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1978 . . . the First Six Months

By RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

Social justice, human rights, intergroup conflict and terrorism posed many challenges to the Churches in the first half of 1978. The six months also saw both losses and gains for ecumenism.



Special

Schism hit the U.S. Episcopal Church. Dissidents objecting to the ordination of women and other changes organized a small breakaway denomination, the Anglican Church of North America.

But Methodists made some moves toward greater cooperation and possible unity. In the first such meeting in more than a century, bishops got together

in Atlanta from the United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Christian Methodist Episcopal Churches.

The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church voted against recommending the admission of avowed, practicing homosexuals to the ministry after debate that was carefully watched by other denominations faced with the issue.

Anita Bryant continued to galvanize public opinion in her campaign against civil rights legislation for homosexuals. She outdrew President Jimmy Carter at a session held in connection with the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta in mid-June, but an effort to have her elected to a high office in the denomination, to symbolize endorsement of her campaign, failed mostly because she hadn't been active in Convention affairs.

The issues of women's ordination and homosexuality also vexed the U.S. Catholic Church. Father John McNeill, SJ, outspoken dissenter from Church teaching that homosexual activity is sinful,



Protesters gather for a demonstration in Washington, D.C. marking the fifth anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision on abortion.



The body of former Italian Premier Aldo Moro is discovered in the back of a van in the heart of Rome.

was ordered silenced by the Holy See. A three-year study commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society concluded that there is no valid reason why women should not be ordained to the priesthood.

Reminder that the Catholic Church was holding firm to its traditional teachings came with symposia held in various cities marking the tenth anniversary of the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, in which Pope Paul VI upheld the ban against artificial birth control. The 80-year-old pontiff celebrated the 15th year of his reign in June.

Issues of social justice appeared to be intertwined with boycotting as a tactic.

Boycotts of states that have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) were hotly debated by religious groups, as were proposals that the U.S. Congress extend the ratification deadline beyond 1979.

A boycott of products manufactured by the J.P. Stevens Company was also endorsed by some religious groups. At issue was the textile firm's record of unfair labor practices. Another boycott was called off — of table grapes, iceberg lettuce and Gallo Wine. It had been in effect for four years and supported by several Churches. United Farm Workers Union President Cesar Chavez said the union had won contracts with 117 growers.

The first half of 1978 might also be seen, on net, as an advance in Christian-Jewish relations as the result of a couple of coincidental occurrences — a threatened march by American neo-Nazis in the predominantly Jewish community of Skokie, Ill., and the telecast of the NBC series *Holocaust* in April.

Overwhelming expressions of Christian solidarity with Jews resulted from the highly publicized legal battle of the tiny group of self-professed Nazis to march. The battle went to the U.S. Supreme Court where the right was upheld under freedom of speech guarantees. The Nazis decided not to march in Skokie, but to do it nearer to their home base in Chicago.

Concern over plans for the 1980 Passion Play at Oberammergau, West Germany, was renewed when a newly elected town council elected to revert to a script deemed by many to be anti-Semitic. But Christian and Jewish leaders cautiously welcomed an

High Court Asked: Reject '73 Decisions

Washington, D.C. (RNS) — The U.S. Catholic bishops have called on the Supreme Court to reverse its 1973 decisions legalizing abortions and to recognize that the Bill of Rights guarantees full "personhood" rights to the unborn.

submitted in the case of Beal vs. Franklin. The Pennsylvania case, involving a state law which requires a doctor performing an abortion to do what he can to save the life of a potentially viable fetus, will be heard by the Supreme Court in the fall.

In a friend of the court brief filed by the United States Catholic Conference, the national level action agency of the bishops, the USCC argued that the court's definition of life as expressed in the 1973 decisions is not in harmony with modern science.

The court notified the USCC bishops on July 3 that their motion to participate in oral arguments in the case had been denied.

According to the USCC brief, the viability issue presented in the Beal case can only be understood as a product of the 1973 abortion cases.

"The issues of life and death cannot be willed away by a determined court," the USCC said.

It held that the principal source of difficulty is that the

The plea by the bishops was made in an amicus curiae brief

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Photo by Terrance J. Brennan

Consejo President

Maria Sanchez smiles after being reinstated as Consejo president at ceremonies at St. Francis of Assisi Church last Sunday. Other members of the Executive Committee include Carlos Vagas, vice-president; Maria Ramos, secretary; Nemencio Martinez, vice-secretary; Eladio Hernandez, treasurer; Carmen Rosa, vice-treasurer.

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