

# Abortion Threatens Churches' Unity

In the wake of the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down restrictive abortion laws in 46 states, pro-life forces have

## A News Analysis

launched a counter-thrust aimed at amending the U.S. Constitution and establishing legal protection for the unborn.

At a time when the latest Gallup Poll shows 46 per cent of Americans favor legalized abortions, 45 per cent oppose, and 9 per cent are undecided, the Supreme Court ruling has placed the abortion question in sharp perspective.

For those favoring liberalized abortion, the next step is the further easing of restrictions by law or the abrogation of all legal sanctions against abortion, making it simply a medical question.

For anti-abortion advocates, future actions seem equally clear-cut — a constitutional amendment.

Thomas Dillon, chairman of the N.Y. State Right to Life legal committee, said the amendment proposal is "the only route we can now follow with any degree of feasibility." In line with that, his organization has begun distributing nationwide a "petition for redress of grievances" aimed at an amendment.

The controversy has already

surfaced in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Rep. Lawrence J. Hogan has drafted and proposed such an amendment designed to overturn the high Court's decision. In that proposal, Rep. Hogan calls for protection of life from the moment of conception.

At the same time, Rep. Bella Abzug told a conference called by the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws that she will work to get a bill passed that would go further than the recent Supreme Court rulings.

Most pro-abortion advocates have pinpointed the Roman Catholic Church as their chief opposition in the abortion fight yet to come — and it can be safely said this issue has done more to unite all wings of Catholic thinking than any other in memory.

Yet, most right-to-life groups operating around the country — and by all reports their number is rapidly growing — vehemently deny that the Catholic Church has the paramount role to play in the forthcoming fray.

The Rev. Lester Messerschmidt, pastor of St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Dix Hills, N.Y., and chairman of the Interfaith Committee of N.Y. State Right to Life, said he was thankful that the Catholic Church is strongly opposed to abortion. But he add-

ed "people of all religions" are opposed to abortion — Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Jew.

Similarly, the Rev. Samuel Jeanes, pastor of First Baptist church, Merchantville, N.J., and chairman of the N.J. Right to Life Committee, took the view that the Supreme Court decision simply reflects a general "disrespect for life which is already too evident in America."

Metropolitan Ireney, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, has called on President Nixon to initiate constitutional procedures to reverse the high Court's ruling. He charged that the decision "clearly violates the Divine Law revealed to us, in the Holy Scriptures and in the Holy Tradition of our Church."

Mormon leaders in Salt Lake City warned that members of their church who are a party "to the sin of abortion must be subjected to disciplinary action of the councils of the Church."

Condemnation of the Supreme Court decision, however, has not been universal among either Jewish or Protestant church leaders.

While the various branches of American Judaism are split on the question of abortion, Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, said that Orthodox Jews "must accept that (court) decision, even if we disagree with its wisdom."

As religious leaders, he added, "we must continue to teach the moral imperatives and the religious dictates which frown upon taking the life of a fetus even during this early period."

A leader of Reform Judaism, Rabbi Balfour Brickner, defended the Supreme Court decision.

Describing as "divisive and ungracious" the condemnations of the court ruling, the rabbi suggested that "the Catholic Church and other critics might better serve the welfare of society by urging acceptance of this new law and compliance with the orderly processes of the country."

Two United Methodist groups, the Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division, welcomed the Supreme Court decision on abortion.

In a joint statement, leaders of the two Methodist agencies said they did not want abortion to become a "method of family planning," but added that the law has no business "to force women who are experiencing unacceptable pregnancies into undesired childbearing."

In the past, the American Baptists, the United Presbyterian Church and the United Church



of Christ have taken stands favoring the repeal of legal sanctions against abortion.

Catholic Church leadership, labeled by most pro-abortion groups as the leading anti-abortion force, has predictably denounced in strongest terms possible the high Court's ruling. Somewhat atypical of recent trends in the U.S. Catholic Church, there is little or no dissent to be found, favoring abortion, on any Church level.

Although every U.S. Catholic bishop has been critical of the Supreme Court's decision, the most vocal response to the Court ruling is coming mainly from among the laity of various religious persuasions.

In Washington, D.C., for instance, 31 legal advisers to the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) met to set up a subcommittee to draft a constitutional amendment that would, in

effect, outlaw easy abortion.

Some religious leaders have taken a more studied approach. Bishop Maurice Dingman of the Catholic Des Moines diocese in Iowa, conceding that "all seems lost" in the struggle to keep a strict abortion law in Iowa, said: "God must have a plan."

"What can we do...?" he asked. "We can form Christian communities within our pagan society, just as did the early Christians."

Thomas Dillon of New York's Right to Life Committee predicted that abortion will be an issue for every legislative office in the country "until the proposed amendment is passed."

Still unanswered is the question of how the abortion controversy will affect the ecumenical movement, which in recent years has lost much of its early momentum, generated during the early sixties.

## WCC Head Fears For Ecumenism

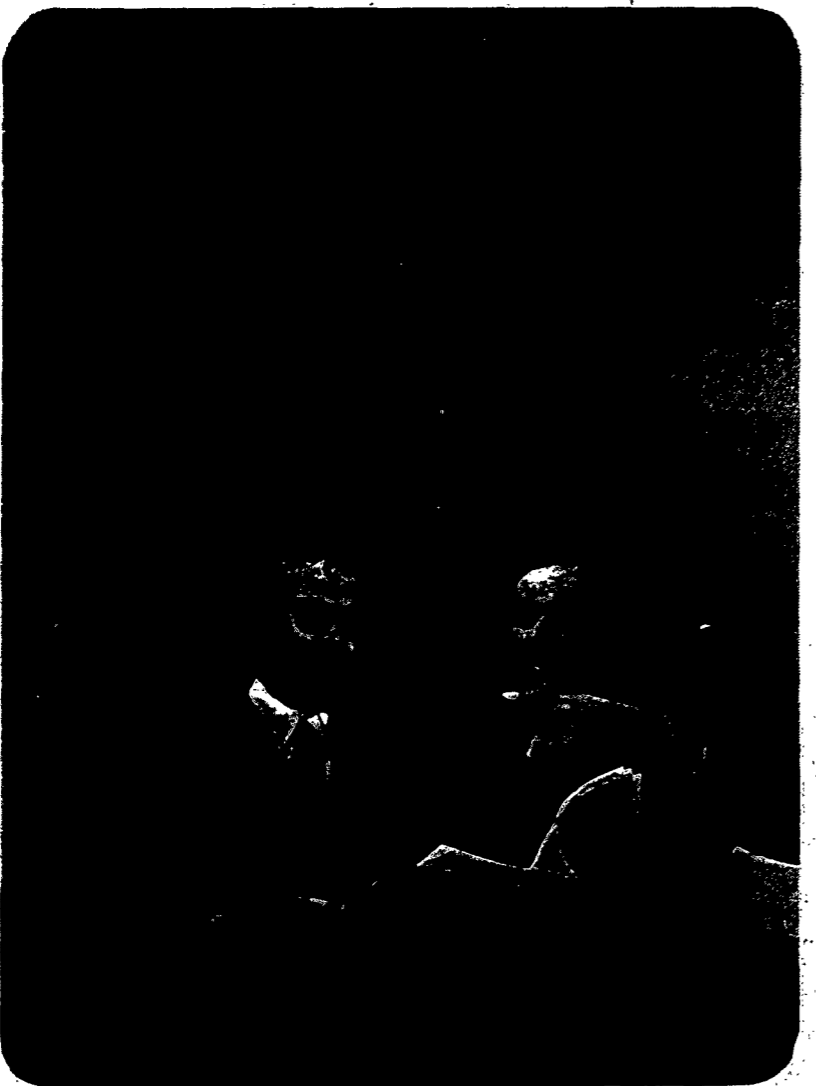
New York (RNS) — Debate over abortion could be "catastrophic" for the ecumenical movement "if we let it be," Dr. Cynthia Wedel, immediate past-president of the National Council of Churches, warned here.

Appearing with Dr. Wedel, a Jesuit theologian deplored the lack of full-scale ecumenical exchange of viewpoints on abortion.

Catholics should be wary of trying to enforce by law a position meeting with such deep opposition of thoughtful and conscientious people of other faiths, said Father Herbert W. Rogers, S.J., an assistant professor of theology at Fordham University.

"It may be that God called the modern ecumenical movement into being in order that the Churches might learn the skills everyone would need in a pluralistic society," Dr. Wedel said.

Ecumenical discussion of abortion, she added, should not be just an inter-Church matter, but one that makes certain women have full opportunity to speak.



## Plans For Eucharistic Congress

Melbourne (RNS) — Father Brian Walsh, director of the 10th International Eucharistic Congress, discusses plans for the Feb. 18-25 event with Dr. Michael Costigan, the Congress' publicity director. St. Patrick's Cathedral, scene of several of the Congress' events, is in the background. The Congress will draw thousands to Melbourne for Eucharistic celebrations, conferences and seminars, and a festival of arts.

Courier-Journal

## Cardinal-Designate Raimondi

### U.S. Catholics' 'Generosity' Lauded

Washington, D.C. (RNS) — Archbishop Luigi Raimondi, who has been the Vatican's representative in the U.S. for six years and was named a cardinal by Pope Paul on Feb. 2, will return to Rome soon — probably to take some high Curia post.

The 60-year-old prelate, who was Apostolic Delegate to Mexico for 11 years before coming to the U.S. in 1967, said he will leave the U.S. with a deep sense of loss.

"I have spent many happy years here," he told the press and expressed his admiration for the American people.

Citing the "openness and generosity" of Americans that is known "all over the world," he added: "I have experienced the deep faith of American Catholics."

Cardinal-designate Raimondi helped establish 12 new dioceses and three archdioceses in the U.

S. and ordained and installed a large number of archbishops — the last being Auxiliary Bishop Joseph L. Howze of Natchez-Jackson, Miss., the nation's second black bishop.

Cardinal-designate Raimondi, who is expected to leave his U.S. diplomatic post in late February, said the American Catholic Church needs no advice from him on his departure. He noted that Catholics in this country "know their way, are... reliable."

"My years in Washington have enabled me to admire the vigorous efforts being made to implement in a responsible way the changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council," he said. "I have witnessed the strength and vitality of Catholic organizations, the physical expansion of the Church."

"In these years," he continued, "the faithful have displayed an ever-growing awareness of the

Church, its liturgy, its ecumenical relations, its openness to the needs of men everywhere."

The cardinal said the Church in America is "a healthy, dynamic unity striving to face the challenges of our time."

Noting that his heart is "filled with gratitude" for the new honor of the cardinalate, he said although he was leaving the U.S., he would continue his "close spiritual ties" with the country throughout his life.

Cardinal Raimondi succeeded Cardinal Egidio Vagnozzi as Apostolic Delegate in Washington in 1967.

Until a new Apostolic Delegate to the U.S. is appointed, the delegation will be administered by Msgr. Paolo Giglio, a 46-year-old Maltese councillor who will serve as charge d'affaires. Msgr. Giglio is one of 10 priests — including four Americans — assigned to the delegation.