

# Problems of Religious Liberty <sup>112</sup>

THE United Nations has proposed that a declaration be drawn up on the principles of religious liberty. One might have expected this to be welcomed, at least by the churches. But a warning has come almost at once from Dr. Nolde of the Churches Commission on International Affairs. He says that such a declaration, taken out of its context as it most certainly would be, could have the effect of limiting religious freedom.

He has examined the proposed text and points out some significant omissions. Among them are references to social ostracism, valid forms of marriage, divorce, the right of access to public posts or functions, the management of religious affairs and the international fellowship of the churches. Without clear reference to these important matters, a declaration on religious liberty would do more harm than good.

Dr. Nolde says that the proposed declaration deals more with "The formality than the vitality of religion." In particular it contains no reference to the freedom to perform acts of service and mercy or the right to give testimony of conscience against the state. A strong word that from Dr. Nolde. It comes at a time when the W.C.C. has just published an important booklet on **Roman Catholicism and Religious Liberty**. The booklet bears witness to a growing dissatisfaction within the R.C. Church with its traditional policy. R.C. principles are

fairly clear. they traditionally state that "error" must not be free to propagate or to be propagated.

The shift in R.C. practise is noted. At least, many leading R.C. laymen are pressing for a fair and rightful application of this principle of limiting religious freedom.

Perhaps the best proposals were made long ago by Maritain. First religious freedom should only be limited for "temporal" reasons, "for the common welfare of the civil society" not to protect the Church.

Second, they must be applied equally to all churches, without any discrimination.

This is an important booklet, coming at a time when the limitations on religious freedom in many countries are seriously called in question by R.C.'s and Protestants alike. It is reflected in a recent Italian Court of Appeal which ruled that Protestant denominations are free to criticize the R.C. Church publicly, so long as the criticism is not insulting.

## Versatile Barth

KARL BARTH has recently celebrated his 74th birthday in his native city of Basle, where he has been professor of theology for some years past. The fifth centenary of the university of Basle is to be commemorated shortly. Three books evaluating his work in French have been published. Two are by Protestant clergymen, Georges Casalis,

who returned to Strasbourg after having been in charge of the French Reformed Church in Berlin, and M. Jean Bosc. A Jesuit theologian Father Boutillard has followed the Swiss historian Urs von Balthazar in showing the seriousness with which such a redoubtable exponent of the Reformation as Barth can be treated by enlightened Roman Catholics.

These three books are mentioned in the French Protestant weekly **Reforme**. M. Albert Finet, the Editor, points out that Barth has been keenly interested in politics ever since he was a young pastor in charge of a Swiss parish. Rarely however has he made observations on the political scene in print. The collection of essays "Against the Stream" (S.C.M. Press) includes indeed some comments of his on the Church-State relations in post-war Hungary.

In the Chicago weekly **Christian Century** Reinhold Niebuhr challenged Barth to comment on the 1956 rising in Hungary suppressed by Soviet armed intervention. Barth declined, adroitly suggesting that his American challenger was trying to put the skids under him on thin ice!

For all his prudent caniness Barth is more versatile than is commonly supposed by his critics. His "Letter to a Pastor in East Germany," written after welcoming a number of young ordinands from there in his home in Basle, has already been discussed in **The British Weekly**.

und auch "Mozart" (1956)

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