

Intervention of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, 20 September 1965

The schema on liberty pleases me greatly. Allow me to humbly share with you the experience of nearly 60 years of priestly apostolate exercised in every country at the service of young workers today.

The solemn and clear proclamation of the juridical religious liberty of all people in all countries of the world seems to me to be an urgent need.

First Reason: Peaceful Unification of a Pluralist World

The world today is tending more and more towards unity and conflicts between nations and cultures must disappear progressively.

As John XXIII stated so admirably in *Pacem in Terris*, our great task is to unite ourselves with all men of good will to build a more human world together based on “**truth, justice, liberty and love**”. And the fundamental condition for people to live together peacefully and to collaborate fruitfully is a sincere respect for religious liberty.

The fact of not respecting the philosophical and religious convictions of others is increasingly felt by them as a sign of mistrust in a matter considered as sacred and personal to the highest degree. Such an attitude makes mutual confidence impossible and without this there can be no true community life and no effective collaboration.

On the other hand, if mutual confidence reigns, it creates the possibility for very joyful collaboration not only on the scientific and technical planes but also on the social, cultural, pedagogical and moral levels.

If the Church can pronounce itself unambiguously in favour of religious liberty, people everywhere will have confidence in her and recognise that she wishes to participate in building a more human and more united world. If on the other hand, this declaration should be rejected, great hopes will evaporate, especially among young people.

Second Reason: Efficacy of Apostolic, Missionary and Ecumenical Action

In a world on the path of unification, the presence of the Church among people must necessarily take a new form which could be compared to the dispersion of the people of Israel after the captivity of Babylon.

In the greater part of the world Christians are a small minority. In order to fulfil its mission, the Church cannot base itself on temporal, political, economic or cultural power as in the Middle Ages or under colonial regimes. It can only count on the power of the word of God, evangelical poverty, the purity of its witness, manifested in the authentically Christian life of lay people, and also on the esteem of the peoples among whom the Church wishes to live and witness to its faith. And this esteem of the people is nothing other than what we have described as religious liberty. But how can the Church hope to benefit from religious liberty in countries where it is a

minority if the Church itself fails to loudly proclaim or to practise religious liberty in the countries where it is in the majority?

This proclamation of religious liberty is important not only for the efficacy of apostolic and missionary action in general but it is also the condition *sine qua non* of the ecumenical movement.

We know that all our non-Catholic brothers consider this declaration as a step which must be taken in order to arrive at a sincere and effective ecumenism.

Third Reason: The Educational and Pedagogic Value of Religious Liberty

The schema speaks of the right of the person and of communities to religious liberty. This juridical liberty is not an end in itself. It is a necessary means for education in liberty in its fullest sense, which leads to interior liberty, or liberty of the soul by which a man becomes an autonomous being, responsible before society and God, ready if necessary to obey God rather than men.

This interior liberty, even if it exists in germ in every human creature as a natural gift, requires a long education which can be summarised in three ways: see, judge and act. If, thanks be to God, my sixty years of apostolate have not been in vain, it is because I have never wanted young people to live in shelter from dangers cut off from the milieu of their life and work; rather I have shown confidence in their freedom in order to better educate that freedom. I helped them to see, judge and act by themselves, by undertaking social and cultural action themselves, freely obeying authorities in order to become adult witnesses of Christ and the Gospel, **conscious of being responsible** for their sisters and brothers in the whole world. In our world in the process of unification, it is not possible to educate young people in glass houses, cutting them off from the real world. Many people lose the faith because they have been given a childish education. It is only by means of a solid education of interior freedom that our young people will be able to become adult Christians.

Objections

Some will object that freedom involves a number of dangers: indifferentism, diffusion of errors, abuse of the ignorance of the masses and of the passions. Here is my answer:

1. I am conscious of these dangers. Some certainly will abuse religious liberty; but these risks are lesser than those which arise from the suppression or the oppression of religious freedom. "Absolutist regimes" - even those which claim to serve the Church - where social pressure is substituted for personal formation, favor anti-clericalism and in fact incite the masses to revolt against the faith and the Church.
2. The dangers inherent in a regime of freedom must be faced in a positive manner, for example by a frank and sincere international agreement between civil and religious authorities; but above all by **the formation and human, moral and religious education** thanks to which young people and adults become **conscious of their own responsibilities**.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to propose the following :

This Vatican Council must conclude with a solemn and magnificent act by Pope Paul VI in union with all the Fathers. This act should solemnly proclaim religious liberty. It should request all confessions, all ideologies, all authorities and institutions to unanimously maintain and protect religious liberty, defining the requirements of public order in a correct and honest manner as well as seeking to implement the means for effectively protecting religious freedom.

I have finished. Thank you.

Joseph Card. Cardijn