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NEWS RELEASE



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CATHOLIC ECUMENISM RESULT OF NEW INSIGHT, SAYS USD PROFESSOR

SAN DIEGO, Calif. -- The Catholic Church has come rather quickly from a policy of total isolation from other churches to a policy of very deep involvement because of changes in theological insights, says a University of San Diego professor.

Dr. Raymond O. Ryland, assistant professor of religious studies at USD, who recently began steps toward becoming a lay deacon of the Catholic church, spoke on the developments in the church in an interview this week.

Dr. Ryland stated that at a recent conference of Southern Baptists with Roman Catholics in Louisiana the widely expressed question was again raised. Dr. Ryland attributed the confusion to a lack of understanding on the part of some Protestant ecumenists.

The reasons for the changes in policy were not sociological, rather theological, Dr. Ryland said. Vatican II and the efforts of Pope John XXIII were indeed precipitating factors but the reasons go further back in time, he said.

"There is no question that the enormous good will which Pope John beget and which he evoked from various persons was a very important factor. Still the more important and basic development was the growing realization on the part of Roman Catholic theologians that as a whole they had not sufficiently understood the churchly reality of other Christian communities,"

(MORE)

the professor said.

"This insight is considered one of the major breakthroughs in the Second Vatican Council. Like all other breakthroughs, it was preceded by a long period of theological and scriptural and pastoral ferment and also was preceded by a number of years of deepening contact of Roman Catholic scholars and scholars of other Christian traditions."

There is some misgiving on the part of non-Catholics, Dr. Ryland admitted. There are those who, perhaps, he said, have a certain lack of confidence in future dialogue as the change came so quickly. Their concern, he explained, is that a reversion to former isolation could come almost as unexpectedly.

This misgiving requires that there be a fuller understanding of the change and the reasons behind it, Dr. Ryland stated. "The dramatic change is due not to the church trying to be 'more liberal' or 'more understanding,' but it is due to a basic and serious development in the Church's understanding of herself and her relation to the other churches and ecclesiastic communities."

Asked the directions of the ecumenical movement, Dr. Ryland said no one in the leadership of the churches involved is prepared to say where it will all end. "In fact, at the very end of the decree on ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council we find admonition from the Bishops of Vatican II not to try to prejudge the future inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Although birth control and divorce are current issues within the Roman Catholic Church and between Roman Catholics and other Christians, Dr. Ryland said, in the serious dialogues between the representatives of the churches, the talk is about the "very serious issue of papal infallibility."

The larger issue in ecumenism, however, Dr. Ryland said, is authenticity. "This is to say there was a time in early decades of the 20th century in the

ecumenical movement when there was a widespread feeling that the way we make progress toward church unity is to work toward a lowest common denominator of belief.

"This was the 'let us ignore our difference and concentrate on the things that we have in common' attitude. All responsible ecumenists today would cast aside this approach as being of no value in promoting Christian unity."

Agreeing that there are those who still equate unity with indifferentism, Dr. Ryland said further, "that is an erroneous equation and the error can be seen in the attitudes and writings of the ecumenists themselves.

"We realize now, rather clearly, on all sides, that unless a person, let's say a Roman Catholic in dialogue, unless that person can be enthusiastically and wholeheartedly and articulately a Roman Catholic, then he has nothing to say in dialogue to a Methodist, a Baptist, or a Presbyterian.

"And it works the other way. As I have often said to groups of other churches, unless they are able to say to us with real enthusiasm what they have found of Christ through their tradition, then there is really not that much to say to us in furtherance of dialogue leading to Christian unity."

Dr. Ryland has been on the faculty of USD since last year, and was formerly co-director of the Oklahoma Center for Christian Renewal. He received his theological training from Union Theological Seminary.

During the USD Summer Sessions he is teaching "Christ the Lion: Agape in the Narnian Chronicles," in the pre-session ending June 19. Also "Comparative Christianity," stressing the principles of ecumenism, and "Christian Healing," which will include a review of the present Pentecostal movement. The later courses are offered during the regular session, June 22 to July 31.

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