

'Faith must be firm' Jesuit advises but 'religion must adapt to times'

PITTSBURGH (NC) — Father Bernard Lonergan, S. J., of Regis College, Ontario, sounded the theme that religion must adapt to the times while steering clear of "trash" in contemporary thinking. The theologian and author, spoke to some 300 persons at a symposium on "The Nature of Belief" sponsored by the American Graduate and Professional Commission, which is the North American affiliate of Pax Romana, international Catholic students' and intellectuals' organization. Bishop John J. Wright of Pittsburgh is the episcopal adviser.

Father Lonergan shared the platform here with Father Martin D'Arcy, S. J., philosopher and author; and Brother Antoninus, O. P., of the Dominican priory in Kentfield, Calif., author of several volumes of poetry.

Father Lonergan said that in times of great social and cultural change, "beliefs too are changing and, because they are only beliefs, because they are not personally acquired know-

ledge, such change leaves believers at a loss.

"They are disoriented. They do not know which way to turn. They feel that all they have taken for granted is menaced. They may be tempted to unbelief as a liberation or, again, they may dread it as destructive of truly human living," he said.

Father Lonergan said this is a time of great social and cultural change, and that "this is being experienced more particularly by Catholics."

Faith in God
Speaking on the stability of classicist culture, he said, only recently has Catholic tradition acknowledged that "the world of the classicist no longer exists and that the only world in which it can function is the modern world." He said that religious faith goes beyond human belief. "But faith is not in man's word but in God."

Father Lonergan stressed that "religion is one thing, and theology another.

"Most saints were not theologians, and most theologians

were not saints. Theology stands to religion as economics

does to business" he declared. He said today's social and cultural changes call for adjustment and adaptation in theology and religion.

Stressing that modern culture is on the move he said, "Modern man is aware that men collectively are responsible for the world in which they lead them," while the classicist was aware "that men individually are responsible for the lives they lead."

Father Lonergan said Catholics are suffering more keenly from the confusion of change because "up to Vatican II they were sheltered against the modern world and since Vatican II they have been exposed more and more to the chill winds of modernity."

"But adjustment and adaptation are in forms and structures much more than in content. Theology has to operate within a different context; it will have to operate differently; but it will not therefore be a different theology," he

stated. "As medieval theology differed from the theology of the patristic period, as renaissance theology differed from both patristic and medieval, so modern theology will differ from its predecessors as much but perhaps no more than they did from theirs."

Working Together
He described today's challenge as a call for a collective effort.

"It is not the individual but the group that transforms the culture. The group does so by its concern for excellence, by its ability to wait and let issues mature, by its persevering efforts to understand, by its discernment for what is at once simple and profound, by its demand for the first-rate and its horror of mere destructiveness," he said.

Brother Antoninus said today's Catholics may not be able to risk their lives in the manner of the martyrs, "but we can risk our immortal soul, which is a way we test our faith."

He said today's world is one of "hard" knowledge, factual and scientific. He said there is a need for the "soft" knowledge of symbolism because "you can't understand religion without symbols."

A symbol, he said, is a mystery, "just as faith is." "We sin symbolically," he said. "We test our faith through our sins."

He added: "A poet is compelled to follow his symbols and they take him where he is supposed to be."

The program included comments by a panel chaired by Philip Des Marais of the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington.

Panel members were Dr. James Kritzeck of the Institute for Advanced Religious Studies at the University of Notre Dame; Mother M. Thomas Aquinas, mother general of the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh; Dr. Jesse A. Mann, philosophy professor at Georgetown University, and A. E. P. Wall, editor of the Catholic Review, Baltimore.

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