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The biggest newsmaker in the world of religion for the first six months of 1979 was easily Pope John Paul II. Above left, he makes friends with a youngster during a Jan. 29 visit to Cullapam, an Indian village near Oaxaca, Mexico. In center, he meets with Edward Gierak, first secretary of the ruling Communist Polish

United Workers party, the highest ranking official in Poland. At right, the pontiff signs his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*. With him is Msgr. Giuseppe Caprio, Vatican deputy secretary of state. (RNS)

# Pope Highlights the First Six Months

By Religious News Service

Pope John Paul II's historic trips to Mexico and Poland and his strong statements on behalf of religious liberty captured the attention of the world in the first half of 1979—a period that was fraught with violence abroad and church-state conflicts in the United States.



Changes of government in Iran and Zimbabwe Rhodesia brought new problems, while the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua appeared on the verge of toppling the Somoza regime. The signing of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was followed by new Mideast tensions, and the growing numbers of refugees from Southeast Asia posed a moral issue for the rest of the

world.

Energy shortages and the dangers of nuclear power highlighted by the Three Mile Island incident challenged Churches in the United States, while they continued to grapple with such long-standing questions as capital punishment, economic boycotts, and homosexuality.

While the world of religion confronted these problems, the pope emerged as a figure who has won the respect of the world.

In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (Redeemer of Man), Pope John Paul II called for widespread recognition of human rights, denounced the arms race and economic exploitation, and called for a more just distribution of the world's wealth.

At the same time, he maintained a conservative stance on theological questions and traditional Catholic doctrines.

On his trip to Mexico in late January, in connection with the third Conference of Bishops of Latin America, the pope declared that Christ was not a political figure. But he also stressed the need for social reform and an easing of the plight of the poor.

While some commentators were confused about the main points of the pope's statements in Mexico, there was no question about his stance on church-state relationships in Poland. On his visit to his homeland in June, he stressed that religious liberty is a fundamental human right, and held that no dialogue can take place until government authorities respect the convictions of believers.

Jewish leaders from around the world spoke favorably of the pope after meeting with him in the Vatican in early March, and were also gratified with his visit to the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz during his Polish trip. Another significant development in Christian-Jewish relations was the drafting of a set of proposed guidelines for joint worship by a

group of Protestant, Clergy and Reform rabbis in New York City.

The half year saw a series of ecumenical developments. Documents outlining a common understanding of the rite of baptism were issued by Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians who took part in a World Council of Churches consultation in Louisville, Ky. At its meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, in January, the WCC Central Committee announced that in the future, greater consultation will be taken with member Churches before antiracism grants are approved.



Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, President Jimmy Carter and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin clasp hands after signing the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel March 26 in Washington. (RNS)

A WCC report issued in May asserted that the human rights situation in South Korea had worsened in the past year. Shortly after, the government of that country released 16 students and opposition figures who had been under detention.

Two major changes of government drew the attention of religious groups in the first half of the year. The fall of the monarchy of the Shah of Iran and its replacement by a Muslim theocracy was followed by a series of executions by followers of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. United Methodist Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa was elected as the first black prime minister of Zimbabwe Rhodesia, but reactions were mixed, even in his own Church, since the Patriotic Front guerrilla movement continued to fight the government.

The overthrow of Idi Amin's dictatorship in Uganda was hailed by Christians around the world. Anglican Bishop Festo Kivengere returned to a hero's welcome after two years in exile, but the Amin regime was replaced by a government that lasted little more than a month before it too had succeeded. Civil strife continued in the country.

Israel and Egypt signed a treaty at the end of March which put the two countries in a state of peace for the first time since Israel's founding in 1948. But Israel's expansion of settlements in the West Bank and shutting down of the Arab Bir Zeit University led to

criticisms from some Christian leaders and some Jews as well.

Roman Catholic officials in Nicaragua openly supported the Sandinista rebels in their efforts to overthrow the government of Anastasio Somoza. The Catholic archdiocese of San Salvador excommunicated government troops responsible for the killing of a Catholic priest and four youths there in January.

Amnesty International reported in June that 2,665 people have disappeared in Argentina since 1976, when a military coup brought Gen. Jorge Rafael Videla to power. A United Church of Christ missionary, the Rev. Lloyd G. Van Vactor, was kidnapped by Muslim guerrillas in the Philippines and held for 18 days. No ransom payment was made.

The problem of dealing with refugees from Southeast Asia increased as thousands of people sought shelter after floating aimlessly in the South China seas. Religious groups in the U.S. and other countries pledged to increase efforts to find homes and jobs for the refugees.

An unprecedented ecclesiastical summit, held in Geneva in late March, produced a joint statement on disarmament by leading church representatives of the United States and the Soviet Union. Most Christian leaders in the U.S. endorsed the SALT II treaty while expressing disappointment that it did not go further toward ending the arms race.

Other issues that drew the attention of religious groups in the U.S. included capital punishment, particularly after the execution of John Spenkeliuk in Florida, preservation of the family farm, and boycotts of the products of J.P. Stevens Company, Nestle's, and states that have not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruling in late June that private employers' affirmative action programs do not violate the 1964 Civil Rights Act dramatized the continuing challenge of rights of minorities and women.

Homosexuality continued to challenge the Churches in the first half of the year. The Women's Division of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries fired a staff member who publicly avowed she was homosexual. A standing commission of the Episcopal Church prepared a report for its triennial General Convention in September urging that homosexuality not be made an absolute barrier to ordination. And a proposed position paper on human sexuality being circulated in the American Lutheran Church said that people who are oriented toward homosexuality but do not practice it are not violating Christian behavior.

In a 5-4 decision in March, the high Court ruled that the National Labor Relations Board has no jurisdiction in labor disputes involving teachers in church-related schools. The case represented a victory for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago and the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Ind.