

A Somber St. Paddy's Day

New York — (RNS) — Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish leaders here have called upon all Americans to join in prayers for peace and justice in Ireland — Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland — on St. Patrick's Day, March 17.

The appeal also urged Catholics to celebrate the occasion in a "new way" by adding a "note of seriousness to the exuberance of the day."

That "new way" would be "prayer and penance for justice and peace in all Ireland — justice and peace for everyone," according to Dr. R. H. Edwin Espy, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, general secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, and Rabbi Henry Siegman, executive vice president of the Synagogue Council of America.

A joint statement by the three men pledged efforts to implement a new style of celebration on St. Patrick's Day. The "Interreligious Call to Prayer for Ireland" said:

"In our concern for areas of crisis all over the world, we

may forget one island where misunderstanding and prejudice seem ingrained into much of the social structure: Ireland. The situation there, in South and North, seems dangerously close to civil war."

Father David Bowman, a Catholic priest who is special assistant for ecumenical services to Dr. Espy at the NCC, stressed that prayers should be said for all parties to the Irish conflict — for Catholics, Protestants, British soldiers and members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

He said prayer should be offered for "equality of civil rights for all in Ireland — for housing, jobs, education, civil service and all areas of life."

Father Bowman voiced deep concern over reports that some groups in the U.S. planned "one-sided confrontations" aimed at expelling the British from Northern Ireland on St. Patrick's Day.

"I would deny that such tactics can be reconciled with religious motives which should guide us all," he said. "Our God is the God of love and respect

for all persons. Our prayers and actions must therefore be for reconciliation, not polarization."

Divorce Referendum Delayed in Italy

Rome — (RNS) — A nationwide referendum on Italy's controversial 15-month-old divorce law, scheduled for June 11, has been automatically postponed until 1973 because of the dissolution of the Italian Parliament.

President Giovanni Leone disbanded the legislature on Feb. 28, a year ahead of schedule, and called for new elections to the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate on May 7 and 8.

The immediate reason for the president's action was the failure of the government of Premier Giulio Andreotti — Italy's 33rd since the fall of Mussolini — to win parliamentary endorsement.

Under the Constitution, any scheduled national referendum is ipso facto postponed by a year, if — as happened — Parliament is dissolved.



Paratroopers carry the flag-draped coffin of Father Gerard Weston at his funeral in Crosby, England. Father Weston, a 38-year-old Roman Catholic army chaplain, was one of seven persons killed when a bomb exploded in Aldershot, England. (RNS Photo)

Cardinal Officiates Rite For Slain British Chaplain

Liverpool — (RNS) — Cardinal John Heenan, archbishop of Westminster, presided at a requiem Mass here for Father Gerry Weston, a Roman Catholic army chaplain killed in the first Irish bomb incident in England in many years.

Father Weston, 37, held the rank of captain in a British parachute brigade whose officers' mess was the target of a bomb placed by Irish Republican Army men at the garrison town of Aldershot southern England, on Feb. 22.

Five women and a man, all civilians, also died in the explosion which evoked expressions of horror in Eire as well as in Britain.

Father Weston's remains were brought here for burial because his parents live in the parish of St. Peter and St. Paul in Liverpool's Great Crosby district, and it was in that church that the requiem Mass

was celebrated. Archbishop George Andrew Beck of Liverpool delivered the sermon.

Cardinal Heenan flew here from Dublin. Before the funeral service, both the cardinal and Archbishop Beck issued statements on the Aldershot bombing, which the IRA claimed was in retaliation for the shootings in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, on Jan. 30 in which 13 people were killed by British paratroops.

Cardinal Heenan said, "Once more unarmed men and women have become victims of a murderous attack. The latest deaths bring home to us in a literal sense the tragedy of the Irish situation. We must redouble our prayers for peace and increase our efforts to find a just solution to the problem of Northern Ireland. May God rest the souls of these innocent people and the brave young priest it was my privilege to ordain."

British Soldier Says Victims Were Unarmed

Coleraine, No. Ireland — (RNS) — A former British serviceman told a board of inquiry here that he became "sickened" as he watched British paratroopers firing on unarmed civilians during a Catholic civil rights demonstration in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, on Jan. 30. Thirteen civilians were killed.

Derek Tucker, a 13-year veteran of the Royal Air Force, testifying at the seventh day of the inquiry conducted by England's Lord Chief Justice Widgery, said he had watched soldiers firing into fleeing crowds from his apartment overlooking the Catholic Bogside area, where the incident occurred.

Tucker testified that he had

seen no armed civilians. After the soldiers opened fire, he said, "people were lying down anywhere to get out of the way of the shots."

He said he watched from his window until he became "sickened" and "had to turn away."

British Army authorities contend that the soldiers had fired only after being subjected to sniper fire and nail bomb attacks.

Meanwhile, in Lurgan, some 20 miles southwest of Belfast, Northern Ireland, two hooded gunman shot to death a member of the volunteer Ulster Defense Regiment in his home and wounded his 11-year-old daughter in the leg.



People to People

President and Mrs. Nixon pause to chat with a group of Chinese youngsters during a visit to the Ming Tombs near Peking. The Nixons were on a sight-seeing tour which included a visit to the Great Wall of China. (RNS)

Looking Up

By Joe Giacalone



Poland Eases Tax Measures

Warsaw, Poland — (RNS) — Poland's government has abolished a law requiring the Roman Catholic Church to submit detailed financial statements of income and expenditures and to maintain itemized inventories of all properties and assets.

Annulment of the 10-year-old law, which also eases tough tax regulations on church property, was disclosed in Slowo

Powszechnie, a daily newspaper published by a state-sponsored Catholic organization called PAX.

The decree, issued by the Ministry of Finance, removes a major irritant and represents a second important step by the year-old regime of Communist Party leader Edward Gierak to establish normal relations with the Polish Catholic Church.