

Religious liberty no longer makes headlines

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

On February 21 the Spanish Government signed an accord that officially placed Judaism and Protestantism on par with Catholicism.

The accord overturned a decree issued by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella in 1492, the year that Christopher Columbus discovered America.

By order of that royal decree, 400,000 Jews were expelled from the newly created Spanish state — unless they converted to Catholicism.

Because of this new accord, Jews and Protestants will be able to negotiate with their employers concerning the observance of religious holidays.

Both groups will be entitled to religious instruction in their own traditions in public schools and in the military.

Jews will be allowed to observe kosher dietary laws.

Jews and Protestants will have access to the same tax deductions now available to Catholics.

And religious weddings conducted by Jewish and Protestant clergy will be recognized as civil marriages.

The government also announced that it hopes to reach a similar accord in the near future with representatives of the Muslim faith.

What is perhaps most remarkable about this development is the scant attention it received in the media.

It would have been headline news 30 or 40 years ago. Indeed, had this happened before 1960, John F. Kennedy would have had a much easier time running for president of the United States.

Before then, Catholic teaching on church-and-state and religious liberty was still predicated on the claim that the Catholic Church alone is the one, true Church of Christ. All other churches were regarded as false churches.

Religious liberty was limited in principle to those professing the one, true faith. One was not free to profess or to practice error. "Error has no rights," it was argued.

The principle defender of this error-has-no-rights theory in the days before Vatican II was Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, Prefect



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of what was then called the Holy Office (formerly the Inquisition). Ottaviani's chief theological supporter in the United States was the late Monsignor Joseph Clinton Fenton, of the Catholic University of America.

Cardinal Ottaviani and Monsignor Fenton were especially enamored of the Spanish model for church-state relations, and of Spain's leader, General Francisco Franco.

Opposed to the Ottaviani-Fenton approach was the late Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., of Woodstock College, a now-closed Jesuit Theologate in Maryland.

For John Courtney Murray, there was no ideal dictated by Catholic doctrine.

In a pluralistic nation like the United States, he argued, public peace demands that freedom of worship be granted to all religious groups.

Murray's views were controversial. The Ottaviani-Fenton faction saw to it that he was banned from lecturing at The Catholic University of America, that he was forbidden to publish anything more on the subject of church-and-state and religious liberty, and most importantly, that his name was stricken from the list of *periti* (experts) for the first session of Vatican II.

Fortunately, the story had a happy ending for Murray and for the church. Through the intervention of New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman, Murray was invited to the second and subsequent sessions of the council and he became the chief architect of the council's Declaration on Religious Freedom.

Were John Courtney Murray alive today, he would undoubtedly have smiled at the story in *The New York Times* — as much for its burial on page four as for its remarkable content.

Disciples who serve each other shall inherit the kingdom of God

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

"Peter, did you see the size of the crowd listening to Jesus?" Andrew asked his brother as they headed for Capernaum. "There were even more people today than when Jesus fed over 5,000 people."

"When I looked into the crowd, I saw priests from the temple and Roman soldiers, too," Peter said.

John, another apostle, added his thoughts as they walked together along the hot, dusty road. "When Jesus comes into his kingdom, they are going to have to give up their claims to power."

Simon, known as Zealot, laughed heartily. "I, for one, would like to see the faces of our Roman rulers when they have to take their orders from us! But don't be so certain they will relinquish their power so easily," he said.

As they continued to discuss these things, Jesus remained far ahead of them on the road. "I don't know where Jesus gets his energy," Peter said. "Next to him, I'm an old man."

"An old fisherman," Andrew reminded him. "Soon everything will change. After all, we have been with Jesus from the very first. When He comes into His kingdom, we shall receive special places."

"No more fishing for me," Peter

chuckled. "We'll have plenty of money." "If it wasn't for me you might still be in the middle of the lake waiting for your net to fill with fish to make a living," Andrew said.

"Who among us will be second in command when Jesus comes into His kingdom?" James asked pointedly. "There can be only one of us in that honored position."

Peter's expression suddenly changed. "I think it should be me. Jesus called me the 'rock' on which he was going to build the new kingdom. After all, I left my wife and all that I hold dear in my life."

"You, a 'rock'?" James chided. "Your faith wasn't like a rock the other day when Jesus called you to walk out on the lake. Your faith was so weak you nearly drowned."

"Which one of you hasn't doubted?" Peter said, his face flushed with anger.

"My brother and I also left our fishing business to follow Jesus," John said. "Our father runs the business alone now. We must be given fair consideration for the top spot."

The apostles continued to argue among themselves over which one of them would

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be the greatest in the new kingdom. By the time they reached Capernaum and joined Jesus, an uneasy silence hung in the sultry afternoon.

"What were you arguing about?" Jesus asked. They were so ashamed that no one would answer.

"If any of you thinks he will be the greatest in the kingdom, he must be the servant of all," Jesus told them. "I did not come to be served, but to serve. I came to give my own life to save many people."

Jesus looked from one puzzled face to the other. He noticed a small child nearby and took him into His arms. "You must become innocent and trusting like this child. The kingdom does not belong to the rich or the powerful, but to those who are ready to obey and do my Father's will."

Scripture reference: Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45.

Stumbling block to being a complete follower of Jesus: Pride. "Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3).

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THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

Grief... Is help available?
Grief is the name of a complex combination of physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences. It occurs when we lose someone or something very important to us.
It is a natural reaction to the realization that we are not all powerful, that we ourselves are mortal.
Everyone deals with grief in a different way.
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