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the launching pad

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Q. At a LIBERTY rally some months ago I heard a tape in which the Orthodox Primate of Greece expressed himself as being favorable to religious freedom. Years ago I heard that small sects were being persecuted in Greece and that it was forbidden even to translate the New Testament from first-century Greek to modern Greek. May we conclude that some notable change for the better has recently taken place in Greece?

A. Unfortunately, the answer is No.

Both the former constitution, in effect prior to the military coup of April, 1967, and the new one, which has recently taken its place, do provide that "freedom of religious conscience is inviolable," and that "any religion of a professed doctrine is free and its worship takes place unhindered and under the protection of the law." Unfortunately the new one, like the old, goes on to say that "the established religion in Greece is that of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ," and that "proselytism and every other interference with the established religion, is prohibited."

As for the rendering of the New Testament into modern Greek, the new constitution states emphatically, "The text of the Holy Bible is maintained unalterable. Its rendering into a different linguistic form, without a previous approval of the autocephalous Church of Greece and of the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople, is absolutely prohibited."

Q. In our largely secular culture, why don't all Christians forget their differences and consider themselves as constituting one single community?

A. Somebody has beat you to it.

Last spring Robert Dodds, of the National Council of Churches, proposed a "general church membership" in which every Christian would be a member of all Christian churches indiscriminately, free to enjoy a Lutheran Bible study on Tuesday afternoon, a Methodist prayer meeting on Wednesday night, and a Catholic mass on Sunday morning.

Indeed, last fall (*America*, Nov. 4, 1967) John McCaw, a Protestant professor in Drake University Divinity School, argued that we are *already* living in the time of a great "American Church"—a great catholic-centered American Church—in which more and more the members of the various

denominations see themselves as "Christian" rather than as "Protestant" or "Catholic."

Judging by the "Everyone Welcome" slogans on church bulletin boards, I reckon that Christians of every persuasion have been free to attend the meetings of other Christians for the past century or more. The difference today is that people *feel* freer to visit churches of other denominations.

It is a good thing that many American Christians are beginning to see that their allegiance to holy water, glossolalia, or supralapsarian predestinarianism should no longer stimulate them to suspect other Christians of sorcery who don't agree with them on such non-Biblical items. But can Christians—can America—survive on homogenized theological pabulum?

Q. Do you happen to know whether the Catholics will ever make an official saint out of Pope John?

A. The process was begun with an announcement by Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965. It is proceeding in Venice, where hundreds of people who knew the pope during his prepapal pastorate there are testifying to his character and good works. But it will probably be at least another two years before Pope John officially becomes Saint John.

Incidentally, in Bible times all living Christians were called saints. (Notice, for example, Philippians 1:1: "Paul and Timotheus . . . to all the saints in Christ Jesus.") In the Greek New Testament the word translated "saint" meant any person dedicated to God. In the Catholic Church the first person pronounced a saint (or "canonized") by a pope appears to have been Ulrich of Augsburg in A.D. 993; but the word came to have special significance during the third and fourth centuries, when the custom arose of praying to martyrs—who were believed to be in heaven—to get them to intercede with God.

The declaration that a man is a saint means among other things that he is considered to have special privileges as an intercessor with God so that prayers can be publicly directed to him, churches may be dedicated to God in his memory, and pictures of him may be painted showing him surrounded with a heavenly light.

The Catholic practice of canonizing saints is