

December 16, 1965

Vatican Council Closes With Liberty Statement

EDITOR'S NOTE: For the last three of the four annual sessions of Vatican Council II the Washington regional editor of Baptist Press was in Rome as news reporter to cover the Council. The following is his wrap-up story on the Council that adjourned on December 8.)

By W. Barry Garrett

VATICAN CITY (BP)--From a Baptist point of view, Vatican Council II climaxed its four years of annual sessions by its declaration on religious liberty. However, other actions of the Council also will affect Baptists, as well as Protestantism as a whole.

Upon adjournment of the Council on Dec. 8 Pope Paul VI decreed an "extraordinary jubilee" for the first five months of 1966, to be observed by Roman Catholics around the world. An object of this jubilee is to teach Catholics what was done at Vatican Council II and to seek support for the reforms that are intended.

Sixteen documents were promulgated by the Council, but all of the effects of the assembly are not to be found in these decrees and declarations. Often the "intangibles" are as significant as the official actions. The full impact of the Council, of course, must await the passage of time. Meanwhile, we cannot ignore the obvious.

After weathering four years of furious storms on the subject, the Council finally, by a vote of 2308 to 70, declared that all persons and religious groups have the right of religious liberty. This is a new and official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

The declaration is summed up in this paragraph: "This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such ways that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits."

The Council declared that "the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person." This represents a basic shift from their former view that only truth has rights but error has no rights.

Although this new teaching of the Roman Catholic Church represents a reversal of its historic position and offers much hope for religiously oppressed minorities in Catholic dominated countries, it did not go as far as many had hoped.

It insists that the "one true religion subsists in the Catholic and apostolic church," and that all men are bound to seek the truth concerning God and his church, and when this truth is found to embrace it and to hold fast to it. Nevertheless, no coercion is to be used to achieve this end.

It fails to recognize the contradiction between approving an established state church and the freedom of religion for all men. Nowhere does the declaration advocate the separation of church and state.

In its emphasis on freedom in education the Council advocates a position that leaves the door open for public tax aid to parochial schools. The declaration fails to take into account adequately the rights of children and could be interpreted to hit at public schools as well as education in totalitarian societies. It said:

"The rights of parents are violated if their children are forced to attend lessons or instruction which are not in agreement with their religious beliefs, or if a single system of education, from which all religious information is excluded is imposed upon all."

The neutrality and incompetency of government in religious matters is overlooked by the Council in this statement: "Government, therefore, ought indeed to take account of the religious life of the citizenry and show it favor, since the function of government is to make provision for the common good."

The limitations on freedom suggested by the Council could result in the restriction of religious liberty under certain circumstances. The limitations of freedom are to be imposed when the common welfare, the public peace and the public morality are endangered.

Among other decrees and declarations of the Council of special concern to Baptists include: The Church in the Modern World, Divine Revelation, On Non-Christian Religions, Ecumenism, and the Apostolate of the Laity.

The constitutions on the Church and the Liturgy as well as other decrees have to do with the "internal" structure and work of the Catholic Church. But even these have undertones and will produce by-products that will affect the rest of the Christian world.

Modern World: In this decree the Roman Catholic Church established a precedent by defining its relationship to man in the modern world and its position on most of the major problems that confront him. By this decree the Catholic Church is seeking to establish a rapport with modern man, and to expand its ministry effectively to minister to the whole man.

Divine Revelation: This decree takes steps toward clarification of the relation between tradition and scripture and it moves toward a more vital role of scripture in the life of the church. It declares that easy access to sacred scripture should be provided for all faithful Christians. It urges Catholic teachers, theologians, priests, and church members to extensive and prayerful reading and study of the scriptures. It looks favorably toward a common Bible for all Christians.

Non-Christian Religions: This declaration strikes hard at anti-Semitism and says that Jews of today cannot be held guilty of the deeds done by Jews of the New Testament day who demanded the death of Christ. It calls for dialogue and collaboration with non-Christian religions and "rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions."

Ecumenism: One of the aims of Vatican Council II was "the restoration of unity among all Christians." The decree confesses its share of blame for the division of Christianity, recognizes other believers as Christians, and declares that other communions share in the nature of the church. It sets forth principles for Catholics to follow in dialogue with others and encourages common worship and activity wherever possible.

Laity: Both in the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity and in the Constitution on the Church a new role for lay members of the church is set forth. Heretofore, the clergy has been almost the sole active element in the Catholic Church, but here the laity are described as the "people of God" with the inherent right and responsibilities that this involves. Although the Catholic Church retains its hierarchical structure, a new, active and dynamic role for the lay members is now open.

Among the "intangible" results of the Vatican Council on the Baptist movement can be mentioned the following. Others will become evident as the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the Council becomes more certain.

1. We must re-examine the motivations for our Christian witness. Are we moved by the Spirit and love of God, or are we impelled by fear and the challenges of intercreedal conflict? We must maintain our position in the world on the basis of the merit of our message, principles and performance. Noise, ignorance, misrepresentation and half-truths will not be effective in a clear Christian witness.

2. The polemics of the era following the Council of Trent came to an end with Vatican Council II. The encounter between Roman Catholicism and other Christian faiths now must be conducted on a higher level.

3. Concern for the whole man, for meeting human need, whatever they are and wherever they may be found, will be a growing challenge to all Christians to proclaim and practice a whole gospel.

4. In the dialogue among Christian faiths that will increase in the years ahead, Baptists have something to share with other Christians and others have much of profit to share with Baptists. Baptists can no longer afford to ignore the ecumenical movement. They must know what it is. Effective ways and means for Baptists to communicate with their fellow Christians of all faiths must be discovered. The day of an isolated Christian and of an isolated Christianity is at an end.

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Court Rejects Appeal
For School Prayers

WASHINGTON (BP)--The United States Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal in a case that would require public schools to make provision for religious exercises in the daily school program.

The case had been appealed to the Supreme Court by 15 parents of 21 children ranging from 5 to 11 years of age. The children attend Public School 184 at Whitestone, N. Y. in grades ranging from kindergarten to the sixth.

Religious exercises in the school had been stopped as a result of the Regents Prayer case in 1962 which prohibited official prayers in schools. Since then, the courts also ruled out required Bible reading and recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

The United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, had ordered the school to restore the practice of reciting prayers in classrooms. Later the United States Court of Appeals reversed the decision and sustained the school decision.

The U. S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from this latter decision.

Although this does not mean that the Supreme Court agrees with the arguments and reasoning of the lower court, it does mean that this action may be interpreted to mean the continued prohibition of religious exercises on public school property during school hours.

In his decision against the recital of prayers in public schools, Judge Henry J. Friendly said that the constitutional guarantees for free speech and the free exercise of religion do not compel a state "to permit persons to engage in public prayer in state owned facilities wherever and whenever they desire."

He further said: "Determination of what is to go on in public schools is primarily for the school authorities. Against the desire of these parents that their children 'be given an opportunity to acknowledge their dependence and love to Almighty God through a prayer each day in their respective classrooms,' the authorities were entitled to weigh the likely desire of other parents not to have their children present at such prayers, either because the prayers were too religious or not religious enough;

"And the wisdom of having public educational institutions stick to education and keep out of religion, with all the bickering that intrusion of the latter is likely to produce. The authorities acted well within their powers in concluding that plaintiffs must content themselves with having their children say these prayers before nine or after three."

In their appeal to the courts the parents contended that the state could not "deny children attending public schools the opportunity to voluntarily offer a prayer of their own choosing to God while in school."

They contended that such a ban denied their children of the free exercise of religion and of free speech.

In reply the brief for the school authorities argued: "No substantial constitutional question is presented by the petitioners' contention that the 'free exercise of religion' and 'freedom of speech' provisions of the first amendment of the U. S. Constitution require public school authorities to provide daily prayer periods in the public schools."

They further argued: "What the petitioners in effect are seeking to do is to impose religious practices upon the public schools, and to obtain the aid of the state therefore through the use of the public schools and school personnel. This the respondents are constitutionally prohibited from permitting. And even if the respondents could permit it, they would not be required to do so."

It was pointed out in the brief for the school that the practices being demanded by the parents for their children could not be in the category of voluntary free exercise of religion.

Since the specific prayers involved were offered by kindergarten children from Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Armenian Apostolic homes, the prayers had to be taught and supervised by the school authorities.

Although the parents attempted to make this a test of "Free exercise of religion" in public schools, the courts refused to accept it as such. Thus the case does not involve the question of voluntary religious acts by students for which they might be excused nor does it deal with the question of "voluntary" religious expression in public schools.

On this point Judge Friendly said, "We are not here required to consider such cases as that of a Moslem, obliged to prostrate himself five times daily in the direction of Mecca, or of a child whose beliefs forbid his partaking of milk and cookies without saying the blessings of his faith. So far as appears, the school authorities might well permit students to withdraw momentarily for such necessary observances--or to forego the milk and cookies, just as they excuse children on holidays important to their religions."

This case remains in the category of the place of public schools in providing for religious exercises. The courts have consistently ruled that state agencies have no responsibility to promote or to oppose religion, but they are to remain neutral in matters religious.

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Baptist Public Relations
Group Slaters Conference

12-16-65

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Baptist public relations personnel from throughout the nation are expected here for the annual Baptist Public Relations Association meeting Jan. 19-21.

Meeting at the Hotel Continental and at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here, most of the conferences will be devoted to workshop sessions and interest group meetings designed to help the public relations man solve practical problems.

Principal speakers for the general sessions include Lloyd Wright, director of press and publications for the U. S. Information Agency in Washington; Dan Forrestal, public relations director for Monsanto Chemical Co. in St. Louis and former managing editor of the St. Louis Globe Democrat; Doug Dillard, religious cartoonist and church public relations specialist; Jarrell McCracken, president of Word Records, Inc., of Waco, Tex.; and James L. Sullivan, executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.

Conferences will be held for special interest groups including public relations representatives of Southern Baptist Convention agencies and seminaries; Baptist hospitals; Baptist state conventions; children's homes, colleges, and editors and associates of Baptist publications.

Workshops are scheduled on creative writing, creative communication, institutional journals, brochures and printing, writing religious news, and development.

During an executive symposium, top Baptist executives will give their impressions of public relations problems, and the public relations men will have a chance to react to their bosses' opinions.

Awards for outstanding achievements and production work during the past year will be presented during the association's annual awards dinner.

About 75 public relations workers with Baptist agencies or institutions are expected to attend.

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Baptist School Gets
College Housing Loan

12-16-65

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Baptist university is one of 14 church-related schools approved for college housing loans, according to the Community Facilities Administration of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

John B. Stetson University, a Baptist school in DeLand, Fla., was approved for a \$641,000 loan for construction of a new dormitory. J. Ollie Edmunds is president.

Other church-related schools receiving college housing loans were four Methodist, one Church of God, three Roman Catholic, four Presbyterian, and one American Missionary Association. The loans totaled \$10,502,000.

Sixteen state and private schools received loans totaling \$8,516,000.

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