

# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

In the exchange of greetings and good wishes at the change of the year we use a wide variety of phrases. This year the traditional "Happy New Year" has seemed to be on the decline, giving way to other phrases. Perhaps there is a growing awareness that life has deeper meaning and higher significance than the enjoyment of personal happiness. Certainly among us as Christians, who seek to be in the will of God, the word "happy" needs definition and clarification if it is to convey our thoughtful desires for our fellowmen.

### 1954 IN REVIEW

The year 1954 should go down as another year of world-wide tensions in the area of church-state relations. A brief review of the categories of conflict will help us understand something of the size and the nature of this problem in our day.

I. In a number of predominantly Roman Catholic countries "the Church" (i.e., the ecclesiastical organization as distinguished from personal religion) has sought to stand guard over the culture and the people under its dominance. The closing of Baptist churches in Spain, the removal of church signs and the controversy over legal recognition in Italy, the persecutions in Colombia, and censorship in Quebec come immediately to mind.

During the year the Bureau of Information of the National Catholic Welfare Conference has done us all the favor of explaining how these developments look to Roman Catholic hierarchy here in the United States. The gist of the 15-page carefully worded explanation is carried in this quotation:

"If you are to understand the religious problems in these countries, you must first understand that Catholicism is in the fibre of their existence.

"You must understand, too, they are proud people. This pride can not be called just nationalistic, this is too limited. It is more of a pride in their whole culture. Italians, Spaniards, and Colombians have no delusions about their comparative material progress. They know the United States has made far greater material progress but while they admire and even envy this, they feel their own culture is superior.

"Whether this is true or not, I'm not attempting to argue. They believe it is true and this is the important thing to understand.

"This culture and Catholicism are not two different aspects of their lives, but are inter-twined parts of one. It is in the Catholic church of the village, for instance, that the people have their art treasures. It is the symbol of their culture, their tradition, and their unity.

"If you can understand these things then you can gain some concept of the feelings of these people when non-Catholic foreign missionaries arrive." (Emphasis mine.)

A major clarification regarding the Vatican's views on cultural control came on November 3, 1954, when the Pope addressed twenty-five cardinals and 150 archbishops and bishops. At that time Pope Pius XII denounced as erroneous the belief that "the Church's authority is limited to purely religious matters." Social problems whether purely social or socio-political in their nature were declared to be not "outside the authority and care of the Church."

"Indeed, there are problems outside the social field, not strictly 'religious', political problems, of concern either to individual nations, or to all nations, which belong to the moral order, weigh on the conscience and can, and very often do, hinder the attainment of man's last end. Such are: the purpose and limits of temporal authority; the relations between the individual and society, the so-called 'totalitarian state', whatever be the principle it is based on; the 'complete laicization of the state' and of public life; the complete laicization of the schools; war, its morality, licity or non-licity when waged as it is today, and whether a conscientious person may give or withhold his cooperation in it; the moral relationships which bind and rule the various nations.

"Common sense and truth as well are contradicted by whoever asserts that this and like problems are outside the field of morals and hence are, or at least can be, beyond the influence of that authority established by God to see to a just order and to direct the conscience and actions of men along the path of their true and final destiny." (Emphasis mine.)

The Pope took specific note of an independence movement within the Roman Catholic Church. He condemned in strong terms the tendency among present-day Catholics, both men and women, to "think that the leadership and vigilance of the Church are not to be suffered by one who is grown up."

As reported, the address showed no awareness that individual human beings can be so related personally to God and to their fellow Christians that they discern for themselves the rights and wrongs of moral living. Apparently all that pertains to morality must, according to the Pope, be under the authority of "the Church." We surmise that tensions in this category will not soon subside.

II. In other parts of the world the church-state tensions of 1954 were indicative of efforts on the part of governments to gain some measure of freedom from ecclesiastical control of the national culture. Usually this involves a conflict over public education.

From this viewpoint Argentina has been much in the news recently. It is not our purpose to attempt an evaluation of the Peron regime, or to discuss in detail its relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. Current publicity about the arrests of priests and the legalization of divorce in a predominantly Roman Catholic country has somewhat overshadowed developments affecting the public schools.

A recent government decree tightened control over religious education in the schools by abolishing the National Department of Religious Teaching, the Inspectorate General of Religious Education, and the National Committee of Culture. Transfer of their services to the Ministry of Education ended Church jurisdiction over appointment of teachers of religion and over religious programs in the schools.

The Ministry of Education in Argentina has also announced that beginning with the 1955 school year a lay "spiritual adviser" will be provided for each primary and secondary school. The developments affecting religious instruction are not being accepted without opposition. In a recent editorial El Pueblo, Roman Catholic daily published in Buenos Aires, stated that since religious instruction in Argentina involves the teaching of the Catholic faith, "the Church must therefore intervene."

Similarly, there has been strong opposition from Catholic authorities, from the level of the local priests up through the Pope, over efforts in some West German states to abolish state-subsidized confessional (denominational) schools. Despite protests from both Catholic and Protestant church leaders, the state legislature of Lower Saxony passed a law providing for the conversion of more than 2,000 Catholic and Protestant schools into so-called Community schools.

Developments in Belgium have taken a different form. In December the Belgian Parliament voted to reduce subsidies for the payment of salaries to teachers in religious schools, most of which are operated by the Roman Catholic Church. The new law, which the government claims is necessary for economic reasons, will affect 20,000 teachers, by cutting government subsidies twenty per cent for lay teachers and ten per cent for religious instructors.

Of special interest are the plans which have been announced to reduce government subsidies to mission schools in the Belgian Congo, as well, and to establish 900 new state schools in the colony. The teaching of religion would be banned in the state schools.

Another close church-state association in educational matters has resulted in a difficult situation in South Africa. For many years native education has been largely in the hands of the churches, with the church-operated schools being subsidized fully by the government. Under the new Bantu Education Act, supervision of all ordinary schooling of natives is placed under the federal Native Affairs ministry. Plans have been announced to cut the subsidies of mission schools unwilling to submit to this supervision. A number of mission schools have already closed and more have announced closing dates, partially because of the cut in government subsidies.

A variety of political and social forces are involved in each of the above situations. However, taken together there seems to be a clear trend toward freeing national cultures from the ecclesiastical control

to which they have been subject in a number of places across the waters. Space does not permit us to review the American scene at this time, but there is considerable evidence that we are moving in the opposite direction.

III. In the old "established" state-churches, in which the church has traditionally been subject to state policies, difficulties and embarrassments also developed in 1954.

The Norwegian cabinet and parliament were disturbed throughout the year by the problem of being asked to decide by legal procedures whether "Hell" is a reality.

Norway has a state-church which is centuries old and in which more than 96 per cent of her three million people are members by baptism and confirmation. The church's policies and teachings are under government control.

In 1953 a certain Professor Hallesby preached a radio sermon in which he stressed the condemnation to Hell of all unbelievers. This was news in Norway and the newspapers reported the sermon. A Bishop Schjelderup took exception saying that Christianity is a religion of love in which the Hell concept is incompatible. In due course the "Hell discussion" made its way to the halls of parliament.

A professor of constitutional law at the University of Oslo studied the problem and in a 60-page document concluded that it is the duty of the King (i.e., the Cabinet) to decide if a pastor is teaching according to the confession. A parliamentary committee, on the other hand, concluded that, "It can only find its solution on a spiritual level within the Church itself."

In Sweden difficulties in church-state relations have pertained to a major personnel problem and a difference of opinion on the number of clergymen needed.

The Supreme Administrative Court, a five-man court which deals with cases calling for disciplinary action against State employees, had to decide whether or not a Bishop should be unfrocked. A magistrate's court in Uppsala had found a certain Bishop Helander to be guilty of slander during the 1952 election campaign for a new bishop.

The Administrative Court, however, decided that Helander could retain his title of Bishop and so continue to ordain new clergymen and to officiate at baptisms, marriages, and burials.

The entire incident awakened much discussion regarding the need for independence of the Church and pointed up the weaknesses of the Church's present situation under the government.

The other major problem in Sweden is still open. The Minister of Finance, Per Edvin Skoeld, is reported to have suggested a reduction in the number of clergymen by means of an increase in the size of the parishes. Mr. Skoeld has been quoted as saying that the salary savings involved for the government could well be used to help meet the rising costs of the government's social service program. The proposal has been vigorously attacked by Archbishop Brilioth.