



DR. BACKER

Judge Allows Counsel for Unborn Children

St. Louis—(RNS)—A Roman Catholic doctor, father of 13 and a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology, has been authorized to testify on behalf of unborn children in a suit seeking to abolish Missouri's abortion law.

Dr. M. H. Backer Jr., has been appointed by St. Louis County Circuit Judge Herbert Lasky to argue on behalf of "Infant Doe," said to represent "an existent but unborn child and all other unborn children situated for all purposes of this action."

"This is a lawsuit of great public interest," Judge Lasky said, commenting on the appointment of Dr. Backer. "It (abortion) has been debated for as long as I can remember. I need as much help as I can get."

A call for Dr. Backer's testimony had come from lawyers of the Missouri Catholic Conference, which seeks to retain the Missouri abortion law. The law makes abortion illegal in Missouri except to preserve the life of the mother.

The suit — filed in November by a group of physicians, clergymen and women — asked that the abortion law be ruled unconstitutional because it infringes on women's rights to decide to terminate pregnancy after consulting with their own physicians.

CRS Head Fears Cutback In Programs

New York — (RNS)—Noting that a significant cutback in funds looms for U.S. Catholic overseas aid programs, Bishop Edward E. Swannstrom warned here that more than 1.5 million needy persons may be affected as a result.

The executive director of Catholic Relief Services said a \$600,000 budget trim by the U.S. Catholic bishops in November and a \$1 million drop in last year's CRS collection is expected to curtail the agency's programs by more than 6 per cent.

In kicking off the first of nine regional meetings with diocesan directors of the annual Catholic Overseas Aid Appeal — slated for March 14 to 21 — the bishop said CRS is attempting to "cut down or phase out" some programs around the world.

"But bishops in these underdeveloped areas are pleading that we continue these programs," he said.

Courier-Journal

COURIER / WORLD

Priest Ends Hunger Strike

Barcelona — (RNS) — After 20 days without solid food, Father Maria Xirinac abandoned a hunger strike that had been undertaken to secure amnesty for Spain's political prisoners.

The 38-year-old parish priest from a remote mountain village some 50 miles from Barcelona had declared he would "fast to death" if political rights and amnesty were not granted all Spaniards by the Franco regime.

He ended his fast only after urgent pleas from representatives of several Catalan opposition factions.

Divorce Referendum Sought

Rome — (RNS) — A second request for a national referendum aimed at nullifying Italy's new divorce law has been placed before the government's court of appeals.

Gabrio Lombardi, president of the National Committee for Referendum, said his group decided to seek repeal because "divorce breeds divorce."

The initial request for a referendum was made by the "For the Family and Against Divorce Movement." Under the constitution, 500,000 signatures are required to call a national referendum. A spokesman for the movement said it already had accumulated some 2 million signatures on petitions.

Pope Deplores Church Rivalry

Vatican City — (RNS) — Pope Paul deplored the paradox of disunity among Christian Churches in the face of the threat of modern atheism.

Speaking at his customary general Wednesday audience on the theme of the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity," the Pope reminded his audience that the unity of the Churches was "a sublime vision, comprising the whole vista of humanity and its history."

Yet, at this juncture of history, he said, "we find that we Christians, 'all believers in Christ,' though faced with the threat of modern atheism, are still disunited, even rivals, and until yesterday, proud of our polemical discussions."

Quebec Priests in Opinion Poll

Quebec City, Que. — (RNS) — The great majority of priests polled in 20 Roman Catholic dioceses in this province agree with their Church's stand on priestly celibacy.

The survey showed that 81.2 per cent of 776 priests questioned in this predominantly French-speaking and Catholic province are in accord with the Church's celibacy rule.

Subsidized by the Bishops' Conference of Quebec, the poll was conducted by Paul Stryckman of Laval University's department of religious sociological research. It was designed to show the opinions of the clergy on a number of contentious issues.

The interviewing was carried out between November 1968 and April 1969. Eighty-five per cent of the priests who responded said they were satisfied with their work and 86 per cent said they had found fulfillment.

COURIER / NATION

Blacks Organize in Ohio See

Cincinnati — (RNS) — A black Catholic caucus here resolved to increase black effectiveness as Christians to show "the Church at large" how to witness. The caucus pledged to work towards a more efficient use of Church resources "for the liberation of black people."

Father Clarence J. Rivers, one of two black priests in the archdiocese who is also famed for his liturgical innovations, announced the formation of the local black Catholic group. He said that the youth among the 150 persons who attended a study weekend here demanded programs in addition to statements of intent.

The black Catholic caucus has no formal archdiocesan status, although it began with the backing of Archbishop Paul Leibold, who began the weekend sessions with a short talk. He asked black Catholics to "maintain a distinction between the ideal Church of Christ and her frequently failing membership; to love the former even while frankly criticizing the failures of the latter."

The Cincinnati group is a local manifestation of the three-year-old National Black Catholic Caucus. About one per cent of the Catholics in the Cincinnati archdiocese, which includes Dayton, are black.

Missionary Meeting Draws Students

Urbana, Ill. — (RNS) — Total registration at the Ninth Inter-Varsity Missionary Convention held here reached 12,304, instead of the expected 10,000.

Of the total, 10,937 were students. Forty-eight states and 71 foreign countries were represented. A computer service called Inter Cristo, matched more than 5,000 interested students with 6,400 job openings in world missions.

The students represented a wide spectrum. The Jesus Freaks, a kind of "hippies" for Christ group, were on hand. So were the Christ Labor Union, suburbanites, farm youngsters and a large contingent of blacks. Two of the most popular speakers were black evangelist Tom Skinner and the Rev. John Stott, chaplain to Queen Elizabeth of Britain.

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