

Bibles

or partially, but in the spirit of equality and non-discrimination. One essential duty of every state is in fact not only not to prevent or not interfere with, but rather to protect the inviolable rights of man, principles endorsed by all nations in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights.

While religious freedom has, in principle, become almost universal, multitudes of people are in practice denied the right of religious freedom.

Under Part 2, Section (A), No. (II), printed information of the Helsinki Final Act on Cooperation in Humanitarian Fields, the U.S.S.R. undertook:

To facilitate the improvement of the dissemination on their territory of newspapers and printed publications, periodicals and non-periodicals, from other participating states.

Further according to Article 124 of the constitution of the U.S.S.R. "Freedom of conscience and separation of church and state" is assured, and it is presumed that non-interference of the state in the affairs of religious denominations is thereby equally assured.

Because of the U.S.S.R.'s adherence to these principles it should be easy enough for the U.S.S.R. to accede to Canada's request to send, or allow Canadians to bring with them, bibles and other religious publications when visiting their co-religionists in the U.S.S.R.

Talk of religious liberty is just so much wind, of course, unless guarantees of religious liberty are institutionalized, and unless social machinery is set up to protect religious liberty against violation. I would suggest that is one of the courses of action that would seem to be needed in the U.S.S.R. It is reported that in fact a person may take, by Russian law, one bible and one individual copy of a religious publication with him. If you press the matter I have heard of people who have managed to take ten bibles with them into Russia. While the Russian constitution proclaims one thing, the practice at the border crossing in the experience of those I have talked to seems to be considerably different. While the U.S.S.R. state apparently talks constitutionally and rhetorically about making such provisions, actual practice is somewhat contradictory. Confiscation of Bibles and religious publications is a widespread practice at U.S.S.R. border crossings.

Members of the Alexander Koshetz Choir of Winnipeg tell of being prevented by Soviet customs officers from bringing records of their choir into the Soviet Union, and then once in the Soviet Union of having to restrict and delete religious numbers from their program for presentation to Soviet audiences. Can you possibly imagine the indignation of the Soviet Union were the Red Army chorus in Canada restricted in the singing of its nationalistic songs in Canada? Equity is certainly required in this case.

Personal friends who have visited have come back to tell of tremendous shortages not only of religious publications but also of bibles. They tell of bibles being produced in Russia which are denied to the people to read because most of the production is exported. They tell of such statistics as one bible for every 250 believers, and of grown men crying with the pleasure of being able to receive a Bible from abroad.

[Mr. Wenman.]

I will be anxious to hear a response by Soviet authorities, and I hope that an occasion will arise when I can visit the Soviet Union to verify what I know to be truth, because the people who have verified this to me walk in truth and light and in the way of the Lord, loving freely and with willing hearts serving Him with joy and righteousness.

● (1712)

While the Belgrade conference has concluded, the principle of the motion is still intact. In fact, I heard within just a matter of weeks of people returning and the confiscatory problems still continuing of Bibles and religious publications being confiscated at the border. There are very few getting through. I would like to see the Soviet Union demonstrate to the world—in the spirit that they came to the Belgrade conference with and that they participated in Helsinki with—that not only was their talk sound but it was carried through into action.

This is a very important motion, Mr. Speaker, and I make it with all seriousness and in a totally non-partisan manner. I appeal to Christians throughout this House and to people who believe in religious liberty in all fields throughout the world. I urge the members of this House to speak briefly as I have done so that this motion might pass, although the Conference is completed, so that the government can carry the spirit of this motion through the ambassador directly to the Soviet Union, so that once again believers throughout the world will have an enlightened view and religious liberty that their birthright under the United Nations Human Rights Charter.

Mr. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we would certainly like to express our admiration for the deep commitment on the part of the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman) that he brings to politics and for his particular commitment to the gifts of the spirit as they ought to guide our decisions and approaches not only at home but also in international relations. We would also like to commend him for the initiative he has taken in bringing this matter before the House, thus permitting hon. members to devote time and attention to this issue.

In conducting a brief research this afternoon on the subject in order to deal with the recommendation of the hon. member, and in search for a source that would be the most complete possible, I came across two statements which I would like to put on the record and bring to the attention of the members of the House, because they seem to have been conceived and expressed with exactly the same concern in mind and with the same objective as that of the hon. member. The first statement I came across was expressed in Belgrade and put forward by Monsignor Achile Silvestrini on behalf of the Holy See on October 7, 1977. I will quote a few passages from Monsignor Silvestrini's speech in the hope that its content will be informative and give an idea of the assessment of the situation on the part of the Holy See.

As I understand it, the Holy See was entrusted by churches throughout the world to represent them at Belgrade and in subsequent follow-up conferences in the field of religious free-