

# Ford on Amnesty, Religious Leaders Divided

By RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE  
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American religious leaders are divided on President Ford's plan of "earned" pardon for draft resisters and military deserters.

Advocates of unconditional amnesty — no strings attached — are sharply disappointed by the Ford plan. "Cosmetic action," exclaimed an official of the United Church of Christ, a denomination that strongly backs total amnesty.

The five prelates who compose the Executive Committee of the U.S. Catholic Conference "greatly welcomed" the President's initiative, adding a hope that a Clemency Board, set up to review certain cases, will "be generous" in considering the situations of resisters and deserters.

Religious leaders cannot accept the President's plan as the final word," said Dr. Herman Will, the top peace executive of the United Methodist Church. "They should continue to press for the kind of generous action needed to bring genuine reconciliation to our national life."

Dr. Carl F.H. Henry, a prominent evangelical theologian, advocated a program similar to that announced by Mr. Ford shortly after the new President indicated August that he favored "leniency" for resisters and deserters.

Any measure of re-entry should provide "compensatory justice with redemptive mercy in a manner not breaking faith with prisoners of war and those who took military service," Dr. Henry said.

Alternate service is one of the most controversial requirements in President Ford's program. The selective service will administer alternate service in much the same way that it handles work for conscientious objectors.

Despite conflicting religious reaction to alternate service, churches are taking steps to help provide the jobs needed by resisters and deserters who wish to rejoin mainstream society by responding to President Ford's offer.

Many church agencies and institutions — especially hospitals, community centers, orphanages and facilities for the elderly — already hold alternate service status. The Catholic Conference executive panel called on all Catholic agencies to volunteer as sites for alternate service.

Dr. Howard Spragg, head of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, said his organization would help find suitable alternate service, even though his denomination remains committed to unconditional amnesty.

Many Protestant, Catholic and Jewish groups and individuals have long held that the U.S. should simply forget violations of either draft laws or military statutes during the Vietnam war era. Such an action would mean the so-called "draft exiles" and deserters abroad would be able to return home unimpeded, without alternate service, men in jail freed and records of convictions expunged.

The argument for unconditional amnesty is based

primarily on an appeal to conscience. Large numbers of the resisters and deserters believed that the Vietnam war was immoral, but were unable to qualify as CO's because they did not object to all wars. (Only universal objection is recognized under U.S. law)

Those who favor earned pardon say that resisters and deserters violated the law and, therefore, must show contrition and perform work in lieu of military service to gain re-entry into society.

Critics of earned pardon maintain that it is unthinkable to require a person to confess wrongdoing or perform work to compensate for a moral act done in conscience.

"It is clear that the majority of persons in need of amnesty will find it impossible both to apply for this (Ford) program and at the same time maintain their integrity," said Louis W. Schneider, head of the American Friends Service Committee.

The Christian Century, a weekly ecumenical magazine, says that earned pardon is ironic, meaning "a man's willingness to accept earned re-entry will be inversely related to his conviction that the war was immoral."

President Ford said in his proclamation that "desertion in time of war is a major, serious offense; failure to respond to the country's call for duty is also a serious offense."

But he added, "Reconciliation among our people does not require that these acts be condoned. Yet, reconciliation calls

for an act of mercy to bind the nation's wounds and to heal the scars of divisiveness."

Draft exiles and deserters in Canada, where the largest number are concentrated, reacted coolly to the President's offer. Persons in jail for resistance — 95 persons — when the proclamation was issued had more favorable views. They were furloughed to enable them to apply for pardon.

Re-entry provisions for resisters and deserters, convicted and unconvicted, vary. Alternate service is required of unconvicted resisters and draft evaders in jail. All military deserters are not, however, forced to accept alternate service. At one stage in the procedures for deserters, an undesirable discharge is issued; then later exchanged for a clemency discharge when alternate service is completed.

If an individual deserter is willing to keep the undesirable discharge, he would not be required to finish alternate service, according to a government interpretation of the President's plan.

Men already holding undesirable discharges from the Vietnam war period may apply to the Clemency Board, headed by former New York Sen. Charles Goodell, for a recommendation of clemency discharge upon completion of alternate service.

Not surprisingly, President Ford's decision extending earned pardon to draft and military offenders became closely linked to his "full, free and absolute pardon" of any crime committed by former President Nixon while

in the White House.

Trying to link the Nixon pardon and the amnesty issue "befuddles" questions of justice and mercy, according to Dr. Henry. The evangelical theologian thinks there is sufficient grounds for earned pardon within the Vietnam war situation itself. "If military deserters failed the nation... the nation too failed to make its commitment to the war — a war it did not intend to win," he said.

The Christian Century has also divided the Nixon pardon and the amnesty issue. "To relate these acts," the Century said, "is grossly unfair because Mr. Nixon's illegal acts involved secret violations of the law in a climate of deceit, while Vietnam war resisters and deserters openly violated Selective Service laws (or military codes) in a climate of protest."

Statistics on the number of men who qualify for re-entry under the President's plan are estimates at best. Guesses on how many draft-exiles live in Canada, Sweden or clandestinely in the U.S. run from the low thousands to 100,000.

Some 8,700 persons have been convicted of draft offenses, and 4,060 are under indictment, according to government figures. About 130 resisters are now on furlough from jail sentences or are out on appeal. Deserters in jail, according to reports, total 660, while some 12,500 are still at large.

The men have until the end of January 1975 to apply for pardon under the Ford plan. Meanwhile, debate on amnesty is sure to continue.



Checkpoint Charlie

Photo by Bruce Genut

Signing in at one of the checkpoints for the Our Lady of Lourdes' School Walk for Missions are (l.) Mary Jo Touhey and Patty Creary. At right is Ellen Coyne, a worker for the walk which netted \$500 last year. Sponsors of the 270 walkers pay for each trip completed around the school property.

## Faculties Granted to Rome Visitors

Vatican City [RNS] — All visiting Roman Catholic priests who have faculties to hear confessions in their home dioceses and who are "free of canonical impediments" will be empowered to hear confessions in any parish in Rome during the 1975 Holy Year. The announcement was made here by the office of the Vicariate of Rome.

The only exceptions to the general permission will be the use of "specially reserved" confessionals in Rome's major basilicas — St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major, St. Paul's Outside-the-Walls, and St. Peter's — though other confessionals in these churches may be used.

Any visiting priest will be allowed to celebrate Mass in any of Rome's churches and chapels,

provided he possesses a valid ecclesiastical document known as a "Celebret."

This document, meaning "let him celebrate," is signed by the priest's local bishop or religious superior stating that the owner is a priest in good standing and is free to offer Mass. Without such a document, permission to offer Mass may be refused him in a church where he is a stranger.

## Pope Urges Catholics To Strike Balance In Action Prayer

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul issued a strong appeal to Catholics to strike a balance between the "inner activity" of reflection, prayer and contemplation, and the "exterior action" of good works, interest in one's neighbor and active interest in social questions.

He also warned against man's tendency to divorce human activities from any laws whatsoever and to apply the "fashionable" interpretation of the Mystery of Christ "only" as the man, for others and the evangelical message "only" as an invitation to love one's neighbor.

Speaking his weekly general audience, the pontiff said that "you are being received by the Pope with great affection and with great reverence. Each one of you is a Christian and each one of you is a citizen of the Church, each one of you is a son and each one of you is a brother."

"We therefore welcome you as belonging to the family of the Catholic Church," he said, adding that the Church today "has need of action."

"By this we mean inner activity — the activity of thought, reflection, prayer and contemplation," he pointed out.

Then he observed that the Church "also needs exterior action, the action of good works, interest in one's neighbor, and an active interest in social questions."

Pope Paul said that action is the "cause and proof and consequence of dynamic life" and that the Church must be a living and faithful representation of such life in the spiritual realm. "Church action gives value to time and our salvation comes to fruition in time occupied by good works," he added.

Stressing that "the activity which must characterize our existence is not any kind of action," the Pope said "rather it is human activity that is in accordance with reason as the eternal law of God."

He noted that another important aspect of activity is "motivation" and said "it is not sufficient to have a purely human or sociological motivation. It is from the love of God, from religious consciousness that our activity has its profound reason and existence."

Pope Paul then said that today there is a tendency to "free" human activities from all laws, which in turn widens the legitimacy of actions to "indeterminate permissiveness." He affirmed that such permissiveness must be condemned, because it "does not lead to truly human expressions, even less it is truly Christian."

Turning to another modern "current" of thought which seeks to divorce man's activities from their so-called "vertical" or spiritual relationship to God and to "put in their place an exclusively 'horizontal' or purely sociological motivation," Pope Paul declared:

"This mentality is becoming fashionable and it is applied even to the Mystery of Christ seen only as the 'man for others' and to the Gospel message considered only as an 'invitation to love one's neighbor.'"

"It is our love of God," the Pope emphasized, "that enables us to love our neighbor. It is the Fatherhood of God that makes us recognize the universal brotherhood of man. Faith of God that makes us recognize the universal brotherhood of man. Faith and love are a motive for us in the activity of our Christian love."