and labor camps, the half-million being penalized—often jobless—because they applied for an exit visa, or the 200 that leave Cuba daily, renouncing whatever they had in pursuit of freedom. Over half a million are already in exile.

A well-informed expert of the Cuban situation, Manuel Gonzalez, gives another view from his exile in Spain.

"Cuba today is a society divided by ideological conflict and immersed in a civil cold war," he wrote from Madrid in the magazine Mensaje Iberoamericano. "No one knows how many followers, or how many enemies, the Revolution really has."

"But for the Church it is enough to know that such conflict exists and that both opposing camps have children of God in order for her to abide by her mission of pacifying and unifying, of showing understanding for all, forgiveness, of rendering any guidance and assistance she can dispense."

"No one can demand from the Church that, either because of alleged past failures or because of a twisted sense of justice, it take sides. To do so is to force the Church into renouncing its universal and primary duty of charity."

How is the Church to become "the unifying bridge"? The search for an answer is on.

"There have been radical changes in the values of our society," a Havana university professor reasons, "so the Christian must adjust to the new Marxist premises, such as the proletariat replacing the capitalist, the proletariat seen as a hindrance to social justice, the mystique of the solidarity of the masses versus individual interest."

A priest gives another reaction: "We want to know when a Church can do when, as in Cuba, it no longer has the help of political or economic patronage to influence a given membership. The idea that more people respond better, and more sincerely, to the invitation of a 'disenfranchised' Church could prove quite an experiment here."

As Gonzalez indicates, it is hard to measure how far communism has penetrated the conscience and the lives of the people with its redeeming promises and dogmatic propaganda, or how much resentment its totalitarian demand for complete loyalty has raised among discriminating revolutionaries.

The regime faces almost insurmountable difficulties. Still tied to sugar exports — a one crop economy — and Soviet subsidies to the tune of close to \$1 billion a day, in dire need of trained technicians, professionals, able administrators and supervisors, and facing critical

shortages in basic goods, the Havana braintrust is not yet sure of the doctrinaire guidelines needed to run the revolution and is trying to buy time.

Cubans have been whipped into a frenzied mood as Premier Fidel Castro and his aides try to increase sugar and cattle production, alleviate the shortages and forge national unity. "Work" and "performance" are the pass-words today.

A teacher, Marcelo Udría, who doubles as a parish lector and drama coach in a revolutionary club in Havana, asked: "When are the Cuban leaders going to admit that 'liberation' is really Christian dignity fulfilled?"

Not having any answers, Christians look for signs in the pragmatic policies of the regime regarding religion. And these are some of the things he sees:

• The name of God has been banned from the constitution, and the effort to regiment youth and hide spiritual values from the young persists; but religious freedom is still in the law. Article 95 of the constitution says that "the profession of all religion is free, as is the exercise of all worship, with no other limitations than those imposed by Christian morals and public order."

• Fidel Castro once said that the Revolution wants to leave the Church alone and free to organize worship and teaching within its own private boundaries. He has also said that "we are not making martyrs either; no one is getting canonized here." Castro sees no need for "dogmatic" Marxism and has asked: "No one can say he has the whole truth."

• The cult of the 19th-century Cuban independence

hero, Jose Martí — which the government fosters more than that of Marx, Lenin or Mao Tse-tung — has brought about an indirect effect of spreading Christian concepts. Martí, a masterful writer, was a believer. Heraldo Cristiano, a Protestant magazine, published a memorial edition honoring Martí with his picture and some of his thoughts: "Jesus did not die in Palestine, he is alive in each man." "Let us kiss Christ dying on the cross for the redemption of all, and let us make of each one's cross the tool of human labor."

• Clergy and seminarians continue to be exempted from military and other compulsory service, although isolated cases of one being drafted show once more the changing moods of the government. Raul Castro, a top commander, says members of the clergy are so few — perhaps 150 Protestant, plus 228 priests — that defense needs are not impaired by their staying with their flocks "and caring for the religious needs of the believers."

• Frequent recognition of the Christian at work from revolutionaries supervising the regime's enterprises is regarded as promising. "A labor leader who was bitterly anti-Church in the early days, came to me and said that he was changing his mind about priests being always aligned with the rich. He was very impressed by the example and sacrifice of the priests he saw at work," said a priest.

On returning to the seminary in the evening, this is the thought of the young students as they kneel in the chapel: "Lord, give us 20 years to try."

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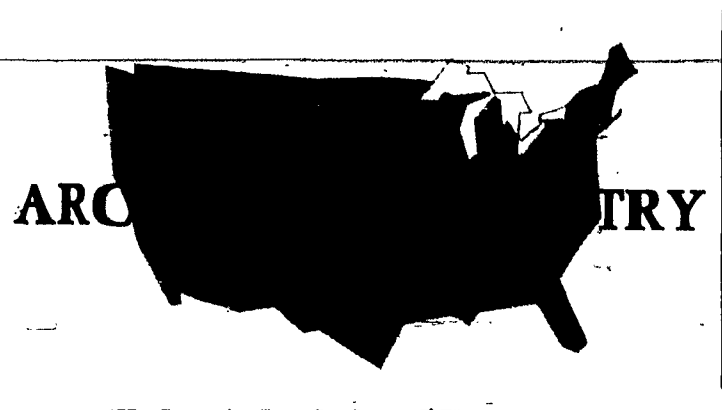
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Help Asked for Ukrainians

Philadelphia — (NC) — In the name of the 'Church of Silence,' three Ukrainian-rite Catholic bishops of the United States have called on world leaders to intercede through channels on behalf of the persecuted people of Ukraine and their church.

Signed by Metropolitan Ambrose Senyshyn of Philadelphia; Bishop Joseph M. Schmondiuk of Stamford, and Bishop Jaroslav Gabro of Chicago, the appeal deals with the recent arrest and reported death of Ukrainian Catholic Archbishop Basil Welychowski, C.S.S.R.

School Prayer Ban Defied

Pittsburgh — (RNS) — The Albert Gallatin Area School District in Fayette County is the second school district in western Pennsylvania to reinstate prayer and Bible reading in its schools.

Clariton Township revived classroom Bible reading and prayer in January.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has begun legal action to ban prayers and Bible reading in Clariton and is expected to bring action against the Gallatin district, basing its suit on the 1963 Supreme Court decision prohibiting religious observances in the public schools.

CAPITOL HILL ROUND-UP

Albany—The final week of the 1969 legislature was hectic and harrowing.

Decentralization and the supplemental budget got the headlines . . . along with individual local bills and the campus gun bill. But there were others that were in the hopper during those days as well.

Some in which the Catholic Committee took a special interest:

Welfare: Along with numerous other welfare groups the Catholic Committee and the eight Bishops of New York urged the legislature to "adopt laws before adjournment to assure the poor of our State that aid to meet their basic human needs shall not be reduced." The aim here was to fend off some of the disastrous effects of the severe cut off of aid to the needy and abandoned.

Decentralization: The Catholic Committee transmitted to the legislators the statement of the Secretaries of Education of the Catholic Dioceses in New York City which supported the "principles and concepts underlying the re-

vised Board of Regents plan." The Committee urged this position be adopted. Some of its items: clearly defined autonomy, for local school boards; state guidelines machinery for settling disputes; local power to establish flexible and experimental curricula.

Nursing homes: Both houses have passed a bill permitting nursing homes to provide outpatient services. This is a useful service to the sick who may not need institutional care but will benefit from some expert care in their own homes. Nursing home people can now perform this care. The Catholic Committee supported this bill.

Education: Here the Committee has supported various bills that will increase aid to students at the college and elementary level.

Among the changes changed back: extending the 100-day nursing home limitation; limiting the freeze on hospital and nursing home rates this December (rather than the 18 month or two year previous freeze); permitting welfare people outside

New York City to raise assistance to the New York City level (previously Non-NYC New Yorkers were limited to a lower assistance ceiling); a new food stamp program, extending the money of the poor and the ability to purchase foodstuffs; restoring restaurant meals to single aged and poor living alone.

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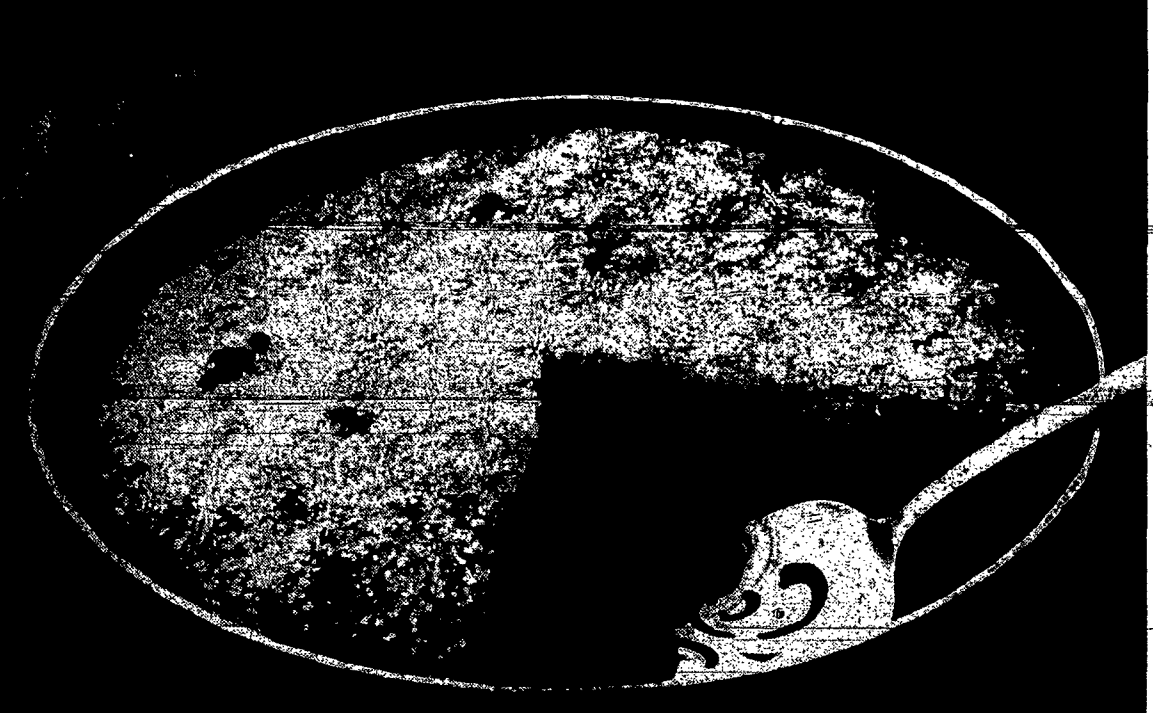
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PREPARE GROUND BEEF FILLING*
Place in mixer bowl:
1 packet RED STAR INSTANT BLEND YEAST
Top (in this order) with:
1/4 c. oil
2 tsp. salt
1 lb. beef
Pinch of thyme, marjoram, and oregano (if desired)
2 eggs
Mixture of 1/4 c. hot scalded milk and 1/4 c. butter.
Beat at medium speed 3 min. Spoon over hot ground beef mixture in skillet. Broil with 1 tsp. melted butter.

SPRINKLE GROUND BEEF FILLING
Sprinkle generously with grated Stella Brand Parmesan Cheese. Let stand in warm place 30 min. Bake at 350° for 25 to 30 min. Let stand few min., turn out on serving plate. Serve hot. Note: may be baked in 9" square pan.

GROUND BEEF FILLING
Fry 2 tbsp. chopped onion and 1 lb. ground beef in 10-inch round skillet. Stir in 1/4 tsp. salt, 1/4 tsp. sugar, pinch of pepper and 1/2 c. tomato sauce. Simmer while preparing bread.

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