

Pontiff Will 'Cut New Trails'

By FATHER ROBERT A. GRAHAM SJ
(RNS Correspondent)

Rome — In the Vatican they are just as curious and uncertain as anywhere else what the year 1979 will bring to the Roman Catholic Church under its first non-Italian pope in centuries.



Feature

Pope John Paul II, self-described in his first words to Romans as one "who comes from a far country," is capable of springing all kinds of surprises. Already, a relaxed style — inaugurated by his short-lived predecessor Pope John Paul I — points to a pontificate ready and able to break with traditions and cut new trails.

In the first few weeks the Polish pope did not give any clear signals. Associates in his former archdiocese, Cracow, recount that as archbishop he was slow to reach a decision but remained firm in his course once he made up his mind.

It is a fact that routine Church affairs have slowed down because of Pope John Paul's desire to familiarize himself with the problems. It is reported that certain important decisions affecting internal Church discipline are still on his desk awaiting his signature. Will he sign these papers soon or send them back for revision, thus indicating a new papal policy? This is what the heads of the papal congregations would like to know right this minute.

The final months of the year were not entirely lacking in suggestive confrontations. One of these was the audience the pope accorded to the rebellious and still unrepentant retired French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, founder of an anti-Vatican II movement with a seminary at Econe in Switzerland.

The pope clearly did not want this meeting to signify anything more than a willingness to hear the suspended prelate's side of the story, in person. What happened we don't really know. But just before Christmas the head-strong rebel churchman illicitly ordained six more students to the priesthood at his outlaw seminary.

Archbishop Lefebvre told the press he hoped the Holy See would not misinterpret his action. But what does he expect with such continued insouciance? Where will these six poor orphaned new priests exercise their sacerdotal ministry — unless to staff the growing network of small communities in France, Germany, and the USA without a bishop to link them to the center of eyes? Eyes are on John Paul II to see how he handles this flagrant and dangerous threat to church unity.

Another tip-off to the course of the pontificate of the end of the millennium (perhaps), was the incident of the censorship by Polish Communist authorities of a papal Christmas message to the people of Cracow, which touched on the coming celebrations of the 900th anniversary of the death of St. Stanislaus, bishop and martyr, and Poland's patron.

Pope John Paul's allusions to the martyrdom of his

illustrious predecessor in the see of Cracow bore too close an analogy to the present situation to please the Communist chiefs. They snipped the offending portions of the papal message out of the printer's galleys prepared by the Cracow Catholic weekly, Tygodnik Powszechny.

The pontiff could easily have foreseen this nervous reaction on the part of the state authorities, but he went ahead anyway: he seems to be in no mood to stay his hand, to withhold a word, when a word is indicated.

This pleases those persons in Western Europe who never liked the ostpolitik of Pope Paul VI. The weekly Rheinische Merkur of Cologne, for instance, through its chief editor, welcomed the accession to the See of Peter of a man who knew communism at first hand.

The Italians, said the editor, were badly disoriented by their experience with Mussolini and Fascism. They — and probably Mussolini, too — never took seriously the claims of Italian Fascism. The result is that the Vatican leaders, including Pope Paul VI, thought they could negotiate with the Communists. At last, said the Rheinische Merkur, we have a pope who knows that, for the Communists, there is no separating theory and practice.

In the year 2000, how will it be? That is what the experts are wondering.

The theme of collegiality, how far will it fare under the new pope? The pontiff insisted from the start he believes in collegiality, that is, he intends to rule the Church with the bishops. He may enhance the role of the Synod of Bishops to this end. But the new pope is turning the idea of collegiality around by calling upon the bishops themselves to take their own responsibilities more seriously.

As is known, the attraction of collegiality at Vatican II was that it appeared as a move away from Roman centralization. To this extent, it received the enthusiastic hosannas of many publicists. But who dares to say now that national episcopal conferences will be any more open than a Roman Congregation? In Germany, today, complaints are raised against the bishops there for being harder on non-conformists than Pope Paul ever was. Gone are the days when local bishops found it convenient to unload on the pope the responsibility of hard decisions really theirs to make.

The assembly of Latin American bishops at Puebla, Mexico, will be the acid test of the new collegiality as understood by the pope. The assembly was called under his authority. He can hardly fail to make his influence felt, if only by his presence. But the decisions, up to now certainly, have been made by the Latin American bishops themselves. Pope John Paul will let them, in the name of collegiality, take the course, in the main, that their own good judgment suggests. This, notwithstanding the bitter complaints of critics that some Latin American bishops seek to "turn the clock back" from the famous program of Medellin of ten years ago.

It will be a supreme irony if these critics, once enthusiastic collegialists, appeal the decisions of the bishops to the pope. This may be among the surprises of the new pontificate.

Father D. Berrigan Set Here

Father Daniel Berrigan, SJ, will speak on Prayer and Peacemaking at the Catholic Worker house, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, on Friday, Jan. 12, at 7:30 p.m. The event is sponsored by the Peace and Justice Education Center and by the Catholic Worker.

Father Berrigan is nationally known for his advocacy of peacemaking as a Gospel imperative.

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Collins Historical Data Given to St. Bernard's

Files relating to Church life in this diocese have been given to the library at St. Bernard's Seminary as the Harold James Collins Historical Collections. The donors are Mr. Collins's widow, the former Lucia Guidici; two daughters, Mrs. Barbara Lippa and Miss Dorothy Collins; two sisters, Mrs. Joseph Poole and Mrs. Rudolph Streb, and a brother, Kenneth Collins.

Accepting the gift at Sunday Vespers Dec. 17, the Rev. Jasper Pennington, library director, remarked that Mr. Collins had "combined a rare gift for systematic collecting with obvious devotion to the work of his parish and the diocese."

Mr. Collins was a lifelong member of Immaculate Conception Parish. He was a member of the Holy Name Society and the Knights of St. John. He retired in 1968 from Bausch & Lomb, and died in 1976.

Books Reviewed

Reviews of books by W. A. Swanberg, prize-winning biographer, will be presented by Mrs. Dorothea Hunter at a Winter Luncheon sponsored by the Business Women's Group of the Catholic Women's Club on Saturday, Jan. 13 at noon. The event will be held at the Century Club. Reservations may be made by calling the club offices between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. on weekdays, 275-9173.

Tutors Sought

Baden Street Settlement needs people to work with children 6 to 12 years old in the second semester of a tutoring program, Jan. 15-April 19. The volunteer meets with one child twice a week, at the settlement house, or elsewhere. An orientation program will be offered at the start of the program. Details may be obtained from Paulette Kyle at 325-4910, Monday through Friday, 9-5.

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