

# One Easter This Year

By Religious News Service

Because various ecclesiastical calendars that were the subject of bitter controversy for centuries happen to coincide this year, Christians throughout the world will celebrate Easter on the same date, April 6.

Consequently, Protestants, Orthodox and Roman Catholics began the penitential, pre-Easter season of Lent in the same week. They did not all start on the same day, however.

For the Orthodox, Lent will be a little longer than for the rest of Christendom.

The Orthodox, who do not observe Ash Wednesday, began their solemn preparation for Easter the Monday before, on a day known in the Greek Orthodox Church as "Kethara Deftera," the Monday of Purification.

Easter in the Eastern churches is calculated in accord with the Julian calendar and in the Western churches on the basis of the Gregorian calendar. Regardless of the calendar used, however, since the First Council of Nicaea in 325, Easter has always fallen on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox.

The concurrence of this most important celebration in all the Christian calendars, marking as it does the resurrection of Jesus, does happen from time to time. In the coming decade, the Easter of both East and West will fall on the same date in 1984 and in 1987.

The coincidence of 1980 prompted Archbishop Iakovos, leader of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, to say, "This year, all Christians have the opportunity to truly experience together a spiritually beautiful Easter celebration."

Controversy surrounded the determination of Easter in various Christian calendars from the second to the eighth centuries. In the second century, for example, the Asian practice of observing Easter on the day of the Jewish Passover conflicted with the Roman custom of celebrating it on Sunday.

In the fifth and sixth centuries, Irish monks used their Celtic calendar, which was different from everybody else's.

Because the Eastern churches, including the Greek Orthodox, still determined the date of Easter independently, the Roman Catholic bishops of the Second Vatican Council declared themselves in 1963 in favor of fixing a common date for Easter. The necessary agreement with other denominations has not yet been reached.

For the Eastern churches to take such a step, they would first need the approval of the Great Synod of Eastern Orthodoxy. Planning for the first such synod since the early days of the Church is under way but no date has been set.



## Robots from 2541 A.D.

Mrs. Arline Ely's fifth grade class at Corning Catholic School North had as an English assignment the job of writing a science fiction story set in the year 2541 that included a robot. And then the students had to build their robot. Above are three students and three of the robots. From left, the robots are "207," "Max," and "Smily." The students are Philip Miller, Victor Russo and Jennifer Kitson, who is Smily's designer.

# Church Groups Air Concerns About Prisons and Reforms

By Religious News Service

"It must be acknowledged that the penitentiary system in America is severe," wrote French philosopher/statesman Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 after a tour of the country.

"While society in the United States gives the example of the most extended liberty, the prisons of the same country offer the spectacle of the most complete despotism."

Like much of de Tocqueville's critique of the diverse early 19th century American culture, this particular paradox has grown keener over time.

Bishop Carroll T. Dozier of Memphis has compared the U.S. penal system to the methods used by the Nazis to eventually deprive Jews of all human status.

"Somehow we forget the personhood as we remember the crime and we cast the person into oblivion," said the Roman Catholic prelate. "As long as we do not see the person, we do not think of him."

In similar fashion, he said, "it was this kind of not remembering — or forgetting — the personhood of the Jew, which allowed him or her to be taken away."

Both the U.S. Catholic Conference and the National Council of Churches have issued statements urging, to different degrees, widespread implementation of alternatives to the imprisonment of criminals. Religious leaders, even some prison authorities, have agreed that prisons do not rehabilitate and that the system has had little success.

Historically disenfranchised ethnic and racial groups have gradually gained a measure of acceptance in society. So have alcoholics, drug abusers and homosexuals. But prisoners and ex-cons appear to bear the same stigma they did at the time of de Tocqueville's visit.

The rage behind the prisoner riot at New Mexico State Penitentiary in Santa Fe may have been kindled as much by the psychological condition of being a prisoner as it was by the much-discussed physical overcrowding.

The ransacking, arson, looting and fighting can be largely understood within the context of 1,100 inmates being jammed into a facility designed to hold 800.

But the murder of more than 30 fellow inmates, mostly by mutilation and scorching with blowtorches, suggests a deeper malaise that is never righted by mere architectural and structural improvements.

Speaking for the U.S. Catholic Conference, Auxiliary Bishop J. Francis Stafford called for a radical re-ordering of the criminal justice system to reflect "the values and tradition of our Judeo-Christian tradition."

At congressional hearings, the Baltimore prelate criticized the proposed legislative revisions of the U.S. Criminal Code as fostering "an over-reliance on imprisonment, an approach that all evidence indicates has failed."

He recommended that "offenders should be able to perform community service, that the community itself should develop citizens commissions for reconciliation, promote remediation programs between citizens that are in some type of dispute."

Carrying that analysis a step beyond, the National Council of Churches has contended that the "dehumanizing, oppressive and unjust" conditions of a prison can never be sufficiently improved and should therefore be virtually abolished.

Yet not all prison critics want to do away with these ancient institutions entirely.

Social critic Alan F. Kay has suggested dividing prison terms into separate stages of punishment, isolation and rehabilitation. Each stage would take place in a different setting under progressively less restrictive conditions.

Evangelical groups like the Christian Holiness Association tend to rely more on the personal experience of "God's grace and power to transform human life and make it whole again."

However, at its 1979 convention, the fellowship of 14 evangelical denominations, including the Salvation Army and the Church of the Nazarene, called for a moratorium on further prison construction.

While offering a broad array of opinions on the efficacy of imprisonment as a crime deterrent, many critics concur that little if any rehabilitation goes on behind bars.

Karl Menninger, noted psychiatrist and prison reform advocate, sees no hope in combatting crime unless the entire system is changed and prisons are largely done away with. "The machinery we have devised to protect us from crime has instead become an aggravation to crime," he says. "Prisons are manufacturing criminals constantly."

But, contrary to much of this current wisdom, a two-year study of juvenile offenders concluded that tougher confinement restrictions were a more effective crime deterrent.

The study by the American Institutes for Research found that chronic delinquents committed to reformatories showed a 68 percent drop in arrest rates after release, while those placed in more moderate treatment programs designed as an alternative to incarceration showed only a 59 percent decline.

The study was taken between 1974 and 1976 among a sample of 600 juvenile offenders in the Chicago area. The youths studied were confined both in traditional reformatories and alternative programs such as group homes and half-way houses.

Karl Menninger, who believes that ultimately "there should be no jails," would at least agree in part with the study's approach to criminal behavior as it develops among the young.

"Nearly every jail inmate I ever interviewed had a wretched childhood — beaten by a father, abandoned or betrayed by a mother." He and a few colleagues have addressed this pattern with an experiment in group foster homes for children who show early signs of criminal behavior. Dr. Menninger's theory is that "preventative programs like this could make jails and prisons increasingly unnecessary."

The climbing crime rate has given momentum to those favoring a strong prison and criminal justice system, while the increasingly apparent failure of that system and its rising maintenance costs have benefitted the cause of prison alternative advocates.

The issue is perhaps best illustrated in the struggle over the future of the Olympic Village at Lake Placid, New York. A religious and social activist coalition called STOP (Stop the Olympic Prisons) has sponsored numerous demonstrations across the country against U.S. Bureau of Prisons plan to turn the village into a medium-security federal prison after the Winter Games are over.

"It is ironic that these international games which represent freedom would have participants housed in facilities which will be used to imprison people," said United Methodist Bishop Joseph J. Yeakel, who heads the New York State Council of Churches.

## Steuben Town Meeting In Bath March 24

Bath — The first general meeting of the newly-formed Steuben Region will be a "town meeting" with Bishop Matthew H. Clark Monday, March 24 at St. Mary's, Bath.

The program will begin with a concelebrated Mass at 7:30 p.m., followed by the town meeting.

The Liturgy Committee planning the Mass is asking each parish to perform a function. The St. Mary's, Corning, Folk Group and the St. Mary's, Bath, Choir will furnish the music.

Among those organizing the event are Sister Agnes Catherine, St. Patrick's, Corning, pastoral assistant;

William Grimmer and Carol Roots of St. Mary's, Bath; Father Thomas Burr, St. Joachim's, Canisteo and St. Mary's, Rexville; Anthony Midey, St. Mary's, Corning; Ann Maloney, St. Patrick's, Corning; and Betty White, St. Vincent's, Corning.

Parishioners from throughout the region are invited to participate.

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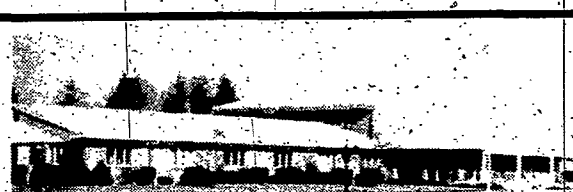
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