

# PRESBYTERIANS

## Strong Stands

"The core of the racial situation in the United States lies in the all-white residential communities that circle our cities," said the Rev. Marshal Scott of Chicago, moderator of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. "It is precisely in those neighborhoods where Presbyterianism flourishes that the center of the evil lives."

Moved by such forthright oratory, the 840 commissioners (delegates) at the 175th Presbyterian General Assembly in Des Moines last week overwhelmingly approved a proposed amendment to the church constitution, declaring that Presbyterians "are obligated to welcome into fellowship" anyone who desires to share in their worship, and that refusal on the basis of "color, origin or worldly condition" causes "a scandal to the Gospel." With less unanimity, they went on to take a strong stand, roughly like the U.S. Supreme Court's, against Bible-reading and prayers in public schools.

**Cash Backing.** The United Presbyterian Church, whose membership of 3,277,787 is less than 5% Negro, has traditionally been opposed to racial segregation. This year the commissioners, as one of them said, "put their money where their mouth is." They unanimously voted to set up a commission on religion and race, with a first-year budget of \$500,000. It will work with other denominations in stamping out segregation in churches, assist individual ministers in combatting prejudice among parishioners. The assembly's stand on race, exulted the Rev. Edler Hawkins, a Negro and pastor of St. Augustine's Church in The Bronx, is "tre-

mendously significant. It gives the church the ability to move together for the first time."

The stand for separation of church and state was similarly straightforward and detailed. Besides opposing prayers and Bible reading (except in history or literature classes) in public schools, the church objected to the use of public property for religious displays of any kind, opposed federal aid for church-related schools. The report adopted by the assembly also recommended that existing Sunday-closing laws be changed to free Jews and Seventh-day Adventists from observance, urged that tax exemptions be stripped from commercial enterprises operated by church institutions.

**"The Real Crisis."** To an angry minority of commissioners, the church-state report seemed a weak surrender to secularism. But Dr. Elwyn Smith of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, who headed the committee that wrote the report, argued that "the question in all the matters we discussed is this: Is it or is it not an effective witness of Jesus Christ? Our conclusion was that the present practices of Bible-reading and prayer are not an effective witness." Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, who was re-elected without opposition to a third term as the church's Stated Clerk, concurred in the decision. "I think it has been a great assembly," he said. "The real crisis is that the Christian church, unless it changes, will be bypassed."

In other business of the seven-day assembly, the commissioners:

- Heard Ecumenicist Blake give a mildly encouraging report on the progress of his one-big-church proposal. Within two years, he said, there may be a definite plan for joining the United Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Evangelical United Brethren, Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ in a new Protestant denomination with 22 million members.
- Elected Dr. Silas G. Kessler, 51, of Hastings, Neb., to replace Dr. Scott in the ceremonial office of moderator until the 176th convention in Oklahoma City next year.
- Noted the increasing warmth of Presbyterian relations with Roman Catholics, and recommended that laymen and ministers form parish-level ecumenical groups to discuss with Catholics such problems as mixed marriages, legalized gambling, religious liberty, family planning, educational policy.
- Upheld the right of the New York presbytery to dismiss eccentric Fundamentalist Dr. Stuart Merriam (TIME, June 15, 1962) as pastor of Manhattan's Broadway Church, but decided that the presbyteries had exceeded their authority in the summary way in which they ousted the Merriam-supporting ruling elders. Merriam, who has been without a pulpit for twelve months, is currently in Pakistan on a pleasure jaunt.

## Barth in Retirement

The greatest living Protestant theologian retired from his professorship at the University of Basel last year, presumably with nothing to do but listen to Mozart records and finish the 13th volume of his masterwork, *Church Dogmatics*. But at the age of 77, Karl Barth (TIME cover, April 20, 1962) has found himself so busy that he wonders if he will ever finish the book at all. Two evenings a week he holds



THEOLOGIAN BARTH  
Sensing a ground swell.

a trilingual "colloquia" with divinity students in the nearby Bruderholz Restaurant. He keeps up a worldwide correspondence, dutifully reads theses mailed in by budding theologians for his approval, and receives a constant stream of visitors, ranging from old pastoral friends to a delegation of Swiss prohibitionists. "I told them," says Barth, sipping vermouth, "that it was a good thing they existed, but theirs was not the main problem in the world."

Barth seems to be resigned to the fact that there may be no additions to the *Dogmatics*. "Let people read my first twelve volumes," he says, in dry awareness that they are heavy going. He has "written more than any other contemporary theologian," and fears overdoing it: "I definitely don't wish to be another Adenauer." He is in good health, still full of sly wit and provocative opinions. A sampling of the latest Barthian views:

● ON ROMAN CATHOLICS: Barth believes that thanks to Pope John XXIII "we are witnessing a complete reinterpretation of Roman Catholic dogma. The thoughts expounded by Hans Küng and other modern theologians in Germany, Holland, France and elsewhere are no longer views of a small spearhead minority, but form the very ground swell of Catholic renovation." It would be "terrible if the Pope died now," but the trend of Catholic thinking "looks to me irreversible." Barth



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THE SEVEN

ARTHUR SIEGEL

### Separating fiction and reality.

scuffs at the widespread Protestant view that Rome is at last catching up with the Reformation churches, says "it might well be that we Protestants are the ones who will have to do the catching up."

• **ON COMMUNISM:** Thanks to Pope John's new opening toward the East, Roman Catholicism "may succeed in reaching a sensible accord with Communist countries before Protestants do." Unchanged are Barth's often-argued views that "the subtle forms of materialist atheism in the West are a much graver threat to Christianity than the overtly trumpeted atheism of the Communists. I don't take this Communist atheism too dramatically. At least we know where we stand with them."

• **ON THEOLOGY AND JOURNALISM:** Barth recalls that 40 years ago he advised young theologians to "take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible." Newspapers, he says, are so important that "I always pray for the sick, the poor, journalists, authorities of the state and the church—in that order. Journalists form public opinion. They hold terribly important positions. Nevertheless, a theologian should never be formed by the world around him—either East or West. He should make it his vocation to show both East and West that they can live without a clash. Where the peace of God is proclaimed, there peace on earth is implicit. Have we forgotten the Christmas message?"

## ROMAN CATHOLICS

### A Who's Who of Saints

St. George, the patron saint of England, earned his place in medieval Christian legend by spearing a dragon that was just about to gobble up a Libyan maiden. St. Christopher was a sort of Jolly Green Giant of the early church who ferried wayfarers across a river on his back; one of his passengers turned out to be the child Jesus, and Christopher naturally became the patron saint of travelers. St.

Cecilia, a Roman beauty who was whacked to death with a sword after her pagan captors failed to suffocate her in an overheated bathroom, was made the patron of music and musicians because she "sang to the Lord in her heart" on her wedding day.

Of course, none of it ever happened. The only facts known about St. George and St. Christopher are that they were martyrs. There is no reliable evidence for the existence of St. Cecilia, and several hundred of the 25,000 saints whose cults have been observed in the Roman Catholic Church seem to be equally fictitious. Oddly enough, most of the evidence that cut these legends down to size came not from iconoclastic disciples of Voltaire but from the Bollandists, a tiny society of Catholic priests whose job is compiling material for an accurate, fiction-free *Who's Who* of the saints.

**A Century or Two.** This week the society will publish its semiannual volume of studies called the *Analecta Bollandiana*, a dry, multilingual collection of research on the lives of the saints. The latest *Analecta*, for example, contains one article on the Bollandists' current favorite topic, St. Martin of Tours, plus others on such minutiae as an early Swedish manuscript dealing with Persian saints and a papyrus describing the life of St. Phileas. Eventually, this material may find its way into the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum*, of which only 60 volumes have been published in the 360 years since Dutch Jesuit Heribert Rosweyde undertook to write accurate hagiographies. But no volume of the *Acta* series has been released since 1940, and Bollandist Father Joseph van der Straeten admits that "no one can say when our next will be published. Maybe in a century, maybe in two."

Membership in the society (which takes its name from Father John van Bolland, Rosweyde's successor) is limited to six priest-scholars, who are always Jesuits and almost always Belgians. The Bollandists, who have no parish duties and seldom give public lectures, live in one wing of Brussels' Collège de St. Michel, do most

of their work in their own five-tiered, 320,000-volume library. The society's leader is Father Maurice Coens, 70, a soft-spoken expert on medieval German saints and a Bollandist for 35 years. Prospective next member is Michel van Esbroeck, 28, a specialist in Near Eastern languages who was assigned to the society by his Jesuit superiors two years ago on a trial basis. His apprenticeship will not be brief. "If all goes well," says one veteran Bollandist, "it will take at least ten years."

**Philomena's Fall.** Bollandist research has no official standing in the church, but Vatican scholars have often relied on the society's discoveries in deciding whether to eliminate a nonexistent saint from the calendar. As a rule, the church takes a tolerant attitude toward cults that have been honored by time and history; it does not forbid St. Christopher medals, for example. Yet it is quick to eliminate veneration of more recent non-saints with a growing vogue. Vatican officials two years ago sternly clamped down on devotees of the Roman "martyr" St. Philomena, whose authenticity was questioned by the Bollandists as far back as 1940. The society's conclusions are not always welcome: in 1695, the Carmelites were so outraged at Bollandist doubts about the order's clouded early history that they persuaded the Spanish Inquisition to ban the *Acta* as heretical.

The Bollandists are not ecclesiastical muckrakers; they aim to produce sober lives of saints that will stand the scrutiny of secular historians, and are as delighted to authenticate a legend as to disprove one. Well aware that the faithful may be scandalized if a popular saint is summarily debunked, the Bollandists couch damaging discoveries in guarded, hesitant prose. But they also believe that the faith of the church will be all the stronger if it is stripped of implausible legends. Father Coens believes that the "enlightened Christian" should always be "on the alert to protect his sense of fiction and reality, employing the reason that God has given him to use."