

Christian Unity

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fighting, according to Dr. Martin E. Marty, a church history professor at the University of Chicago.

"Presbyterians would not even know how to go about attacking Episcopalians, and even Catholics and Protestants find it increasingly difficult each year to blast each other," he said in 1977. Instead, the theological rift has appeared along lines of "Catholic charismatics versus other Catholics, or Catholics of the right versus Catholics of the left; Episcopalians who favor ordination of women to the priesthood and/or prayer book revision versus those who do not."

Dr. Marty's analysis has proved all too true up through 1980. While traditional theological misunderstandings have withered in the warmth of more than 50 years of widespread ecumenical dialogue, the latest strides toward church unity have been taken almost exclusively by like-minded partisans, causing a gradual realignment of the Christian doctrinal divisions.

Worldwide, Protestant ecumenists fear that the papacy of John Paul II will reverse the ecumenical gains that emerged from the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s. Theologian Hans Kung, seen by many as the head of the "liberal Protestant wing" of the Catholic Church, roused those fears to a fevered pitch after being censured by the Vatican for his critical examination of papal infallibility.

"If it is no longer possible to ask certain questions about the authority of the church in Rome, for example," Father Kung said shortly after being stripped of his certification to teach Catholic theology, "then the Orthodox and the Protestants could well say that dialogue is useless."

Despite occasional papal protestations to the contrary, Vatican priorities seemed to have shifted from the heady world of Protestant ecumenism to a binding up of the traditional Catholic elements in Christianity. In 1979, the pope reached out with an official visit and a dialogue initiative to the Eastern Orthodox churches which share the Catholic apostolic heritage and the traditional all-male priesthood.

Last summer, in a move that surprised, shocked and angered many liberal Protestants, the Vatican announced that it would admit married Episcopal priests who had left their church over recent decisions to ordain women and revise the treasured Elizabethan English of the prayerbook.

Episcopal leaders who supported women's ordination accused the Vatican of "stealing sheep" and abetting Anglican reactionaries. Bishop John S. Spong of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, N.J., reacted by temporarily suspending "covenant" relationship talks with the neighboring Catholic dioceses of Newark and Paterson.

According to some traditionalist Episcopalians, the worldwide Anglican communion may have forfeited its claim to a shared Catholic and apostolic heritage when the American church voted to ordain women priests in 1976.

When the Vatican announced its startling move, Bishop Stanley Atkins of the Episcopal Diocese of Eau Claire, Wis., read it as a sign "that the pope has lost patience with us," owing to the growing liberal Protestant slant of the denomination.

Others saw a bit of pointed symbolism in the fact that Episcopal Presiding Bishop John M. Allin was informed of the move while he was attending a World Council of Churches Central Committee meeting in Geneva.

Other attempts at church union have progressed quite nicely, once the goals were narrowed. The United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) temporarily deferred their talks in the early 1960's in order to participate with eight other American Protestant denominations in the Consultation on Church Union. When the consultation hit a snag in 1970 over the structure of the proposed super union, the two denominations resumed discussion of a bilateral merger. About 400 congregations drawn equally from each denomination will soon pair off in a long-term ecumenical study as preparation for a 1985 deadline by which the two churches will decide whether to begin formal merger negotiations.

A plan for a three-way fusion of major Lutheran denominations in the United States cleared its first hurdle this year when the participating bodies approved the study process which could lead to a united

church in 1982. The four options being considered range from closer cooperation to a full merger of the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

Ironically, soon after all three national church conventions agreed to take the first step of the Plan, American Lutheran Church Presiding Bishop David W. Preus opined that the "organizational merger of only three Lutheran bodies should not be a priority for the 1980s." In a recent column in the church's official "Lutheran Standard" publication, Bishop Preus said the amount of time, money and bureaucratic effort involved in working out such a union would detract from other, more important mission priorities.

Besides, "Lutheran unity now exists among the three churches and is being expressed," he wrote. "There is no scandalous division, no hostility, no wounds to be healed in relationships of these churches."

Bishop Preus' objections do not necessarily oppose the cause of Christian unity so much as they are indicative of its practical redefinition over the past few years. As age-old stereotypical divisions have broken down, the ideal of Christian unity has found its expression in a multiplicity of inter-church cooperative ventures in mission and social advocacy programs. While economic and doctrinal eruptions appear to have provided most of the motivation for recent advances in structural church union, both as a strategy for survival and as a consolidation of theological partisans.

Priests Council

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the four components of Social Ministries, Institutional Ministries, Department of Justice and Peace (formerly the Office of Human Development), Catholic

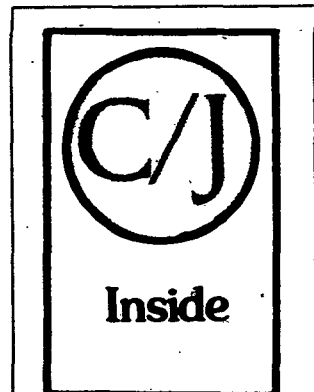
Charities and the Southern Tier Social Ministry.

Father Mulligan's report was the third of five divisional reports to the Priests Council. He said that future programs for Social Ministries may include a parish for deaf people and improving ministerial service given to nursing homes in the diocese.

The Priests Council also voted down (5-13-3) a proposal that would provide for sabbaticals to be taken by priests. The council members agreed with the concept of providing sabbaticals, but that a better written proposal be submitted.

Msgr. John Maney then submitted a proposal stating that the Priests Council go on record in support of the concept of sabbaticals and that an ad hoc committee be established to work out the language of the proposal in light of input received from priests in the diocese.

The proposal was accepted by the council.



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Pontiff Plans Family Document

Castel Gondolfo, Italy (RNS) — Pope John Paul II announced here that he was working on a new papal document on the family, in response to proposals made at the fall Synod of Bishops.

The document is expected to deal with such controversial issues as contraception and admittance of remarried divorced Catholics to the Eucharist.

The announcement came in the course of a brief address on the Feast of the Holy Family.

The pontiff had flown by helicopter to his summer residence in this town in the Alban Hills south of Rome to rest up after a strenuous Christmas week schedule.

Speaking to a large crowd of pilgrims gathered in the courtyard, the pope said, "This festive season goes together with the day of the family, because the Holy Family, made up of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, is a model for every Christian family."

"As the Holy Family of Nazareth was a place of love, a place of respect for each person, and a place in which the Christian message was lived, so the Christian and human family is and must be a community of love and life."

John Paul went on to remark that the 1980 international synod of Catholic bishops had "contributed to stimulating a greater understanding of the importance and the mission that the Christian family plays in the delicate situation of today's world," and that the synod

had "reaffirmed the irreplaceable role of the family in the service of life."

Recalling that the synod fathers had formulated "many proposals" and presented them to him for consideration, John Paul said, "All these riches of the last Synod of Bishops will now become beneficial fruit to all families. Now, while many bishops' conferences and individual bishops, priests, and laymen are increasing their work and dialogue with families, the pope is willingly given in to the unanimous desire of bishops and is now preparing a document on the family."

Asked for clarification, a Vatican press spokesman said that the pope was readying a document that would contain guidelines for members of the church on "all problems connected with the family, including marriage and divorce."

PATON Dinner Scheduled

The second annual dinner-dance sponsored by the Parents and Teachers of Nazareth Academy (PATON) is scheduled for Jan. 24 at the Party House on Beahon Road.

Tickets are \$23 per couple and reservations are available by calling co-chairpersons Eleanor Sciscioli (254-9230) or Philomena Lupiani (254-2339) by Jan. 15.

Proceeds from the dance will be used to help defray the expense of a new computer program soon to be in use at the school.

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