

FR. HENRY ATWELL

## Toward Tomorrow



"The best Protestant is one who becomes a Catholic." That pretty well summarizes the way Catholics thought in the pre-Pope John era.

Then came the thaw between Catholics and other Christians:

Pope John gave the best seats at the Vatican Council to the Protestant scholars he invited to attend it.

Pope Paul went to Jerusalem where he embraced the Greek Patriarch, the first event of its kind in over 1,000 years. He then welcomed the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury to Rome and gave him a symbolic seat next to him, something he doesn't do even for Roman Catholic archbishops. Later Pope Paul went to Geneva, Switzerland, on a less publicized but even more significant journey, to visit the headquarters of the World Council of Churches.

The Pope's trip to Geneva was a complete turn-about to cancel out a Vatican directive of 1954 which said Catholics "may not in any capacity attend the assemblies or councils of non-Catholics seeking to promote unity of the Church."

Many Catholics who plunged into the ecumenical waters after Vatican II have since retreated back to an all-Catholic territory. As a matter of fact even Protestants are ecumenically quite sluggish these days.

The Consultation on Church Union, an attempt to merge nine major American churches, seems at the moment to be going nowhere. After lengthy and deep study of the problem of disunity, the Consultation experts produced a plan of union. The United Church of Christ promptly reported it didn't like the plan. The United Methodist Church, another participant, said it had "reservations" about the plan. So did the Black denominations. And then

the United Presbyterian Church simply pulled out of the whole endeavor.

The chief ecumenical organization in this country is the National Council of Churches of Christ in America, with 33 churches enrolled as members. A two-year study group of high-level experts from both the U.S. Catholic Church and the National Council of Churches concluded there is a "close parallelism" between the two and that the Catholic Church might very well join the National Council, thereby doubling its present membership.

And if Catholics joined the National Council, many fundamentalist Protestant churches might join too. These churches have been wary of the social activism of its present members and the tendency to blur doctrinal differences.

The most important point about Catholic membership in the Council, as in all ecumenical activity, is that the Catholic Church is fundamentally committed to Christian unity.

Unity, oneness, has always been an intrinsic mark of the Church according to Catholic creeds and teachings.

Protestants, of course, owe their existence to a conviction that some things are more important than unity.

An article by Tracy Early in a recent issue of the Atonement Friars' Lamp magazine, reminds Catholics that the quest for Christian unity "stands on a theological basis." He cautions them not to abandon the ecumenical ship "even when it sails through rough waters."

He says, and I certainly agree, that a strong Catholic presence in the ecumenical movement "can give courage to all the rest who believe we Christians can still all be one."

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

## On The Right Side



Politicians are pondering the Aug. 20 magazine section of the New York Times which has a lengthy article entitled: "Right to Life Has a Message for N.Y. State Senators." The author, Fred Shapiro, states that his own wife has had a legalized abortion, and I expected this would be another abortion promotion. Yet Mr. Shapiro's article was objective: about the work of Right to Life groups which caused the State Legislature to repeal its abortion bill, which was vetoed by Gov. Rockefeller.

During a recent hospitalization I watched many "talk shows." Not one was specifically about abortion, but abortion advocacy popped up incidentally and frequently. For example, there was a panel from NYC on homosexuality and lesbianism. The most aggressive panelist was a lesbian, about 25, intelligent, educated, earnest — and articulate. Abortion was not part of the program but the women frequently interjected it in the context of freedom and Women's Liberation. She strongly urged political action to achieve her concept of liberty, which includes sexual aberrations, restructuring of marriage, and of course, abortion.

Proabortion infiltrates a multitude of "talk shows," including Johnny Carson, Merv Griffin and above all, David Suskind. All abortionists sing the same song: "Freedom for a woman to destroy her fetus." Practically all soft-pedal the helplessness of the child within the womb. The voice of the Pro Life people is rarely heard. Do you remember any "talk show" which even incidentally spoke in behalf of the unborn children? When Our Lord said "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." He was lamenting the apathy and ineptness of good people.

However the Times article unfolds what is coming to be realized: that there are aggressive, effective groups of Right to Life people who are engaged in a mighty political struggle in behalf of the babies in the womb. These determined people meet with legislators and politicians on their one, all-consuming issue: "Will you support legislation in behalf of unborn children; or will you vote for their destruction? On your answer depends our

struggle for you or against you." It's as blunt and clear as that.

Shapiro gives the logic of this ultimatum in the words of Ed Golden, a leader near Albany. "To our way of thinking, any legislator who doesn't support human life and protect it at all stages is unfit to sit as a representative, and we look for a man to replace him. It doesn't matter to us whether he is a Democrat, Republican or Independent, or how he voted on any other issue."

Executive VP of Planned Parenthood, Alfred Moran said: "The Right to Lifers changed the ball game . . . They brought it down to a question of political survival, telling each man, 'If you don't stand with us on the abortion law, we'll have your scalp'."

Shapiro observes: "Interestingly enough, now that the legislature has reversed itself, it is the proabortionists who have begun looking for scalps — and attempting to preserve legislators who opposed repeal . . . There seems to be this fundamental difference in tactics between the two factions: the anti abortionists send campaign workers and canvassers; the pro-abortionists send money . . . Right to Life is expected to have to battle a revitalized and more militant movement in the next session of the Legislature."

Is the R. to L. non-denominational? Shapiro writes: "Not all who early opposed abortion were Roman Catholics. In addition to Rabbi Hollander and several other Orthodox spokesmen, the movement picket up substantial support when Bruce Duncan, an Episcopalian, formed Citizens Concerned for the Unborn, the first (and still one of the largest) of 10 antiabortion organizations in Long Island. Of the stunning passage of the N.Y. abortion bill Golden said: "That's when we realized we'd been steamrollered. The people in favor of abortion had done their work in the corridors of the Legislature, and we hadn't. Now we knew we'd have to roll up our sleeves and really become political."

Politicians may well ponder the fact that there are determined and dedicated Right To Lifer voters all around them who just want to know: "How will you vote: for the life of the unborn, or for their death? Answer us clearly."

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