

Cardinal Says Church Supports Democracy, Religious Liberty

By Franziskus Cardinal Koenig
(Cardinal Koenig, author of this article on the Church and democracy, is Archbishop of Vienna and one of the leading figures in the Second Vatican Council. He visited the United States earlier this year.)

Throughout her history the Catholic Church has lived in and been obliged, to a certain extent, to collaborate with remarkably diverse societies.

She has existed in feudal states and city-republics, under absolute monarchies and dictatorships. And inevitably, because the Church is a church of men, she has adapted herself to and to an extent accepted these various social structures.

But even in times of persecution, when cooperation with the state was impossible, the Church did not give way to opportunism and modify either her fundamental structure or her message of salvation. Nor has she ever given her approval to injustice, but at most has suffered and endured.

In the modern world the Church openly and honestly supports democracy in many nations. This is not opportunism nor is it a mere compromise with those who are presently in power. Rather, it is the way in which the Church fulfills her mission by using the means of the times.

DEMOCRACY is not the only possible way of life. It is not the only possible form of society in which the Church can live and carry on her mission. But is it the best form of society for the modern world.

Today it is considered fashionable, even by many Catholics, to criticize the Church of the past for excessive attachment to her environment. The Church is held responsible for everything bad in a particular historical era—as "goodness" and "badness" are determined with the advantage of hindsight.

But is not this form of intellectual arrogance? The suffering, struggling Church in her earthly form has always been a Church of human beings, whose view is obscured, whose wills are led astray, whose thought is closely tied up with this world.

In her human aspect, the Church is a rather conservative institution—that is, she seeks to preserve certain forms to which she has become accustomed. This is undeniably paradoxical, for the message entrusted to the Church is after all the most revolutionary imaginable. Indeed, in such conservatism there is a certain lack of confidence in the assistance promised

to the Church by her Divine Founder.

SUCH TENDENCIES have often during the centuries involved the Church in struggles which were not hers to defend social forms to which she had grown accustomed. This struggle has taken place not only externally—between the Church and outside adversaries—but internally as well. Those who point to new ways of life have always encountered difficulties; only once in centuries does the Church have a pope like John XXIII, who with his own hands opens the door to the future—and even John XXIII was not understood by everyone, including some within the Church.

This tendency toward conservatism was apparent in the 19th century in the Church's attitude toward democracy. In many cases the Church could see in the self-proclaimed democrat only an enemy, a burner of monasteries—and indeed many of the democrats of that period left no doubt that was the way they wanted to be looked upon.

But the need to defend herself against that kind of democracy actually caused the Church to make use of the forms of democracy herself. In fighting secular liberalism and atheistic Marxism, the Church inspired the organization of democratic mass political parties.

It is easy enough today to say that the Church thereby made a mistake. But at the time, what else could the Church, considered in her human aspect and influenced by the ideologies of the era, have done?

TODAY the Church is without government, party, or social privilege. She has only her faithful. And this is certainly as it should be.

The Church in a certain sense has always been at bottom democratic, because she has recognized the absolute and essential equality of all men arising from their status as children of God with immortal souls. If in the past the Church gave more attention to the soul of a king than to the soul of a laborer, it was not because she considered the king's soul more valuable but because she hoped to reach the soul of the common man through his ruler.

In our times the Church has frequently been accused of accepting and supporting democracy, tolerance and religious freedom only in places where Catholics are a minority; wherever the Church enjoys majority status, it is said, she seeks absolute power.

This is a serious accusation, and there is certainly some historical evidence which would seem to support it. Catholics may not respond to it merely with counter-charges. It involves a serious theological question, and as such it will have a large place in the coming session of the ecumenical council.

LOOKING AHEAD, one may predict that the Church will conclude that, without abandoning her claim to possess the truth and to have a mission to spread it, she can accept for all others the religious liberty which she demands for herself. In all times and places she can respect the religious, and even nonreligious, convictions of every individual. This is not a surrender to relativism; behind it, rather, lies the conviction that truth is stronger than secular power.

Christian political action does not mean waiting for the orders of the bishop or campaigning under the banner of the Church; rather, it means bringing to politics a sense of Christian responsibility.

It is the Church's job to encourage and strengthen this sense of responsibility—but not to suggest specific political solutions. Even Christian responsibility may result in different solutions to the same problem. A policy is not good because it calls itself Christian, but it may speak of its Christian responsibility if it is good. And how is one to determine this "good?" The answer of Scripture is still best: "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew, 7, 16).

Thirteen Named To Dean's List At Belmont Abbey

Thirteen Catholic students from North Carolina have been named to the Dean's List for the second semester at Belmont Abbey College, Belmont, N.C.

William R. Bernish, Jr. of Charlotte ranked eighth and Thomas P. Schlunz of Brevard ranked fifteenth in the senior class.

Joe Fitzsimmons of Charlotte ranked fifth in the junior class.

Joseph Alan Willis of Winston-Salem ranked fourth, James Roy King of Greensboro ranked sixth, and John R. George of Charlotte ranked fifteenth in the sophomore class.

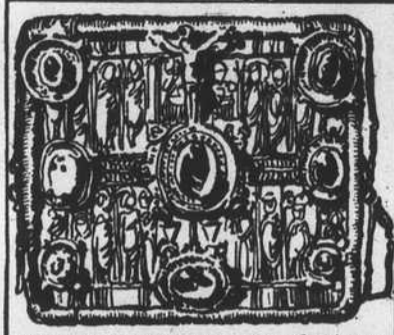
In the freshman class of 190 students, Terrell C. Estes of Winston-Salem ranked first, David C. Van Zile of Belmont ranked second, John L. Blaney of Mt. Pleasant ranked fifth, Paul A. Bernish of Charlotte ranked fifth, Paul E. Bruchon, Jr. of Gastonia ranked seventh, Frederick T. Field, Jr. of Raleigh ranked tenth, and Robert D. McDonnell of Belmont ranked twelfth.

STRANGE BUT TRUE

Little-Known Facts for Catholics
By M. J. MURRAY
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