

# In Review: Religion in First Half of 1974

By Religion News Service

Religion in the first half of 1974 resembled a complicated tapestry woven with mostly familiar threads.

On the world scene, the search for peace, efforts to ward off massive starvation and stands against "repressive" governments were continuing themes.

American Churches, like the society at large, struggled with the implications of Watergate and soaring inflation.

Evangelism was a big issue. The future of the missionary movement was much discussed, particularly after the All Africa Conference of Churches in May called for a moratorium on Western missions personnel and funds.

The six months period was a time of changing religious leadership. Pope Paul removed Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty as primate of Hungary. Dr. Donald Coggan, the Archbishop of York, was named to succeed Dr. Michael Ramsey in November as Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the world Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church installed a new head, presiding Bishop John M. Allin. Services of six top U.S. National Council of Churches executives were terminated.

Lutheran and Catholic theologians in the U.S. reached new agreement on the papacy. Intense controversy continued within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. A new survey showed that as many as half of the American people are "unchurched," and early 1974 was the time of *The Exorcist*, a motion picture on demon-possession.

Hope that peace may finally come to the Middle East was raised as Syria and Israel, following the example of an Israeli-Egyptian accord, agreed to troop pullbacks. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was highly praised in religious circles for his central role in the negotiations.

But despite the agreements, such incidents as the massacre of Israeli youths by Arab terrorists at Maalot and Israel's bombing of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were reminders that a Middle East peace has not been fully achieved.

Northern Ireland remained in turmoil, with direct British rule imposed in May when a Protestant-Catholic coalition in Belfast collapsed.

The fall of the dictatorship in Portugal introduced the possibility of independence for African colonies controlled from Lisbon. Father Adrian Hastings, an English priest, continued to allege atrocities by Portuguese troops in Mozambique, a colony where a war of liberation goes on.

Tensions between Muslims and Christians figured in the internal problems of Ethiopia. Christians — Catholic and Protestant — calling for restoration of democracy felt the wrath of military regimes in South Korea, the Philippines, Chile and Brazil.

The exiling of novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn from the Soviet Union dramatized the plight of religious and social dissenters in Communist states. The right of Soviet Jews to emigrate became embroiled in detente between the U.S. and the Kremlin.

Extreme drought and famine in six West African nations and in parts of India served as frightening commentaries on world food shortages. Religious concern for the hungry escalated as United Nations officials reported that 12 nations are on the verge of bankruptcy and that current food stockpiles would last hardly a month.

The U.S. and Canada were looked to as the nations most equipped because of land space and technology to increase food production. As the need for food increases, relief supplies have decreased. American religious relief agencies were unable in early 1974 to obtain as many commodities through the federal Food for Peace program as in former years.

In calling for church action on world hunger, a conference of 125 American religious leaders in June said that in addition to emergency relief there must be work toward "creation of global structures which will ensure basic dignity and humane existence for all people."

Public morality in the wake of Watergate preoccupied many U.S. religious leaders in the first six months of 1974. Evangelist Billy Graham was among the prominent clergymen offended by the implied profanity in edited Presidential tapes.

Assessment of the spiritual and moral meaning of Watergate — including lessons to be learned — was a popular religious topic from January through July.

While total giving to all religious causes held steady, many Protestant denominations reported dwindling income for national and international programs. The 1974 United Presbyterian General Assembly was stunned to learn that the Church's unrestricted reserves are depleted and a 1975 budget must be cut from \$32 million to \$26 million.

Membership in the so-called "mainline" Protestant Churches continued to drop, while conservative and evangelical groups picked up members. The Catholic Church reported a 1973 gain of 5,011 persons. An ecumenical study, launched by the Glenmary Research Center, indicated that half of the American people are "unchurched." The study was based on 1971 figures.

Discussion of evangelism was bolstered by the planning for two international meetings, a predominantly Protestant Congress on World Evangelism set for July 16-25 in Lausanne, Switzerland and the International Synod of Catholic Bishops to be held in September in Rome. Evangelization of the Modern World is the topic for the synod.

Cardinal Bernard Jan Alfrink, the primate of Holland, summed up considerable sentiment when he said, "To Christianize must not be to Westernize." That conclusion was sounded loud and clear at the Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Lusaka.

The Protestant, Orthodox and Independent Church delegates to the assembly asked that Western groups stop sending missionaries and money to Africa. Earlier, six United Methodist bishops in Africa told their



An Israeli soldier embraces his beloved beside Jerusalem's Wailing Wall. Below, a view of the Watergate complex.



denomination that missionaries in the future must be accountable to the indigenous Churches.

Appeals to divorce evangelism and mission work from Western standards and life-styles took account of the growing spirit of independence among peoples in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Ecumenism had some high spots in early 1974. Dr. Gerald F. Moede, a United Methodist minister employed by the World Council of Churches, was named general secretary of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), an organization of nine American Protestant Churches exploring union.

A U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue group in March issued a statement affirming that the primacy of the Pope "renewed in the light of the Gospel, need not be a barrier to reconciliation" of their Churches, separate since the 16th century.

But there was no reconciliation in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, badly divided on interpretation of Scripture and administrative policies. The conflict resulted in the near collapse of the denomination's Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis. Most professors and students at the school walked out and formed their own seminary, Seminex.

Cardinal Mindszenty's removal as primate of Hungary was not universally approved. The action was criticized by Hungarian emigre groups and some U.S. Catholics, among others. The 81-year-old prelate lived in the U.S. Embassy in Budapest for 15 years as he tenaciously opposed the Communist regime in his country. He left Hungary in 1971. The cardinal was warmly welcomed by many American Catholics on a brief 1973 visit and a longer U.S. tour this year.

The Pope's decision on Cardinal Mindszenty was seen in some quarters as part of an effort to regularize the Vatican's relations with Hungary.

Claire Randall, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, announced that five top administrators were being terminated by the end of

the year to make way for a more "horizontal" and "open" style of operation. All of the persons affected were white clergymen over 61 years of age. Among them were Dr. David Hunter, deputy general secretary, and Dr. H. Leroy Brininger, chief financial official. Dr. Brininger strongly objected to Ms. Randall's use of the term "early retirement" to explain the terminations.

In a separate development, James MacCracken, head of Church World Service, the National Council's relief agency, was also dismissed. Personality clashes and ideological differences between Mr. MacCracken and other council officers were cited as reasons for the action.

*The Exorcist*, the movie version of William Peter Blatty's novel, became the most profitable film enterprise in U.S. history and stirred up more religious controversy than perhaps any film ever made. The view of demon-possession presented in *The Exorcist* was generally unacceptable to religious leaders.

Other developments in the first six months of the year were:

\*Pope Paul called on governments to consider granting amnesty to prisoners during the 1975 Holy Year.

\*Dr. Lawrence Bottoms, a Decatur (Ga.) pastor became the first black Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. (Southern).

\*Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr., mother of the late civil rights leader, was killed by a gunman as she played the organ in Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church.

\*A survey showed that the number of U.S. college and non-college young adults who think religion "very important" dropped radically between 1969 and 1973.

\*The religious campaign for "corporate responsibility" in the dealings of American business at home and abroad intensified.

\*Demands of women for more voice in religious affairs were strongly asserted at an international consultation in West Berlin.



A soldier guards a street in Belfast.