

Pope throws in towel

VATICAN CITY (APEY) - In a surprise move today Pope John Paul II dissolved the Catholic Church and called on Catholics and Christians around the world to renounce their beliefs.

The pope's actions came after scientific examination of the Shroud of Turin revealed a perfectly dried and preserved white blood cell with a normal chromosome count of 46.

"The chromosome count conclusively proves that Jesus had two human parents who each supplied him, through normal genetic channels, with 23 chromosomes, just like normal humans," said the pope. "In short, there is no evidence that Jesus was anything more than your average homo sapien."

The pope revealed, however, that support for the idea of dismantling the church had been growing in the church organization for some time.

"We tore our hair out trying to resolve the two accounts of creation in Genesis, and trying to figure out why John 1:18 would state that no man has seen God, when Exodus 24:9-11 states that Moses and a whole bunch of elders saw him, and a slew of other biblical mysteries.

"When the news of the chromosomes came in, we were already on the verge of throwing the Bible out as a hopeless tangle of hearsay evidence. You could say it was the Shroud that broke the camel's back."

The implications of the dissolution will probably be widespread. The number of clergy added to the unemployment rolls, especially in Italy, will add immensely to many countries' economic problems, although the Pope has said that putting them in productive jobs will be beneficial in the long run.

Much of the church's worldly holdings will be distributed to various charities, but, because the amount is apparently too large to be given away at once, a trust fund has been established.

A Vatican spokesman said that the church's gold alone, released carefully onto the market, will depress gold prices to the point where poor people can once again afford to cap their teeth.

Elsewhere, reaction was mixed. In Northern Ireland the Reverend Ian Paisley called the dissolution "a papist plot which probably was helped along by atheists and communists."

Pravda hailed the announcement as a triumph of dialectical materialism, but warned its readers that the movement may be offset by defections to decadent bourgeois organizations like the "Moonies" and Kiwanis.

Spokesmen for other major world religions have largely avoided comment on the momentous decision but many admit they are doing a brisk trade in converts.

Astronauts see Red

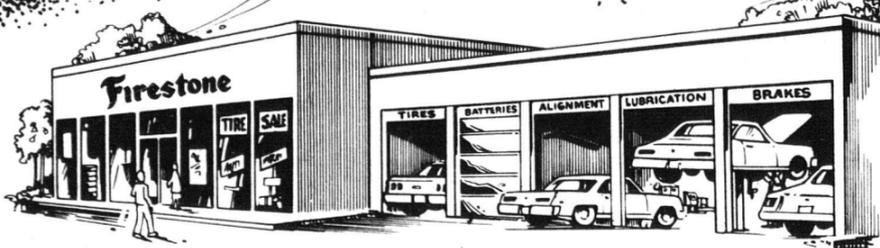
CAPE CANAVERAL Fla. (APEY) — Space centre officials here were left blushing when the Soviet news agency Tass revealed that John Young and Robert Crippen of the space shuttle Columbia defected to the Soviet Union Tuesday.

The two aging astronauts were last heard from as they flew over the Soviet republic of Khazakstan. Suddenly one of the Mission Control technicians reported the craft was losing altitude dramatically.

Mission Control ordered the astronauts to take corrective measures, but their only response was "beautiful." Language experts at Cape Canaveral say the two were actually speaking Russian, saying "coming in, comrades."

Sources in Washington have speculated that the defection was actually part of a top-secret trade. In return for the shuttle and the two astronauts, the Americans will receive three ballerinas, a dissident poet, and one free chance at hijacking the planned Soviet space station.

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