

Bishops Defer Action On 'Selective Objection'

Washington, D.C. —(RNS)—The American Catholic bishops deferred action until April on a recommendation that they collectively support "selective" conscientious objectors who refuse to serve in wars they consider unjust.

However, just prior to the general meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops here (Nov. 16 to 20), the administrative board of the U.S. Catholic Conference agreed by a 24 to 1 vote to file a brief in the U.S. Supreme Court in behalf of a Catholic "CO" seeking selective exemption from the draft. The USCC is the nationwide administrative arm of the U.S. Catholic bishops.

In a press briefing Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, general secretary of the USCC and NCCB, said the bishops sent the declaration on selective CO's back to the USCC Division on World Peace and Justice for redrafting.

He indicated that the document, which was submitted to the bishops just prior to their meeting, will be resubmitted at the April semi-annual bishops' meeting.

The declaration is unprecedented in that it urged that "general amnesty" be granted to those imprisoned or self-exiled because of their beliefs on certain wars.

It also called for an end to peacetime military draft and urged pastors and Catholic educators to provide draft informa-

tion and counseling services for youth.

The declaration goes beyond the bishops' initial statement on conscientious objection issued at the November 1968 meeting which recognized two traditions in the Catholic Church regarding war on conscience — the pacifist tradition of the first centuries of Christianity and the "just war" theory. It only recommended that it be studied with an eye toward making conscientious objection legally possible.

In the matter of filing a "friend of the court" brief in support of a "selective" CO slated to appeal before the U.S. Supreme Court, the administrative board of the USCC voted 24-1 in favor of the motion. That action did not need approval of the NCCB's general membership.

The Supreme Court case has already received legal support from the National Council of Churches and the American Jewish Congress, although submission of the USCC brief may hinge on further developments.

Commenting on the action Msgr. Marvin Bordelon, acting head of the USCC's World Peace and Justice Committee, said this is the first instance in which an official agency of the American Catholic Church has agreed to file a brief in a conscientious objection case.

Observing that the traditional Catholic "sensitivity" on the issue of war and peace had been predominantly on the "hawk

side" until the 1960s, Msgr. Bordelon asserted that a "whole new sensitivity has arisen," and was first noted by the bishops in their 1968 statement.

Catholics to Join NCC Unit

Washington, D.C. — (RNS) — Nine Roman Catholics will become members of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches, with the endorsement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

At the international level, the Vatican authorized the membership of nine Catholics on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in 1968.

Membership in both commissions is by individuals who represent their Churches. The present membership on the NCC Faith and Order Commission is 50.



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Direct Aid to Parents Of Parochial Students To Be Re-Proposed

Albany—(RNS) — A controversial bill proposing direct aid to parents of children attending private and parochial schools will be resubmitted at the next session of the State Legislature with some modifications "but no substantial changes."

While the bill failed to reach the floor of either house of the legislature in 1970, it has generated more emotional impact and debate than any of the previous measures aimed at easing the financial crises in non-public schools.

Proposing direct tuition aid, the bill has provided for a maximum grant of \$150 for each student attending a non-public school with the amount depending upon the parents' income.

State Assemblyman Alfred D. Lerner (R-Queens), principal sponsor of the bill in the Assembly told newsmen he would re-introduce the measure with only minor revisions.

He said it was too early to pinpoint the modifications, but indicated that the main features of the tuition-grant proposal would remain intact.

It was estimated during the last legislative session that the bill would cost the state around \$69 million for the first full year of operation. But sponsors have maintained that a complete shutdown of Catholic schools alone would cost the state \$4.5 billion.

The 1971 legislature also will be faced with a decision on the "dual enrollment" (shared timed) plan advanced by the State Board of Regents. This would require local boards of education to admit pupils from non-public high schools to certain classes in grades 10

through 12.

A spokesman for Catholic education in the state said this approach would benefit some non-public school students but could not be construed as a "panacea" for Catholic school relief.

L. Alan Davitt executive secretary of the Catholic School Superintendents Council, commended the Regents for clarifying the "right of our children to participate on a part-time basis in public schools."

The limited dual-enrollment proposal, he said, would be of "potential benefit to those children who have specific needs for those programs of vocational training which have been unavailable up to now.

However, Davitt added, it is not a means of alleviating "in any significant way the present, tremendous fiscal crisis in non-public schools."

He indicated Catholic school leaders are looking to such proposals as the tuition-grant bill, which they compare with the state's program of scholar incentive aid for college-level students.

The so-called Blaine Amendment, the state's constitutional restriction on financial aid to church-related institutions, still stands in the way. A move to repeal the Blaine Amendment was advanced in 1970 when both houses of the legislature voted to strike it from the state constitution.

But the repeal motion must again be passed by the legislature in 1971 and then submitted to the public in a referendum, making late 1972 the earliest possible time that public funds could be distributed if Blaine is repealed.

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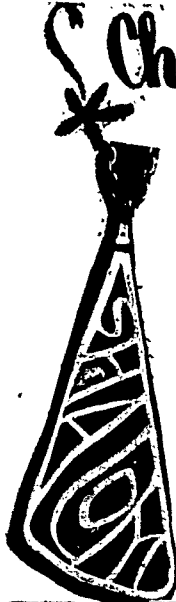


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