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The Italian Incident

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The Italian Incident



THE CATHOLICS IN ITALY

More than two centuries ago, our forefathers left Europe and came to this country seeking freedom from the tyrannical powers of the old world. Many were the innocent people who had been locked in jail to rot because they dared to fight for human rights. The peoples of Europe and Asia have been bowed down in a form of slavery in many places for centuries. The man of Valley Forge and Bunker Hill bathed the ground upon which they fell with "martyr's blood" in a desperate effort to live as free men. They left the old countries seeking freedom of education, freedom of government, and freedom of religion. There were two great powers from which they were fleeing; one was the Catholic Church, the other the Dictators of governments. Both had you cast into prison or even killed if you dared to oppose their way of life IF and WHEN they had the power. Their nature has always been the same and always will. They only ease up when pressure is brought to bear so heavily upon them they are forced, for the time, to grant you liberty to exercise your own rights. Freedom is a "death blow" to both.

We, their sons and daughters, have never witnessed such persecution, and have been asleep all these years but never doubt for one moment this one fact, Catholicism has NEVER BEEN ASLEEP. They may have been "kept down" for a spell and they may have cried, "freedom, freedom, democracy," but that was the "voice of Jacob, and the hand of Esau." When they cry "freedom" it means only freedom for Catholics; never for anyone else. They are against all our public institutions such as public schools, hospitals, free press, free radio speech, freedom to worship God as you desire, and boast of the fact, what they will do when they come into power.

As I prepare this lecture I have before me the papers with these "headlines:" "Police Ban Church of Christ Conducting Services In Rome." Again "22 Churches of Christ In Italy CLOSED." In the first article we have these words, "Police backed by a red riot jeep cracked down on the Protestant Church of Christ, in CATHOLIC ROME SUNDAY and prevented its holding regular services WITHIN SIGHT OF VATICAN CITY." Again it says "About 35 Italian worshippers (not American) were stopped from entering the church and ORDERED TO GO AWAY."

You ask, "Brother Harper, why this?" I will let this same paper answer: "An informed Italian source said friction with the SMALL PROTESTANT CHURCH arose from its evangelical activities in CONVERTING ITALIANS

IN CATHOLIC ITALY. The church has made about 1000 conversions since the last war." Give us 25 years of religious freedom such as we grant the Catholics in America and the church of Christ will break their power in Rome by the simple preaching of the gospel of Christ. Let America be under the domination of that religion for 5 centuries and then let them lift the band of religious freedom and that for which we stand will break its power here then.

I issue this challenge to the Catholic Church: Lift your "religious intolerance" in Spain, and in South America, and the church of Christ will break your power there, not by guns, not by force, not by slander, but by the simple preaching of the gospel of peace. Your religion in Spain and South America cannot stand the pressure any more than can Italy. You just think what these "little small town country boys" have done right under the eves of VATICAN CITY where the Pope and all his bishops are. They first tried meeting these young men in public debate; great crowds came; the Catholics were defeated and the Pope ordered them to cease. People were following these young men. When they could not meet them in public, not even their greatest Bishops could or would meet them, they then became scared and frightened and persecution began. Yes, it was persecution! Bombs were set for our men and instead of its hurting our men one went off and ruined the hand of a little Italian boy. We have the recorded brawl conducted under the leadership of the Priests of Italy which will show the length to which they were ready to go to destroy us. They even offered the blessings of the Catholic Church, so the men there reported, for the bones of what they called "the protestants."

THE ITALIAN PAPER

But that you may know the things they are saying in their papers in Italy, I now read to you what they are saying about us there, in an effort to stir up the people to a "persecution complex" such as that which killed our Lord and stoned Stephen and that would have torn Paul apart had it not been for the captain of the guards.

This is in the newspaper "Roma" for Naples, Italy, September 7, 1952. "A group of trouble-making protestants, are luxuriously established in the zone of Rome. After two months of protest, the competent authorities have not intervened.

"The church of Christ has arrived in Rome. This is

not to be confused with the Roman Church of Christ of which Dante wrote." Let me digress just here long enough to say, I say it is NOT the Roman Church of Christ! That is why this article is in this paper. Just 22 of them with 1000 members have scared the Roman Church Dante wrote about, almost out of its wits. THIS church of Christ that has "arrived in Rome," is the one Paul represented while he was in prison. Rome could not stand it then; she can't now. But on with the article: It says we "arrived as scavengers in the wake of the war. They stopped for some years in the Roman hills, and now have descended into the city. No sooner were they arrived into the city, which is not only the capitol of the republic, but is also the center of a serious housing shortage, but they found immediately an elegant and ample villa, when and where they wanted. The building has been remodeled, and they have opened their religious market." This shows the stupidity of the Catholic Church in Italy. The thing that has so aroused them is the fact this little group of Texas preachers succeeded in buying one of the most desirable villas in the city. But let me say to you we did not "descend down from the hills"; we came right into their town. We were not afraid of the Pope, nor his bishops, and right under Vatican City, we bought our "roosting place." But again that you may know this little band of Christians is worrying this great big bad wolf, sitting in the Vatican, clothed in his fine linen, decked with jewels rare, carried by his "men carried chariots" as a god who rules the people, hear this article further: "In a villa, just in the middle of an elementary school district, where each side of their building is flanked by a school; here the traffic of mothers and children and babies pass daily. There they have established the "church of Christ." Now, friends, let me ask you "Isn't that a shame?" Right in the midst of their schools, where their mothers and children have to pass by and see the name "church of Christ"; THERE WE SIT! Go to any great city in our own country and there their money has bought the most outstanding site on which a most elaborate cathedral stands. Our boys are dying today for their rights in America to worship in our cities without molestation. You give that small building near Vatican City twenty-five years of peaceful, friendly religious liberty and we will continue to baptize their priests as we have been doing, and as we are doing in America. They object to our baptizing their people; they must remember they are trying to do the very same thing here.

BIBLE UPSETS CATHOLICS

Now, I invite your patience as I read to you their charge that we are molesting Catholics with the Bible. "Now that the schools are about to open they have commenced their activities, which include the placing of a man on the sidewalk with a Bible in his hands to talk to bystanders. In brief, the exponents of this religion are using religious freedom to molest, or provoke the people." Well, well, well. Here we have some people standing on the streets with Bibles and with the Bible they MOLEST THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. Brother, it MOLESTS all who undertake to deny it or bypass it for human opinions and human traditions. Our men were not out there with guns, bingo gambling parties, beer or whiskey parties, or great dance hall revelings; they were there with the Holy Bible, asking people to live by it. This MOLESTED THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. Yes, it MOLESTS! They can only meet those men who stand on the streets with the Bible by FORCE. What is the charge against our brethren? They are MOLESTING CATHOLICS WITH THE BIBLE. If I were the Pope of Rome, I would be ashamed to let my people print such a statement that a little group of Texans with a Bible, had my people scared out of our wits. Our men over there are not scared surprised by the Pope and all his men. Why the scare on the part of the Catholics in Italy?

THEY CHARGE COMMUNISM

The paper continues, "However, the church of Christ is anything but a religious confession, if we are to use the words "religious confession" respectfully, and give it the meaning that other Protestant groups merit. There is a great difference between the liberty that is the right of all individuals, and the attempt on the part of this group, which is REALLY COMMUNISTS UNDER THE GUISE OF RELIGION, to capitalize on the good faith of the people. All of this under a false religious aspect, and the American Flag."

This we resent and say to you IT IS A MASTER LIE! We are not Communists and our American flag has been insulted by the implication it is covering up for us, knowing that we are Communists. Yet our people sit by in America and let this group from Rome, try to dominate our congress, our radio, our press, and by their threats keep even this incident from being properly given to the papers. That article, insulting the flag of our country, should have an immediate reply from our

own State Department in Washington. They should demand an apology from the Italian government.

WE GET OUR GAME

This article further says "They (church of Christ) are like hunters waiting for the season to open." Yes, and we are getting the game; that is what is the matter. The ammunition we are using, the Catholic Papa can't meet. Thank God we do not have police, guns, great enraged mobs strolling the streets behind some idol god, led by a group of priests, shouting "down with the Catholics!" Give us the bones of the Catholics!" All we want is the good will of the Italian people, an open Bible, freedom to stand on the streets and meet in our buildings and in love and kindness we will reach the people of that idolatrous nation. Christianity does not, yea, it cannot, resort to such ungodly tactics to defeat its opponents. Truth will put to flight the Pope and all his Bishops in any country, if they will, like men, come to the front and meet their idolatrous religion.

NOT THE GOVERNMENT

That you may know this is not just the Italian Government, as the papers are playing up, I now read to you what this man has to say about it. "Since the first of June, responsible persons have lodged protests at the office of the Chief of Police and also to the Minister of the Interior. July and August have passed, and still no official action has been taken. No one has as yet intervened of those who should, we do not say could, but those who have the responsibility to intervene, according to the law. It seems that there is no hope that the police will do their duty. Are they waiting for this "market" to gather force? (Friends, here is what they fear.) Are they waiting for the COMMUNISTS to grow stronger so that also at Rome the Americans will be included on the Communist list? The fact that no official action has been taken against them is a surprise to us, and may indicate that this is a part of the New DeGasperi plan. Recently he emphasized in a speech that traditionally anti-clericalism is an attitude that must be tolerated in our government." Now you know who it is that is pushing this fight in Rome. It is not the GOVERNMENT. It is the Catholic Church. This man admits the Government was not doing anything

about it. He accuses them of being in sympathy with the Communists and brands us again as Communists. Then to climax this entire matter so that not even the most prejudiced person listening to me could misunderstand, I quote again what he says. "Recently he emphasized in a speech that traditional ANTI-CLERICALISM is an ATTITUDE that must be TOLERATED in our government." In this is couched the trouble in Italy. The CLERGY in Italy is trying to RUN the government. They do not want anything that is ANTI to them connected with the GOVERNMENT. If so, they can't always get what they want. The Catholic Church is determined, if possible, to RUN ITALY and to keep all others out. Do not be deceived. They will do it in America when the time comes that the Pope has the strength.

BROTHER PADEN SPEAKS

Brother Paden has this to say at the close of this article, "This is an article typical of others, which are appearing in newspapers in Italy. We thought it would be of interest to you. I think it will be of interest to our State Department to know that we are operating a Communist front under the guise of religion under the American Flag!" Friends, such charges should be investigated by our State Department. WRITE OUR STATE DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON AND KINDLY URGE THEM TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS.

HAVE WE VIOLATED ANY LAWS?

Now they are charging that we have not complied with their laws of religious operation. That we have not received a permit of worship. Let me say to you, that is not true. We have done all we can to meet every demand of theirs. They are denying THEIR OWN PEOPLE THE RIGHT TO HAVE PLACES OF WORSHIP. Not the Americans alone. It is reported that they have refused since 1870 to grant any such permission to religious groups. These 1000 converts from the Catholic Church are THEIR OWN CHILDREN, their own citizens begging for a place to worship in their own country. Do not let the issue get out of your minds. We are pleading for RELIGIOUS WORSHIP FOR not only our people, BUT FOR THE ITALIAN PEOPLE who have obeyed the gospel. They are REFUSED A PLACE TO WORSHIP GOD BY THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT. KEEP THIS IN MIND AS YOU READ THE PAPERS. They are keeping their OWN PEOPLE FROM THEIR OWN PLACES OF WORSHIP.

THEIR CONSTITUTION SPEAKS
NO PERMISSION NECESSARY

That you may know we have not violated any law of assembly I read to you their own constitution. Article 17 says "The people have the right to gather peacefully and without arms when the gathering is open to the public. No APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION IS NECESSARY." Friends, THOSE ARE THE WORDS OF THEIR CONSTITUTION on religious freedom. NO APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION IS NECESSARY. Remember, it is THEIR OWN PEOPLE BEING DEPRIVED OF THIS FREEDOM under THEIR CONSTITUTION that GUARANTEES IT. Article 18 says, "The people have the right of FREE ASSEMBLY WITHOUT ASKING AUTHORITY." Now you have it. Yet the papers are full of charges that we DID NOT GET PROPER AUTHORITY. It is their own people, people who left the Catholic Church for Christianity, when they saw what they had been following, who are being denied the right of FREE PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THIS CATHOLIC COUNTRY.

Again, Article 19 says, "All have the right to profess FREELY their religion in WHATEVER FORM, individually or in groups, to advertise and to conduct worship in private or IN PUBLIC if it is not in violation to good morals." Yet, with a plain statement like that in their own constitution, you saw the pictures of the police standing in front of our buildings refusing the people admission into our own public places of worship. It is time our State Department is waking up to what they have known since our people fled that situation, centuries ago. The Catholic Church has never changed; it never will. You have to show the people what it is and convert them to Christianity and then it will die.

Article 21 says, "All have the right to manifest liberally their personal thoughts by word, the written letter or by ANY OTHER MEANS OF DIFFUSION." And yet this article from their own paper says the "church of Christ is MOLESTING the people by standing on the streets with a Bible."

1947 PEACE TREATY VIOLATED

I make this charge against Italy. She has violated the Peace Treaty of February 10, 1947 which said, "Italy shall take all measures necessary to secure to all persons under Italian jurisdiction without distinction as to race, sex, or religion, the enjoyment of human rights and of the fundamental freedom of expression, of press and publication, of religious worship, or pol-

itical opinion and of public meeting." I charge her recent action against not just the Americans there but against her OWN CITIZENS, is an open violation to her signed Peace Treaty with the United States.

Again, I charge she has violated her own Constitution which is now in force, which says in article 19, "Everyone has the right to make a free profession of his own religious convictions in any form whatsoever, personally or as a member of an association; to advocate the doctrines thereof and to practice its worship in private or in public, provided they are not rites which offend public morals."

I charge their sending police to bar the doors and drive away our brethren from their places of worship, is in open violation to their own Constitution. If not, let the priests of this country show us wherein we have violated their constitution.

Again, they have violated the very spirit of the Atlantic Pact Charter into which they entered, making it of no value when they so wilfully set aside the above laws of the treaty and of their own constitution.

TO MUSSOLINI THEY GO

You say, "Brother Harper, how then did they close them?" I now read to you a letter or part of a letter from Brother Paden who is in Italy. He says concerning the closing of our congregations in Italy, "What is the basis for this action? A Fascist law of June 24, 1929, number 1159 and one written Feb. 28, 1930, number 289, which demand recognition of the 'kingdom.'" Do you know what those laws are and what they were designed to do, friends? They were made during the reign of Mussolini, whose kingdom no longer exists and were designed to keep any organization from arising in the midst of his government, now dead, be it Catholic or otherwise, that would oppose his reign. You say, "What happened to these laws?" Well, I now read to you what happened to them. They were done away and are no longer laws in Italy. Article 16 of their Constitution reads: "Within a year from the adoption of THIS CONSTITUTION, competent authorities must proceed to the revision and coordination of all PRECEDING LAWS WHICH not ALREADY EITHER EXPLICITLY or IMPLICITLY BEEN ABRO- ARE IN CONTRADICTION to this CONSTITUTION which have GATED."

Now there it is so plain that even a little child can understand it, much less the DIGNITARIES of the Italian Government and the paper that published the ar-

ticle I read to you in the beginning. All laws passed by any and all previous governments all laws that were in force before the PRESENT CONSTITUTION OF ITALY that contradicted any law of this present constitution, were done away within one year of its adoption. Ladies and gentlemen, there is no law forbidding us to worship in Italy. It is a free country, as is ours. They have just VIOLATED their Peace Treaty; their own Constitution and have made but a "Scrap of Paper" the Atlantic Pact. That, the Catholic Church has always done and will always do if and when she can get by with it. You know what is wrong in Italy! They can't meet our people in debate. It will break the Catholic Church to so do. In fact, what we teach, NO MAN CAN MEET. It is the BIBLE.

NO LAW VIOLATED

Now this question: "Brother Paden, have you violated any laws of Italy?" His answer is, "We have been in harmony with the laws of this land until now. When the officials of this government (Italy) bow to Catholic pressure and go beyond the constitution to order us to close, we feel that we must obey God rather than man. With ARMED MEN they may close the buildings, but the church will meet ---- SOMEWHERE."

PAUL, THE ROMAN MARTYR, SEES CATHOLICISM

With this I am reminded of another servant of God, who was a "prisoner of Rome" who said, "the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course, I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH." Rome took his head. Rome will take it again. Paul was NOT a CATHOLIC. He did not have a Rosary, he did not bow down to the Madonna, he did not have Peter as his Pope, he said he was not a whit behind the chiefest apostle, he himself said he was over the churches, not Peter, but Paul was only over them as a teacher. He had Christ as his HEAD and not the Pope and it was Paul who said, "Now the Spirit speaketh EXPRESSLY that in the latter times SOME SHALL DEPART FROM THE FAITH giving heed to seducing spirits and DOCTRINES OF THE DEVILS; speaking LIES IN HYPOCRASY; having their conscience seared with a hot iron"---NOW LISTEN TO THIS DESCRIPTION---"FORBIDDING TO MARRY and commanding to ABSTAIN FROM MEATS which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." This is one of the reasons they object to our men standing on the

streets, under the very eve of Vatican City, and letting the people read the Holy Bible. They are that power Paul here saw. They are the power that forbids certain people to marry and they do lead in the NO MEAT EATING on certain days. Of course, the Pope and his priests HATE THE BIBLE and had rather be guided by the TRADITIONS of the church. The Bible exposes them. In Paul's day, they were not forbidding them to marry. This was to come AFTER Paul's day, in latter times, as men left the truth, teaching the doctrines of Devils; lies in hypocrisy and DEPARTING FROM THE FAITH.

LATER THAN YOU THINK

No, friends, we have not violated their laws. We have done everything possible to abide by them. They know that. You know that. We are not Communists. They know that. You know that. Their trouble is, they can't meet the truth. The church of Christ stands on a platform religiously that no religious group on earth can meet. Really, that is the truth. Next Sunday I am going to discuss that platform and then you compare your religion with it and see if YOUR RELIGION, IF YOUR CHURCH could meet it any more than can the Catholic Church. Brethren, it is time for us "to stand up and be counted." We have something the world needs; something that no group can defeat. Let us in love and understanding take it to our friends. But write your congressman, your U. S. Senators, our own Texas State Department, our Secretary of State, our President. Yea, let us "put this straight up to the candidates for President" and see where they stand. The reason the Catholics in Italy have done this at this time is, the election is ahead and they are counting heavily on nothing being done because each candidate wants the Catholic vote. Protestantism had better show its strength, They are after you, in a more subtile way, possibly, but the closing of that Baptist Church in Italy reported in last week's paper is but an expression of how they LOVE US ALL. We had better safeguard America NOW while we can. It may be "LATER THAN YOU THINK."

WAKE UP, AMERICA, AND LIVE.

