

1981: The Year In Retrospect

By Darrell Turner
Religious News Service

Violence and a sense of urgency to halt the nuclear arms race, dominated the concerns of the world of religion in 1981.

The attempted assassinations of Pope John Paul II and President Ronald Reagan reflected the vulnerability of even top world leaders. And the murder of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was not only a loss to the world of a peacemaker, but an indication of the danger posed to the Middle East by militant Moslem fundamentalists.

1981 was also the year when a worldwide protest movement against the stockpiling and placement of nuclear arms gained momentum and enlisted the support of the mainstream of religious leadership in both the East and West.

Protests over the arms race were complemented by new religious concern in the United States over the human rights policies of the Reagan administration, which took office at the beginning of the year. Religious leaders continued to be outspoken against repressive regimes in Latin America — as in El Salvador where four American missionary women had been gunned down as 1981 dawned — and South Africa's subjugation of its black population.

The Reagan administration's deep cuts in social welfare while defense appropriations escalated upset mainline denominations. Meanwhile, Moral Majority adherents grew uneasy because their social agenda — including prayer in the schools and a human life amendment — took a back seat to the president's economic priorities. And Catholic leadership, late in the legislative year, saw fit to remind the president of his campaign commitment to push tuition tax credit legislation, which likewise had gone nowhere.

Violent conflicts, which engulfed religious life within and religious concern without, worsened in Northern Ireland, Iran, Central America, and southern Africa.

The world had hardly recovered from the attempt on the life of President Reagan in late March by a mentally disturbed young man when a Turkish terrorist shot Pope John Paul II in mid-May. The would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, was sentenced to life imprisonment in Italy.

In February, the peripatetic pontiff had spent 13 days on a visit to the Far East. He said Mass in Karachi, Pakistan, met with Philippine President Ferdinand E. Marcos, and visited with Japanese Emperor Hirohito in Tokyo. The trip — the pope's ninth

outside Italy — also included stops in Guam and Alaska.

The assassination of Egyptian President Sadat was preceded by a crackdown on extremists in both the Moslem and Coptic Christian communities. He pushed Coptic Pope Shenouda III into monastic exile and arrested more than 1,500 Moslems and Christians. When he was assassinated in Cairo Oct. 6, the hail of gunfire also took the life of Coptic Bishop Samuel, Sadat's handpicked Coptic overseer to fill in for the deposed pope.

Religious concern over the nuclear arms race mounted. In June, at the annual German "Kirchentag," or Church Day, widespread hostility was expressed toward the American plan to place intermediate range, nuclear missiles in Europe in response to earlier Soviet missile placement. By August peace churches in Germany and those with roots in the anti-Nazi movement backed widespread demonstrations that caught the attention of the world and were emulated across the continent. As the United States and Soviet Union prepared for a round of arms-reduction talks that began in Geneva in late November, other anti-nuclear demonstrations were mounted.

In the United States, the Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-day Saints, in an unprecedented statement for the Utah-based Mormons, opposed the proposed MX missile system which would be in their backyard.

Last May, 27 heads of Anglican provinces around the world meeting in Washington pledged to work for multilateral disarmament.

Two Roman Catholic bishops captured national attention with recommendations that hit home. In Amarillo, Tex., Bishop L.T. Matthiesen suggested that Catholics who worked in a plant that would assemble the new neutron bomb consider quitting their jobs. And in Seattle, Wash., heavily dependent on defense expenditures, Bishop Raymond G. Hunthausen endorsed unilateral disarmament and the morality of tax protests against the arms race. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, meeting in Washington, staved off those pushing for unilateral disarmament and continued committee work on a definitive position paper on the arms race to be issued next year. So much publicity had focused on the Catholic shift toward the position of the "peace churches" that Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York, the military vicar, had to assure chaplains counseling members of the armed forces that they could serve in good conscience.

The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran



The above series of photos follows the long ordeal of Pope John Paul II from the attempt on his life on May 13 through his recovery and resumption of duties on Nov. 22. Top row, from left, the pope holds a baby moments before being shot in St. Peter's Square before a general audience; the pope falls into the arms of his secretary, Father Stanislaw Dziwisz following shooting; Mehmet Ali Agca, the Turkish terrorist suspected of shooting the pontiff; crowds in St. Peter's Square kneel in prayer while listening to a recorded message by the pope from his hospital bed on May 17, four days after the attack. Middle, from left, Pope John Paul II sits in his bed at Gemelli Hospital in Rome; the pontiff meets with Rose Hall, extreme right, one of two women wounded in the attack; the pope steps out of his car on June 20, returning to Gemelli Hospital because of a persistent fever that slowed his recovery; nuns kneel and cross themselves while listening to another taped message shortly before the pontiff's return to the hospital on June 20. Bottom, from left, sitting in a room in Gemelli Hospital, Pope John Paul II tapes a televised message to be heard at the International Eucharistic Congress in Lourdes, France; Dr. Emilio Tresalti, chief medical officer at Gemelli Hospital, answers reporters' questions on Aug. 5 dealing with the pontiff's successful surgery to remove an intestinal bypass; Italian security officials check nuns entering the courtyard at Castelgandolfo, where the pope continues his convalescence; the pope smiles to the crowd as he arrives for a visit at the Shrine of Merciful Love in Collevaenza, Italy, on Nov. 22. Vatican officials stated that the trip marked the resumption of the pontiff's apostolic pilgrimages.

World Federation held major international conferences on the urgency of nuclear disarmament. The primate of the Anglican communion, Archbishop Robert Runcie of Canterbury, endorsed the Lutheran-suggested idea of a "religious summit conference" on disarmament next year. The Russian Orthodox Church found ready acceptance from churches in the West to attend an inter-religious peace conference in Moscow in the spring. And in a dramatic pre-Christmas move, Pope John Paul sent teams of scientists to major world capitals, including Washington and Moscow, to report findings on the medical effects of nuclear war. Even the head of the Communist Party of Italy hailed the pontiff for his peace efforts.

President Reagan's policies that appeared to support authoritarian regimes that were anti-communist fueled religious concern about human rights. President Reagan's nomination of Ernest Lefever, perceived as a defender of South African apartheid, to head the State Department's human rights desk, set off a heated battle that the ad-

ministration lost. Dr. Lefever, head of an Ethics and Public Policy Center which Jesuit-run Georgetown University cut loose, was felt to be an apologist for and weak opponent of rights violations in right-wing countries. Following the nomination's defeat in early November, the State Department circulated a memorandum indicating that the administration would chastise publicly even friendly nations that violated human-rights standards.

The spotlight on human rights in Latin America was focused particularly by the Jacobo Timerman case. The Argentine journalist was imprisoned for two years and exiled to Israel. He stirred a flap when he charged in his autobiography that anti-Semitism had been the main cause of his running afoul of the state. Jewish leaders in Argentina and the United States, some of whom had helped with his release, asserted that Timerman was imprisoned for his leftist political views.

The suggestion of Secretary of State Alexander Haig, a Philadelphia Catholic whose brother is a priest, that the women may have been caught in a "fire fight" — with implications of complicity — outraged many Catholics, as reflected in the diocesan press.

President Reagan's budget cuts were widely denounced by religious leaders as hurting the poor at the expense of the rich. While most held that churches could not pick up all the slack, some urged that the religious community do more to aid the needy and disadvantaged.

The awarding of the 1981 Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, an agency headed by a former Danish Lutheran pastor, highlighted the continuing problem of refugees. An inter-faith appeal to President Reagan asked the administration to stop turning away Haitian and Salvadoran refugees seeking asylum in the United States.

In late July, the administration announced its proposals for a new immigration policy. They in-

cluded a 10-year wait for families of illegal aliens seeking to enter the country, and limited access to public services for undocumented aliens. The religious community generally had reservations about the proposals.

The president stood by Interior Secretary James Watt, who drew fire for seeming to imply that the second coming of Christ may make long-range stewardship of natural resources unnecessary. The United Methodist Board of Church and Society called for his resignation on the ground that his policies exploited resources for the sake of immediate gains.

President Reagan's nomination of famed pediatrician C. Everett Koop for the post of U.S. Surgeon General was also controversial because of Dr. Koop's lack of a public health background and leadership in opposing abortion. But the nomination was finally confirmed by Congress.

Anti-abortion bills in Congress not only were denounced by "pro-choice" forces, but split the "pro-life" forces. (Continued on Page 5)