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# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

## BAPTIST JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS



The American Baptist Convention  
The Southern Baptist Convention  
The National Baptist Convention of America  
The National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.  
The North American Baptist General Conference  
The Baptist General Conference of America



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### HAITIAN TREATY WITHDRAWN

On Tuesday, July 23, the Senate received the following communication from the White House:

"It is desired to give further consideration to the treaty of friendship, commerce, and navigation between the United States of America and the Republic of Haiti, which was signed at Port-au-Prince on March 3, 1955, and submitted to the Senate on June 22, 1955."

"I therefore desire to withdraw the aforementioned treaty from the Senate."

Dwight D. Eisenhower."

The Congressional Record for the day made note of the withdrawal and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved on July 30.

That closes a chapter in the State Department's growing experience with the significance of religious liberty. When the treaty was signed at Port-au-Prince March 3, 1955, all was quiet in Haiti and it seemed to our negotiators that the religious liberty of American residents in Haiti could safely be trusted to the constitutional provisions of that nation without further guarantees. Since then that assumption has been called in question by several developments.

First of all, American public opinion, of which the Baptists are a part, did not agree with the Department's assumptions. Even though the Haitian government's record was clear on the

subject of persecution, the protection of the religious liberty of Americans who go abroad seemed to be an important principle which towers above the economic values of trade. The future of our nation's fairly consistent policy with reference to treaties of friendship was at stake.

With the delay of the treaty in the Senate, the State Department recognized that the future negotiations with other countries depended somewhat on the acceptability of the formula used in the treaty with Haiti. This would mean that other countries having concordats with the Vatican, as Haiti does, might well expect to exclude the clauses on religious liberty. Some of these countries have a very poor record with reference to religious liberty.

Finally, the stability in Haiti turned out to be very temporary. Since the previous regime was overthrown in December, 1956, there have been a number of governments, none of which has been able to retain power for more than a brief period of time. At present no one would venture to predict the nature of future policy in Haiti. Perhaps their elections, originally scheduled for last spring but not held yet, will give some answers. The New York Times of July 20, 1957, in reporting that Gen. Antonio Kebreau, head of the group now in power, had declined to set a date for elections, quoted him as saying "elections the country will have, and as soon as possible."

## VALUES INVOLVED

The State Department's interest in protecting the religious liberty of American subjects abroad is not a desire to intervene in the affairs of a foreign country. On the other hand, when the United States government places the freedom of her people on a higher plane than the economic interests, she sets an example of a tradition which is worthy of American ideals and is significant in today's world. A word of commendation is not out of order.

While this treaty was under study your director contributed an analysis of the values of liberty in an article in Liberty, a Magazine of Religious Freedom, fourth quarter, 1956. This said, in part:

"The long-run results of trade, however, are not automatically good. In this activity, as in others, human relations can be either benign or malignant. When traders lack broad humanitarian interest and become narrowly materialistic, imperialism and oppression are the normal results. In this spirit wars are engendered, and human suffering rather than well-being is magnified. If trade is to be beneficial, it must be based on respect for people as God's highest value, and it must be carried out in a spirit of confidence and good will. Unless the right spiritual foundations are present, trade degenerates into mammon's search for 'filthy lucre.'

"The sound promotion of trade, then, must stand on worthy moral foundations. If the exchange of goods is divorced from the exchange of ideas, there is reason to believe that the needed respect for the dignity of man has been lost in the operation. Trade is then malignant, and before long the materialism of those human relationships will fester into sores in the social structure.

"Foreign ideas' have often been viewed as dangerous. Indeed, they have been looked upon as being so dangerous that it is better to forgo the foreign commodities rather than to

risk the contamination of the national mind. Such fears are not irrational. Rather they spring from well-conceived plans by political, economic, or ecclesiastical leaders to spare themselves the competitive appeal of someone else's thoughts. In the interest of entrenchment and control, ignorance becomes desirable, and narrow provincialism becomes sacred loyalty.....

"When cultural differences are vested with the significance and authority of established religion it becomes most difficult to recognize our common humanity. Then the superficial differences of color and dress, of language and the arts, of taste and habit, are magnified into great barriers to communication and understanding. The shade of the shawl or the cut of the coat then becomes cause for suspicion and the ring of the name or the vocabulary of the creed becomes the basis for persecutions and executions."

## COLOMBIAN AFFAIRS

Elections are matters of current interest in several Latin American countries. The five-man military junta ruling Colombia since the ouster in May of former President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla is reported to have called for presidential and congressional elections on May 4, 1958. This move followed serious disturbances in which thousands of demonstrators had demanded the end of military rule, the establishment of civilian authority, and the immediate calling of national elections.

After a recent visit to Colombia, the president of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hannover, Germany, was quoted by Religious News Service, July 9, 1957, as saying that the new foreign minister assured him "that the government would do all in its constitutional power to restore freedom of worship everywhere in Colombia." Despite the attitude of the new government, the bishop said that some local governors and police officials "still take the position that all Protestantism is a heresy which should be driven out of Colombia for the welfare of the people."

An indication of a change in government policy is that one of the largest Protestant churches in the country has been permitted to reopen, after being closed for more than a year.

The Roman Catholic Church is given credit for playing a major part in the overthrow of Dictator Rojas Pinilla and, as a result, its position in the country is stronger than ever. The ruling junta have publicized their Catholicism and have professed profound respect for the hierarchy, promising to work in close relations with them.

According to Time, July 1, 1957, the role played by the Roman Catholic Church is part of a new policy only two years old under which "the church is taking a critical look at its old role as friend of the top dog and is often charting a new, antidictatorial course." This is rooted in the Vatican's conviction that dictatorships and poverty breed Communism. A high Vatican spokesman is quoted as saying, "Experience has taught that a system of freedom is in the end best for church interests. Any privilege that may be gained through a dictatorship is soon more than offset by hatred against the church."

We watch with interest to see how much of this new freedom will be available for our fellow-Protestants in Colombia.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION IN ARGENTINA

At this point the moderate democratic forces appear to have won a victory over the supporters of ex-Dictator Peron in the July 28 elections in Argentina. Members who were elected to the Constituent Assembly will consider the question of reforming the 1853 Constitution. According to Provisional President Aramburu the reforms should be such as to make future dictatorships impossible. In a recent speech, however, he indicated his conviction that the real guarantees needed for the security and progress of all have to be forged in the democratic conscience of each citizen.

Among the provisions of the 1853 Constitution are these points referring to church-state relations: (1) the state gives some economic aid to the Roman Catholic Church; (2) the President and Vice-President must be Roman Catholics; (3) the state has the right to approve pontifical documents and to submit names of candidates for ecclesiastical appointments.

The National Board of the Methodist Church in Argentina issued a statement shortly before the election in which it called "special attention to religious freedom, because it affects other freedoms. We believe that full liberty cannot exist while the state upholds one Church and is linked economically and institutionally to it."

The Baptist Convention of the River Plate, meeting in the industrial city of Avellaneda in May, approved a resolution calling for church-state separation in Argentina. Speakers at the meeting said separation of church and state would signify equality for all creeds and complete neutrality in spiritual matters.

El Pueblo, a Roman Catholic daily published in Buenos Aires, replied that Baptists in Argentina have no reason to "clamor" for religious freedom as they already enjoy it. Religious News Service, May 16, 1957, quoted El Pueblo as saying: "The religious freedom for which the Baptists clamor is already embodied in our magna charta, as is amply shown by the fact that this religious sect enjoys liberty of action in holding public meetings and broadcasting by radio, and has postal facilities."

El Pueblo also criticized those who are opposed to proposals for a concordat with the Vatican to regulate church-state relations. Declaring that these people have a mistaken idea of what a concordat really is, the paper said "such a pact is an effective means of ensuring harmonious collaboration between a free Church and a free State."

Another Protestant voice, the Federation of Protestant Churches of Rio

de la Plata, appealed to the government to withdraw a decree passed in 1948 which required compulsory registration of all non-Roman Catholic religious worship.

As reported by Ecumenical Press Service, June 28, 1957, the Federation said that the government file drawn up as a result of the decree "instead of being a means of information, is in practice a means of supervision." Affirming that the request for repeal did not imply refusal to give statistical information to the competent authorities, the request declared: "We have nothing to conceal; our churches keep their doors open to all who wish to enter them, and it will give us the greatest satisfaction if our fellow-citizens know us and know our doctrines."

The friends of religious liberty throughout the world will be much interested in the deliberations of the newly elected Constituent Assembly during the coming months, as it considers proposed reforms in the Argentine Constitution.

#### A "CHRISTIAN FRONT"

Turning to Europe, we find West Germany also preparing to hold general elections, on September 15. There, too, church-state relations are in the foreground.

The role of the church in politics was brought into prominence early in June when Bishop Michael Keller of Muenster told a meeting of the Catholic Trade Union Movement that no practicing Catholic could, in good conscience, vote for the Social Democratic Party in the coming election. Since the over-all philosophy of the Social Democratic Party, which has its roots in Marxism but closely parallels the British Labor Party, is in opposition to Roman Catholic beliefs, Catholics cannot support its political candidates, the bishop said.

Earlier Roman Catholic lay organizations had been instructed to concentrate on the reelection of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the Christian Democratic

Union, which he heads. The party, predominantly Roman Catholic but containing a Protestant minority, dominates the present coalition government.

Among the challengers of the position expressed by the bishop were the Roman Catholic members of the League of Christian Socialists, a Social Democratic group made up of both Protestants and Catholics. They said any Catholic was allowed to vote for the Social Democrats as long as his conscience was not bound by an official declaration by the Pope in favor of a specific party.

The Evangelical Church, which includes most of the Protestants of West Germany, refused to take a position in the 1953 general election and has refrained from participating in the present campaign.

Some Evangelical groups, however, have spoken out against the use of the word "Christian" in connection with political parties. One statement said that it is contrary to the Gospel to "mix the name of Christ with certain political opinions and interests." It charged the Christian Democratic Union with increasingly "turning political controversies into an ideological battle in which all Christians are to be consolidated into a 'Christian Front.'" As a result, "all those holding different political views are being branded as non-Christians and even anti-Christians."

Leaders of the Free Democratic Party, third largest political group, appealed to both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches to stay aloof from the election campaign. They charged that the Christian Democratic Union had tried to give the impression that the policy of the coalition government, which it dominates, "is identical with God's plans." Therefore, the churches should make it clear that they regard religion and the triumph or failure of the Christian Democratic Union "as two things which have nothing to do with each other." It would be a sad thing for the churches, the appeal said, "if their existence depended on election returns."