

FR. HENRY ATWELL  
**Toward  
Tomorrow**



Earlier this month I attended the meeting of the National Council of the Churches of Christ at Dallas, Texas.

The council is the coordinating agency for 33 Protestant and Orthodox churches of the United States. Organized in 1950, the council actually dates back in one form or another to the 1920's when the ecumenical idea began to develop.

At this year's meeting there were about 50 Roman Catholics present, including three bishops.

The Catholic presence was evidence of a rapidly growing spirit of fraternity between Catholics and other Christians.

Bishop Charles H. Helmsing, who is chairman of the U.S. Catholic bishops' Commission on Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, told the Catholics attending the Dallas meeting that the Catholic Church may become a member of the National Council of Churches if conversations already underway prove fruitful.

The obvious advantage in membership would be a possible unified voice for the Christian conscience in America, rather than the present fragmented and sometimes contradictory voice as at present.

There are also disadvantages. The American Catholic Church has a membership just about equal to the total membership of the present 33 denomination in the NCCC, and Catholic membership might easily smother the rest. And there are very definitely some issues where Catholics are still quite at odds with the moral and ethical convictions of the present members of the NCCC, as, for example, on the question of birth control, government funds for parochial schools and ordination of women.

Many Catholics, however, feel that these few areas of disagreement should not stand in the way of mutual concerns and agreements on other subjects.

These "other subjects," as a matter of fact, were the theme of this year's

meeting — "The Demands of the Gospel in a World of Conflict." These demands include: (1) Justice, liberation and human fulfillment, (2) Evangelism and renewal, (3) The stewardship of creation and the quality of life.

Lengthy consideration was given to these three demands through documentary films, noted speakers and group discussion and strategy workshops.

Best known of the speakers was anthropologist Margaret Mead who said the world faces famines and plagues, including oxygen crises in major cities, within the next decade as "warning signs" of environmental disaster. She insisted that this is not "alarmist" rhetoric but hard realism. To avoid the impending disaster, she said, "we have to mobilize the necessary will in the world to take advantage of the ecological crisis to build a better world."

She said the churches have preached for centuries that Christians must "feed the hungry and care for the sick" but today we have millions of people literally starving to death and vast areas of the world filled with disease.

Now because we face "a shared danger" in environmental calamity we are forced to deal with these problems on a worldwide level instead of merely continuing "business as usual."

Other speakers, especially Bishop Patrick Flores, said exploitation of people and resources in Latin America, Africa and Asia by American industries and corporations, is rapidly widening the gap between the "have" and "have not" nations.

All speakers stressed the fact that churches cannot face up to their moral responsibilities in these critical and complex affairs by acting alone. All churches need the strength that comes only from solidarity.

Bishop Helmsing, in his talk to the Catholics at the NCCC meeting, reminded them that Pope Paul and the world's Catholic bishops had also stressed this need for ecumenical collaboration, describing it as "the work of the Holy Spirit" in our times.

About a year ago I stopped for a bed at St. Margaret Mary's rectory in Rochester. A delightful teen-age girl who was answering the phone and the door bell until 9 p.m. let me in. I introduced myself. She beamed with a happiness I find in few teen-agers: "Of course I know you. Recognize you from your picture in the Courier. I read your column every week." Then she said: "Why don't you ever write about teen-agers?" Here is an answer, in Irish, for the Irish answer by asking another:

Dear Sue,

You may not remember, but when we met last year you asked: "Why don't you ever write about teen-agers?" I replied that it never occurred to me that teen-agers would read such a column." You replied: "Oh, yes. Lots of the kids I know do. But why don't you ever write about US?"

For a year I've been mulling over your question and always come back to the same answer: "I think I don't know enough about what make teen-agers tick to be able to express more than a shaky opinion."

Today I received a letter from a friend I knew in the Air Force almost 30 years ago. Then he was about 22 years old, a pilot and a pilot instructor at our Napier Field Advanced Flying School in Dothan, Ala. After WW II he left the service, went on to college but found it dissatisfying. He took up carpentry and building and loved the work. He married a fine girl and has had a happy family life. I have not seen him since 1944 but he writes two or three times a year. Today's letter reads:

"The wife and I are still rocking along together. Each year really is a blessing. We have five teen-agers at home, and it's a rather difficult time for

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY  
**On The  
Right Side**



us parents. But I feel it is more difficult for them.

"As you know, the Church has gone 'liberal' in Oklahoma; and two of our oldest have kicked Mass, confession and the whole bit. It appears it will not be long for the others—once they leave home. It appears to be all over as far as their religion is concerned.

"I am not criticizing the Church. I will also be held responsible. However, the wife and I feel we have accepted and made an honest effort in our many areas of total responsibilities. One can do only so much, as you well know . . ."

Now, Sue, I ask you — and any other teen-agers who will write to me — to answer the question which applies to you. 1. Why do you find the Church and the Mass a joy and a support? or 2. Why do you find the Church and the Mass a dissatisfaction?

I am ready for instruction from anyone who has reasonable answers, whether he is Our Holy Father, Merv Griffin, Joe Doakes high on drugs, or a happy or a disgruntled teen-ager.

Of one thing I am sure. There are thousands of Courier-Journal readers who are parents of teen-agers. And most of them are completely mystified by their progeny. Add to these, teachers, grandparents, neighbors, old pastors and younger curates, and you have a galaxy of souls who really are devoted to the young, but also puzzled. Some are puzzled to the point of helplessness.

Frankly I am mystified by the seeming dourness and cheerlessness of so many teenagers. You are not such a one; but it may be because you come from such a cheerful, generous and happy family. Anyway, will you answer the question — without just asking another?

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