

Churchmen Across Nation Urging Prison Reform

By Religious News Service

Churchmen and religious groups are becoming increasingly embroiled in the question of prison reform, in many cases urging approaches far beyond the traditional prison ministerial role and post-prison rehabilitation.

In some areas, penal authorities and religious leaders are asking for a new definition of the prison chaplain's role, including that of "agitator for reform" in both the judicial and penal systems where abuses often undermine any basis for rehabilitation.

Within the past year—spurred especially by the Attica (N.Y.) prison riots in which 43 persons were killed—religious leaders and church groups have joined government and civic leaders in pushing hard for sweeping reforms in prisons and for new approaches to programs of education, rehabilitation, counseling and research.

Keying on Attica as a "tragic symbol of the profound moral failure of our society," the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism said: "If the revolt at Attica teaches us anything, it is that what our society desperately needs is reform, not repressive patterns of behavior which emanate from our own anger and sense of frustration."

Last Fall, omnibus bills were introduced in both houses of Congress aimed at effecting widespread changes in the nature and direction of the nation's correctional system. A main feature of both bills is the em-

phasis upon replacing the present system of large penal institutions with small, community-based facilities to foster rehabilitation rather than punishment.

This was in line with the conclusions of a wide-ranging study on crime and punishment completed by the American Friends Service Committee of Philadelphia.

The Quaker report insisted that the attempt to build rehabilitation programs into the prison system has failed, and that it has simply resulted in "an increasingly repressive penal system and overcrowded courts dispensing assembly-line justice."

Urging the separation of rehabilitation and punishment in the American penal system, the report said "prisons are for punishment, but only when a compelling social need has been demonstrated and when less drastic remedies have been exhausted."

Similarly, the Vatican's representative to the United Nations commission on crime and punishment, Auxiliary Bishop Augustine Harris of Liverpool, England, has declared that penal reform must "focus on the person or we will dehumanize the very one we must make human."

A former prison chaplain, the prelate said that "unless today's society has good reasons to offer a prisoner why he should lead a good life it has no right to maintain prisons."

The General Board of the Na-

tional Council of Churches resolved to ask its member Protestant and Orthodox Churches to work for a series of reforms that includes the drafting of a "bill of rights" for prisoners and other steps toward a "policy of rehabilitation and human respect."

Tied in with that resolution were calls for more chaplaincy services in jails and prisons where none exist and for reductions in jail terms through the establishment of "community-based treatment programs."

At almost the same time, 450 religious, racial, business, labor and civic leaders of the National Alliance for Shaping Safer Cities, made its appeal for the adoption of a prisoners' bill of rights by federal and state governments. The proposal is based on United Nations' standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners.

John Cosgrove, a U.S. Catholic Conference official who endorsed the statement, said the "rights of prisoners are not, of course, all those available to free citizens. They are, however, those rights inseparable from the prisoner's existence as a human being, a creature of God."

The Roman Catholic and Episcopal bishops of Rochester, N.Y., Bishop Joseph L. Hogan and Bishop Robert Spears, in an unusual joint pastoral following the Attica tragedy, said that riots and deaths "have finally forced us as pastors of a Christian people to speak out on the penal system."

Follow Rochester Bishops' Prophetic Lead

And significantly, as though following the bishops' prophetic lead, churches and religious leaders did speak out.

United Methodist Bishop W. Ralph Ward of Syracuse said "Structured and hidden racism" lies at the root of the nation's social disorder. "There is evidence that in prisons as well as in the whole of society there is one standard of treatment for whites and another for blacks and racial minorities."

He called on churchmen to pressure the state legislatures and governments for the diversion of greater resources to those in charge of penal institutions to establish their effectiveness in rehabilitation and reform.

One hundred Catholic, Protestant and Jewish community leaders in Boston appealed to their state government "to prevent another Attica" in Massachusetts. They urged the governor to investigate "the volatile and deteriorating conditions at our prisons."

Similarly, the American Baptist Convention's Division of Christian Social Concerns demanded that the U.S. penal system be replaced with a "genuine" correctional system de-

signed to rehabilitate prisoners.

Addressing a Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. consultation on the church and prison reform, a former director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons said the chief goal of reform must be the reduction in the size of prisons.

"The giant penal institution," said Dr. Myrl E. Alexander, now a professor at Southern Illinois University "and the thousands of county jails where people are warehoused under the care of untrained persons have got to go."

He said the prison system must be coordinated from arrest to release, adding that "much of the care of offenders has to be at the community level and must take place before sentencing."

Participants in the consultation said that one of the major contributions churches can make toward improving the prison system would be to work to change the attitudes of the public toward prisoners and released prisoners.

However reforms of prisons and penal systems on the local, state and federal levels is accomplished in the future, it would appear that church leaders and spokesmen for religious groups intend to play a major role.

Father Hesburgh: Population Problem - Stress Overlooks Human Dignity

New York — (RNS) — Calling for a new emphasis on human development aboard "our spaceship earth," Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame, said here "if we really made human dignity meaningful for everyone, then in large measure we would ultimately solve the population problem."

He declared that a deeper crisis lies beneath the widespread concern for over-population, "a crisis of values and priorities than a crisis of population."

Writing in a special New York Times section devoted to the problem of population in the U.S. and in the world, the famed educator noted that "if population growth is viewed as 'one great crisis,' then modern society 'will descend to all kinds of pragmatic and immoral initiatives.'"

"One of the greatest evolutions of our times, human dignity, is becoming lost in the discussion of population growth," he said. "Human development is the new name for peace among men."

Assessing abortion as one of the most "blatant of the immoral initiatives," mentioned, Father Hesburgh said this "degrades women as nothing else can, despite the protestations of the Women's Liberation Movement. As a priest, I have known of nothing that so shatters a woman psychologically and morally as the destruction of human life within her."

"One of her greatest assets
Courier-Journal

is life-giving — not life destroying. Cast her in the latter role and you ultimately destroy her," he declared.

Stressing the difficulty, especially in the affluent nations, of differentiating the population problem from sex, he said: "We should cherish sex, as it is, indeed, God-given. The modern world needs, not our sex-soaked culture, but a reasonable philosophy that transcends mere sexual thrills."

"To redeem the times," Father Hesburgh asserted, "... we must redeem sex — to make it once again the language of love, of generosity, of children responsibly and lovingly begotten; not sex — the haven of selfishness, childlessness and empty pleasure."

In calling for an emphasis on human dignity and human de-

velopment, he said that "making population . . . our single focus may be exactly the wrong way to proceed towards a world that can achieve . . . life, liberty and pursuit of happiness."

Father Hesburgh also urged the affluent nations to aid underdeveloped countries in which rapid population growth has prevented gains in food production, more education, health services and housing.

"The United States with 6 per cent of the world population, annually uses 40 per cent of the world's energy," he observed. Yet, it gives a "mere one billion" in foreign aid, while "two-thirds of the rest of the world lives on less than \$200 a year."

He added that this is a part of the population problem he hoped U.S. Catholics would espouse.

Catholic Statistics Show Dropoff in Schools

Information in the Official Catholic Directory, 1972, ranges from the bed capacity of diocesan general hospitals to the number of converts in the Diocese of Rapid City, S.D.

It also contains important statistical data on the Church in the United States and its 164 dioceses and archdioceses.

There are 43,390,990 Catholics in the U.S., 23.3 per cent of the total population. This figure represents an increase of 176,261 over last year. However, the increase in the number of Catholics from 1970 to 1971 was 342,640, almost twice the increase for 1972. The rate of

increase in the number of Catholics dropped greatly.

In many other areas the figures have gone down, most notably in the Catholic school system. There are 11,021 Catholic elementary and high schools in the U.S., 539 fewer than in 1971. Enrollment in Catholic schools is 4.5 million, down 7.4 per cent since 1971, and 22 per cent since 1962.

In 1944, lay teachers in Catholic schools numbered 7,633, or 8.25 per cent of the total. Today, there are more than 104,000 lay teachers, and they comprise 55 per cent of all teachers in Catholic schools.

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Teacher of the Year

President Nixon's daughter, Mrs. Julie Eisenhower, presents the 1972 "Teacher of the Year" award to James (Jay) M. Rogers, Jr., of Durham, N.C., at a White House ceremony. Rogers, 31, is the first black teacher to be honored in the 21-year history of the national Teacher of the Year program. The educator, who teaches history at Durham High School, is a member of Mount Vernon Baptist church in Durham. He sings in the choir and is counselor to a youth group in the congregation affiliated with three Baptist denominations.

Another downward trend is in the number of priests. In 1971, the directory listed 58,161 priests in the U.S. This year, it lists 57,421, a drop of 1.3 per cent from a year ago, but a climb of 3.3 per cent from a decade ago. Also there are 416 fewer Brothers and 6,731 fewer Sisters than last year.

In 1965, there were 596 seminaries and novitiates with 48,992 seminarians. In 1972, there are 432 and 22,963 respectively. This represents a loss of 44.2 per cent of U.S. seminaries and novitiates, and 53.1 per cent of the students there.

The number of new Catholics

also has fallen. There were 33,530 more infant baptisms in 1970 than in 1971, and 5,522 more converts, for a total decline of 313 per cent. In 1964 there were 297,000 more infant baptisms, and 49,000 more converts, for a total drop of 23.4 per cent for the decade.

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