

Tried to Go Straight . . . Ends Up on Crime Again

[At a hearing on crime and correction in Albany this past spring, a former convict, identified only as Mel, submitted a statement on his difficulty in going straight after his release from prison because he couldn't find a job. Below is Mel's story.]

"When I got out of prison in 1962, I had a 'can opener' job, a phony offer from a cousin of mine that satisfied the parole board's requirement and let me out. I had intentions of getting a barber's license, because I'd been the institutional barber in the prison

and had a slip of paper that certified I'd spend 2,400 hours barbering. But when I applied at a barber shop, I had to start as a shine boy, even though I told the boss how much hair I'd cut, and showed him what I could do. He said he couldn't put me on a chair until I got a license. But the license never came. I got a note back saying the city couldn't give me one because of my record. The boss said to reapply and I did but the same thing happened again.

"Later I worked in a real estate

shop, but I couldn't get a salesman's license. A little later I found out that the guy working with me also was an excon, but he was using another man's broker's license and later got into a complicated mess. He told me he was submitting my application for a license and I could work as a salesman while we waited for it to come. So I did, and was renting apartments for about five months until I got wise and asked him what was going on. Eventually I found the application in his drawer; he hadn't even sent it in. He said 'I'll tell you the truth man, you can't get a license. I didn't want to tell you because I didn't want to hurt you, and I liked your potential.' That's when I found out he was an excon too.

"I stayed on there a while anyway and made a little money, but then I cut out. I was going to go to nursing school; my parole officer thought I'd be good at it. (He was the one parole officer who really helped me in seven years of parole.) He sent me to a nursing school. I asked about the course, and of course I had to tell them about my record. They said they were sorry, but they wouldn't be able to accept me.

"Then I went across the street and applied for a security job at King's County Hospital, and I again told the truth on the application. The guy came out and said he was sorry, but it was against city policy to hire me.

"Then I worked at Downstate Medical Center for a while and this time I didn't tell them anything. I got a job in their supply place, where I had to be bonded. But they ran a check on me and I got fired.

"Then I worked a year as an usher in a movie theater, and they had an opening for manager in the same theater, so I applied for it and the bonding sheet went out again, and I got fired, even though I'd worked there a year and they liked me.

"There was a construction job, too, but the man said I couldn't get into the union because of the record, so I worked 'off the books' and got paid in cash. But when my parole officer found out about it, he made me quit.

"I worked in a laundry, too, for a while, but some baby clothes got stolen and when the manager asked me if I had a record and I said yes, he fired me, even though I told him I wasn't married and couldn't have any use for the stuff.

"Then I worked in a car place, and one day I turned a car on that had been left in gear, and it crashed into another car. But

SVD Missioners Beatification Set

Conesus — Word has reached the Divine Word Seminary that two Divine Word missioners will be named Blessed by Pope Paul VI on Sunday, Oct. 19.

The missioners are Father Arnold Janssen, SVD, and Father Joseph Freinademetz, SVD.

Father Janssen founded the Society of the Divine Word and two congregations of nuns: the Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (the "Blue Nuns"); and the Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration (the "Pink Sisters").

Father Freinademetz was the first missioner of the group to be sent into the foreign missions.

The society, founded in 1875, also marks its centenary during this Holy Year and plans are being formulated to observe the three events at the seminary here.

A number of Rochester natives are missioners in the society which has establishments throughout the world. In the United States, Divine Word serves the poor, blacks, and the down-trodden, according to Father Paul H. Burrichter.

They Were Sorry But Couldn't Accept Me

they didn't fire me for that, they fired me because a bonding company said I had a record and I guess they figured I might steal a car, even though nothing was on my record about ever stealing a car.

"I had a lot of trouble getting a driver's license, but after three years I finally got one. I applied for a bus driver's job, and I got very good scores on all the tests. But the City of New York informed me it was exercising its rights to choose only one out of every three people who applied.

"I had a job driving a gypsy cab for a while, and it's a funny thing, I thought it was a parole violation to drive one of those cabs, because we all stopped to pick up people even though we weren't supposed to. So I never told my parole officer until I applied to

get off parole. He said it wasn't a violation to drive a gypsy cab, but it was a violation not to have told him about it. So I had to serve two more years of parole.

"One thing I'd always wanted to be was a singer, and I did cut a record. I even sang with a group for a while, but they had to let me go because I couldn't get a cabaret license to sing anywhere they sold alcoholic beverages.

"Eventually I gave up, and went back into crime. I'd spent about three years trying to go straight, and it just seemed it wasn't going to work. And in prison I'd learned how to graduate from snatching pocketbooks and mugging to armed robbery, living off women, selling stolen goods, and dealing in reefer and cocaine. So I started a second criminal career."

and lose her vision of future and sense of the tension between what already is and what must and will be.

This experience of tension between Church and society is a sign of life and health for the Church. The writers of the New Testament books wrote about hope at the same time that the young Church was experiencing antagonism and persecution. Today, too, many values professed by Christians are subtly or not so subtly undermined by our society. Even though social practices and legislation dull our sensitivity, we must work to alleviate the oppression of prisoners, the aged, the unborn and the mentally ill. We must also work to free ourselves from a cynical hopelessness about politics that excuses us from the pain of patient and persistent efforts to improve conditions.

A situation of tension and persecution is normal for the Church, but so, too, is a sense of hope and commitment to mission. Belief in the future promised us sustains Christians in working for a society which frees persons to grow toward that new creation. That work will be political work.



What does hope have to do with politics? What is hopeful about our involvement as Christians in contemporary society? The God Christians believe in calls us to be hopeful; he makes promises that cannot be ignored. These promises radically shape our attitudes toward politics as well as toward the more private aspects of our lives.

We are used to thinking about hope in terms of personal salvation, family cares, and individual projects. This limited type of hope is too private to be called Christian hope. We believe that redemption occurs on all levels of creation, that all human realities and structures are caught up in God's purpose. The writer of the letter to the Colossians speaks of this purpose and of Christ as the head of all creation:

As he is the Beginning, he was first to be born from the dead, so that he should be first in every way; because God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything on heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross.

Colossians 1:18-20

It is God's work to transform the world and it is certain, too, that this transformation will only be complete at the end time. But the work of new creation has been shared with men and women from the beginning; the creation stories in Genesis attest to our partnership with the Lord in building the earth.

If Christians are blessed with a revelation that redemption is sure, then this is not a secret insight to be clung to, but a mission to announce through word and work what God is doing in the world. Christianity must not succumb to the temptation to become a private cult, concerned with self-preservation and divorced from the so-called worldly realm. Neither must the Church become comfortably identified with social structures,

State Legislature Topples Ex-Convict Job Bans

A bill that would topple many barriers to employment of former convicts passed the state Assembly July 8, and having already passed the Senate, was sent to Gov. Carey for final approval.

The bill prohibits public and private employers from discriminating against persons convicted of crimes. Police and fire departments are excluded from the provisions of the bill.

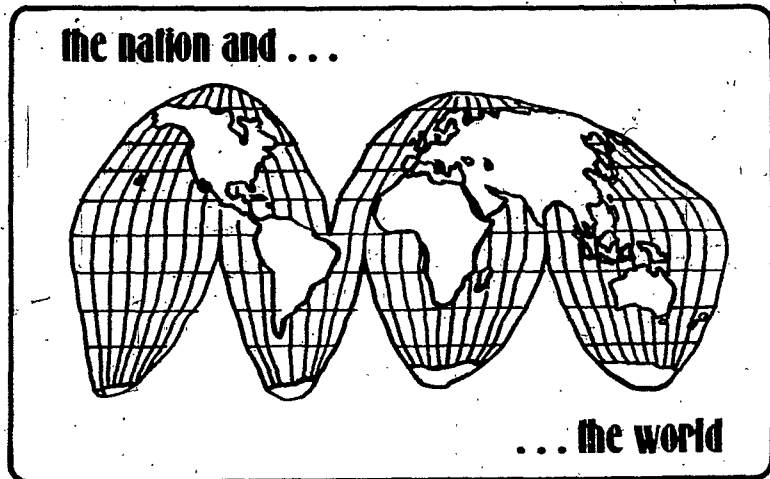
At present many state laws forbid former convicts from holding various positions from barber to Bingo operator to undertaker. Some positions which require state licensing also require a "moral character" test which in practice excludes former convicts. Civil service jobs can be legally denied to former convicts. Under the bill all these positions would be affected.

Similar legislation passed the state Senate in 1973 and 1974 but

did not pass the Assembly. During recent years at least 15 states (California, Illinois, New Jersey, Connecticut, Florida, Washington, Hawaii, Arkansas, Indiana, Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, Minnesota, Iowa and Kansas) have passed legislation preventing arbitrary, non-job-related job prohibitions against former convicts.

Several versions of the bill were introduced this year at the legislature and the concept of better employment for former convicts has drawn widespread backing from such groups as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the State Parole Officers Association, the Correctional Association of New York, the Fortune Society, law school professors and state officials.

Gov. Carey has vocally supported correction reform since his election, although his office gave no immediate indication whether he would sign the bill.



From Courier-Journal Services

U.S. Catholic bishops will meet in July and August at which time primary consideration will be given to projects of a constitutional amendment to reverse the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions on abortion. The meetings are expected to be informational and not intended to elicit statements or announcements. Cesar Chavez has begun a 1,000-mile march to explain the new California labor law to farm workers. Starting from San Ysidro, Calif., Chavez plans to go as far north as the state capital at Sacramento. "One Nation Under God" will be the theme of a continuous program in a structure to be erected in the President's Park between the White House and the Washington Monument as a special bicentennial presentation in the nation's capital.

Cardinal Leo-Joseph Suenens of Belgium told a press conference in London that he doesn't believe "Charismatic Renewal is a movement or an organization of people. It's a movement of the Spirit." He added, however, that the movement requires "guidance and discernment" and appealed to bishops and priests to take part. A German-born convert to Catholicism, who devoted part of his life to assisting the victims of Napoleonic wars and revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, was proclaimed blessed by Pope Paul July 6. Father Johan Heinrich Karl Streb who founded the Sisters of Mercy of Verona, Italy, died in 1856.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, by reason of its report on abortion last April, has become an instrument for "repression of civil rights—it was once designed to safeguard," said the Office of the General Counsel of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The report said the commission exhibited a "callous attitude for the rights of the unborn child and no consideration whatsoever is given to the rights of those who oppose abortion procedures because of conscience." A dialogue on abortion has been launched at a one-day conference of high level representatives from the Catholic and Jewish communities in New York City. Sponsored by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Synagogue Council of America, which represents all three branches of U.S. Judaism — Reform, Conservative and Orthodox — the talks "revealed important differences between the faith groups, but also provided common ground for further meetings and possible joint activities." Rabbi Henry Siegman and Msgr. James Rigney, rector of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, chaired the meeting. By a vote of 546 to 135, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ (UCC) has called for legislation supporting civil rights for homosexuals at the federal, state and local levels.

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