

Vatican-Moslem Dialogue Ends in Dispute

Vatican City (RNS) — The Vatican has formally rejected the anti-Zionist, anti-Israel statements contained in a document issued at the close of an Islamic-Christian conference in Tripoli, Libya.

The recommendations — numbers 20 and 21 — of the declaration, which was issued by the Islamic delegation, but not signed by the Vatican delegation, condemn Zionism as "a racial aggressive movement," affirm "the national rights of the Palestinian people and their right to return to their homeland," and declare "the Arabism of the city of Jerusalem."

In a statement issued here Feb. 11, Archbishop Giovanni Benelli, Deputy Secretary of the Vatican Secretariat of State, said that paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Tripoli declaration had been examined by "competent Vatican authorities."

"The Holy See," he said, "declares that it cannot accept these two articles because their content does not respond substantially to the position, known to all, of the Holy See."

Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli, president of the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians, which co-sponsored the seminar with the Libyan government, declared in a

statement, upon his return from Tripoli to Rome, that he "disassociated" himself, "not only as a Vatican representative, but as a Christian" from the position taken in the two recommendations "by our Moslem brothers."

He added that "the contents" of the two recommendations were to be "transmitted" to the authorities of the Holy See (presumably the Secretariat of State) who alone have competence in this matter, since "political elements" enter into it.

A highly informed Vatican source said here that the Holy See was privately "mortified" by the "misunderstanding" involved in the issuing of a document containing such "political" statements, but was trying to prevent the incident from "compromising" what it regards as "the basically positive achievements at the religious level" of the Tripoli seminar.

As for "explanations" as to how such "explosive and controversial" so-called "resolutions" found their way into the final formulation, the source said, the Vatican delegation to the conference, "understandably" wants to avoid charging bad faith on the part of the Muslim participants or admitting incompetence or naivete on its own part.

Earlier, in Tripoli, Msgr. Pietro Rossano, vice-president of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Rapport with Islam, and a leader of the Vatican delegation to the seminar, told newsmen that his colleagues had "grave reservations" regarding the two resolutions on Zionism and the Palestinians.

Recommendation number 20 (also called a resolution, although it was not subject to any vote on the part of the Vatican delegation) reads as follows:

"The two sides look upon the heavenly religions with respect and accordingly they distinguish between Judaism and Zionism, the latter being a racial aggressive movement, foreign to Palestine and the Eastern region."

Recommendation (resolution) number 21 — also not subject to any Vatican delegation vote — says: "Adherence to truth, justice, and peace, and belief in the rights of peoples for self-determination prompt the two sides to affirm the national rights of the Palestinian people and their right to return to their homeland, and to affirm the Arabism of the city of Jerusalem and the rejection of (its) Judaization, partition, and internationalization."

"(The two sides) denounce all violation of all sacred places. (They) demand the setting free of all the detainees in occupied Palestine . . . and ask for the liberation of all (Israeli) occupied lands, and call for the formation of a permanent commission to investigate the alteration of sacred Moslem and Christian sites and reveal this to world public opinion."

The aim of the Islamic-Christian dialogue, according to the prologue of the declaration, was "to create mutual confidence between the Moslem and Christian worlds, with a view to eliminating sediments of remoteness, struggle, and colonialism left from past ages, to

explore the real causes thereof and take mutual efforts to eradicate them, and to construct bridges of understanding and cooperation among believers of the two religions."

The series of 24 resolutions and recommendations included affirmations of the primacy of religious belief, censures of all forms of racial and religious

discrimination, a call for an end to arms production, and suggestions for the rooting out of mutual Islamic-Christian prejudices and misunderstanding.

Though billed as an Islamic-Christian dialogue between two delegations representing each side, the Christian delegation headed by Vatican prelates was exclusively Roman Catholic.

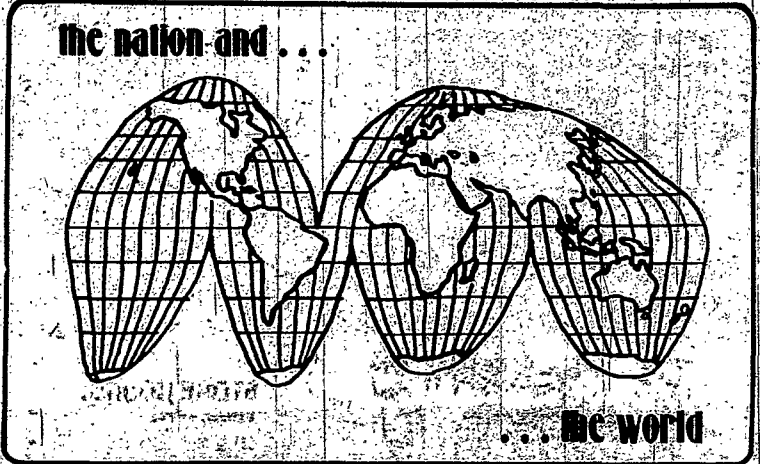
Lay Group Proposes Morality Campaign

A "Pastoral Plan on Chastity and Modesty" based on the recent Vatican Declaration on sexual morality has been proposed by Catholics United for the Faith (CUF).

The lay group, which claims 13,000 members in the United States, plus several chapters in Canada, presented its plan last week to the administrative committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The CUF likened its proposed program to the pro-life campaign the bishops launched last November.

It would lead to "a mobilization of Catholics against legalized obscenity and pornography similar to the mobilization the Catholic bishops have already called for against legalized abortion."

Priests should be encouraged to preach on chastity and modesty, the CUF memorandum said, and Catholic schools should become "pre-eminently places where these virtues are taught." There should be adult education courses for "the present generation, which has allowed public moral standards to sink so low."



On the life front, Ronald Reagan, campaigning for the Republican nomination for President, has said again that he supports a Constitutional amendment that would outlaw abortion except to safeguard the life of the mother. Irish Catholic bishops are considering setting up a special agency to deal with abortion. It is expected they will launch a major anti-abortion campaign in the next few weeks. Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan of Worcester has stated his opposition to the restoration of the death penalty as "counterproductive to the pro-life stand of the Church." Legislation that would curtail abortions performed at public expense has been forced to the calendar of the Wisconsin Assembly for action, but the calendar is crammed with bills that have precedence. And in New York, The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and the Long Island Coalition for Life have filed two suits challenging existing government policies on abortion and fetal experimentation. The first suit contends that new U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare guidelines on fetal research fail to accomplish what Congress intended when it passed legislation calling for curbs on the practice. The second charges that Medicaid funds are unlawfully being used for elective abortions in the state.

Archbishop James V. Casey of Denver has announced he will establish a Committee on the Status of Women "to enable women to assume decision and policy-making roles" in the archdiocese. A Religious Committee for E.R.A. (Equal Rights Amendment) has been organized in New York by 22 persons from Christian and Jewish organizations, including the U.S. Catholic Conference and Network, an organization of Roman Catholic nuns. And Miss America of 1975, Shirley Cothran, says that holding the title forced her to sit down and analyze her Christian faith, and the result was a life more fully Christian.

At the Vatican, Pope Paul has made a strong defense of the indissolubility of Christian marriage, declaring that the validity of the matrimonial bond is "not subordinate" to the permanence of the spouses' love for one another. Speaking to the Sacred Roman Rota—the Church's highest court of appeal—the pope expressed his opposition to "some ideas" which exaggerate the advantages of conjugal love and personal improvement to the detriment of the children of the marriage. And in Baltimore, Archbishop William Borders has told a group of divorced and separated Catholics to "move into the mainstream" of Church activities, and he said the Church is "deeply interested" in helping remarried Catholics return to the sacraments.

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