

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE
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Debate Full Religious
Liberty For All People

By W. Barry Garrett

VATICAN CITY (BP)-- For the first time in history the Roman Catholic Church in full ecumenical council has plunged headlong into debate over its position on religious liberty. A basic reform is at stake on the church's attitude toward non-Catholics. The issue is religious liberty for all men.

Bishop Emile-Joseph de Smedt, Bruges, Belgium, led off in the debate by presenting a proposed declaration on religious liberty. He said that it has been considerably improved since last year. (In November of 1963 a strong effort was made to get a debate and vote on religious liberty, but due to lack of time and behind-the-scenes maneuvering by opponents the subject was not discussed.)

The proposed declaration states plainly that all men everywhere have a right to religious liberty, both in its private and public expression. This includes "an individual's genuine right to observe and to witness his private and public worship before God and men, whether individuals or groups, and to organize according to the precepts of his religion the whole of his own individual, family, educational, cultural, social and charitable life."

The declaration says that the state is incompetent to establish itself as a judge of religious truth. The responsibility of the state is to guarantee the religious liberty of the people.

On the other hand, one limitation on religious liberty is stated in the proposal. "It can be restricted legitimately only when it is in grave conflict with the end of society," it says. Just what is meant by "the end of society" and who determines that end is not explained.

While defending the right of religious groups "to carry on sincere and honest propagation of their religion" the declaration condemned "proselytism which would employ dishonest means." This was explained by a council expert as referring to "rice Christians," making converts by cajolery, and by misrepresentation of the faith and teaching of other groups.

The declaration makes no attempt to settle problems of church-state relations. It does not touch upon the issue of an established state religion.

Up until this point in history the Roman Catholic Church does not have an official teaching on religious liberty or church-state relations, according to council experts here. Rather there has been a traditional practice based on the theory that only truth has rights and error has no rights. This has led to a wide variety of practices, depending on whether the Catholic Church has been in a majority or a minority position in nations.

The new position of the church would be based on the fact that rather than "truth" having rights, "people" have rights. This would mean that a person, even though holding to error, should be guaranteed religious liberty the same as a person holding to truth.

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The opening day of the debate revealed the depth of the struggle between the old and new views. Four cardinals holding positions of great power in the church spoke against the declaration and held to the old view of restraint against those who hold error.

These were Cardinals Ernesto Ruffini, Italy; Fernando Quiroga y Palacios, Spain; Jose Bueno y Monreal, Spain; and Alfredo Ottaviani, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, Vatican City.

On the other hand, seven speakers vigorously defended the proposed declaration on religious liberty. They are: Cardinals Richard Cushing, Boston, Mass. (speaking for the bishops of the United States); Paul Emile Leger, Canada; Albert Meyer, Chicago; Joseph Ritter, St. Louis, Mo.; Raul Silva Henriquez, Chile (for 58 Latin American bishops); and Bishops Smiljan Cekada, Yugoslavia, and de Smedt of Belgium.

Attacking religious liberty Cardinal Ottaviani said that "those professing a revealed religion have rights over and above those coming from the natural law." He also declared that "it is not true that the state is incompetent to choose a religion."

Defending the new position Cardinal Cushing said that "the Catholic and non-Catholic world alike is waiting for this declaration." He said the issue is simple with a twofold aspect: (1) the assertion of the freedom of the church, and (2) insistence by the church on this right for every human being.

Bishop Cekada proposed that the Catholic Church not only approve the declaration on religious liberty but that it send it to the United Nations. For this purpose he asked that the council appoint a special commission to prepare the text of the message to the United Nations and that it should be discussed by the council.

Cardinal Quiroga y Palacios of Spain complained that the declaration "seems to have been written in view of so-called Protestant countries, and to have paid no attention to the situation of Catholic countries." He suggested that "the text should be completely recast by a new mixed commission of periti (experts) which would be in a position to appreciate the importance and delicacy of this point."

The future course of the declaration on religious liberty is uncertain. After the present debate concludes the matter will go back to the study commission which will evaluate all the arguments on both sides. It will be rewritten and brought back to the council for vote. After that a final rewording will take place and a final vote will be called for before promulgation by the council and the pope.

If there is overwhelming approval by the council on the first vote it is conceivable that final action could be taken on the declaration this year during the third session. However, if large numbers of amendments are proposed, and if the vote is rather evenly divided, and if the opponents succeed in blocking rapid action, final action may be deferred to a fourth or later session of the council.

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SUMMARY OF DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The declaration on religious liberty before the third session of Vatican Council II is five pages long. It is accompanied with five pages of notes, an explanation and a summary. The Latin text, which was sent to the council fathers April 27, 1964, is a secret document. Following is an official summary released by the council's press office:

Summary

The numbering of the articles follows that of the schema on ecumenism, which comprises 24 numbers. The articles of this declaration begin with No. 25.

25. The consideration of the problem of religious liberty favors contacts among Christians. This emphasized its ecumenical aspect.

26. The nature of religious liberty.

(a) Its foundation: In the religious field, it is both a duty and an honor for man to follow the will of God, according to the dictates of conscience. This is the very root of the right to religious liberty.

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(b) The right to religious liberty in society puts men in a position to be able to practice privately and publicly their own religion, and no restriction must be placed on this religious practice.

(c) Religious liberty demands that there should be established in society the conditions required to guarantee it.

(d) The council, in its affirmation of man's dependence on God, proclaims that religious liberty in society must be recognized and respected by all and everywhere.

27. The task of the church.

According to the mandate received from the Lord, the church propagates the Word of God and prays for the salvation of all men, exhorting her own children to spread the life-giving light of the gospel.

28. No one can be forced to embrace the faith.

With love, prudence and patience, in accordance with the ways of God, contact is established with those who do not have the true faith. But all coercion, direct or indirect, is to be excluded from the preaching of the truth, because according to the traditional norm of the church, based on the very nature of the act of faith, the acceptance of faith must be fully free.

29. The religious liberty of the individual in human society.

In human society, religious liberty is to be respected not only by Christians and for Christians, but by all and for all--persons, individuals, and religious groups.

Freedom to follow God's call is the peak of human dignity, and consequently this liberty in social coexistence is a right in the truest sense of the term, and is the foundation and safeguard of other freedoms.

The objective, absolute and universal divine law is the norm of our relationships with God, whence there derives man's obligation to acquire diligently the knowledge of this law. But man can follow the divine law only through the judgment of his own conscience which he forms for himself under the guidance of prudence. In sincere obedience to conscience, a man implicitly obeys God. If, in his attempts to know the will of God, a man falls into an erroneous interpretation of that will, no man and no power has the right to induce him to act contrary to the dictate of his conscience.

An essential element of religious liberty is the right to practice one's religion publicly. Hence the church proclaims not only the right to one's opinion and freedom to practice the rites of one's own religion, but also an individual's genuine right to observe and to witness his private and public worship before God and men, whether individuals or groups, and to organize according to the precepts of his religion the whole of his own individual, family, educational, cultural, social and charitable life.

The exercise of this right must be adapted to the exigencies of the social nature of man. Hence it can be subject to restrictions. But it can be restricted legitimately only when it is in grave conflict with the end of society. Consequently, it is unlawful for state authorities to discriminate in any way against religion. It is, on the contrary, their duty to protect and to encourage religious liberty.

30. The freedom of religious groups in social coexistence.

Men have the right of free assembly in groups, which groups in turn, within the limits determined by the end of society, have the right to govern themselves according to their own laws, to honor God with public worship, to assist their members in their religious life, and to create institutions of social character based on religious principles.

The Catholic Church expects from state authorities a recognition of the right of religious liberty in social coexistence.

Any violent oppression of religion itself or of the religion of a determined religious group is in opposition with the divine will and with human rights.

Religious groups are entitled to carry on sincere and honest propagation of their religion, but they must refrain from any "proselytism" which would employ dishonest means.

Civil authorities have no direct power to regulate the relationships of their citizens with God. Consequently, they may not subject religious groups to the temporal aims of the state. On the contrary, it contributes to the common welfare when conditions are created which will favor religious life.

31. Religious life in the world today.

Today in particular, the problem of religious liberty is of greater urgency because of the more extended contacts which exist between men of different cultures and different religions, because of an increased consciousness of personal responsibility, because of the juridical organization of today's civil order--all of which set off in a clearer light the incompetence of the state to establish itself as a judge of religious truth.

There can be no peaceful coexistence in the human family in the world today without religious liberty in society.

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Asks Church Bond
Tax-Exempt Status

(9-28-64)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- A U. S. Congressman proposed legislation which he said would put church bonds "on a par" with municipal and state bonds.

Rep. Joe R. Pool (D., Tex.) introduced a bill to provide tax exemption for interest on church bonds used in church building programs. He pointed out that municipal and state bonds are already tax exempt.

"We provide tax exempt status for bonds to build an athletic stadium or sewer system" but tax the "building of churches and sanctuaries," he said.

The Congressman argued that his proposal would "relieve this inequity" by putting church bonds "on a par" with tax-exempt municipal and state bonds."

He said that church bonds are a "tiny business" and the loss in federal revenue by such action would be small. While church bonds generally carry a higher interest rate, Pool said, there has been no default recorded in 25 years and the market is steady.

Pointing out that most bonds are bought by members of the churches, the Congressman said that the interest is paid "by the church from the tithes, contributions and offerings of members and friends of the church."

Calling attention to the church's role in the community, Pool said that most churches have a difficult time with construction programs. Since some churches are in redevelopment or urban renewal areas, tax exemption would make church bonds more appealing to buyers and help churches "keep pace with the renewal program," he stated.

The field of institutional bonds must be expanded, the Congressman said, if churches are to meet their obligations. Making them tax exempt would be encouraging the building of new churches, he said.

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New Orleans Changes
Conference Dates

(9-28-64)

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Date of the 1965 Student Missions Conference at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has been changed from March 5 to March 26-27.

More than 400 college students are expected at this 11th annual conference. It is designed to provide information and inspiration to persons interested in mission service, Seminary President H. Leo Eddleman said.

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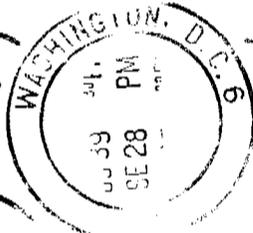
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