Religious Freedom in Spain

Attitude of Recent Speaker Held to Be Unwarranted by Facts

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES:

Father Ignatius W. Cox, in a statement quoted in your columns on Dec. 5, suggests that the Pope take in hand the administration of relief to Republican Spain "in order that this relief may not be used to excite sympathy for or bring aid to a group in Barcelona or Madrid or Valencia that either did not or would not or could not or willed not to grant religious freedom or stay the hand of Red madness against our God, our Christ, our church."

I will not pause to discuss the shocking implication that Father Cox wants no relief at all to go to those who are starving in Republican Spain. But I, as a clergyman, must confute the grave misstatement of fact of which Father Cox is guilty when he says the Spanish Government has refused to grant religious freedom within the territory under its control.

Program Cited

In the first place, the willingness of the Barcelona government not only to grant but to guarantee religious freedom is irrefutably evidenced in Point 6 of the Thirteen-Point Program issued by the Negrin government on May 1, 1938. This program, which is as truly democratic as our own Bill of Rights, was offered by Premier Negrin to all his countrymen as the basis for the creation of a new and united Spain. Point 6 reads: "The Spanish Government will assure the free exercise of religious belief and practice." And since Father Cox is so insistent about religious freedom, what can he say of Franco's Spain, which, according to one of its chief apologists, Dr. Joseph Thorning, has imposed a Catholic monopoly of education?

In the second place, the ability of the Barcelona government to put this expression of policy into practice has been proved. It has been proved by no less a witness than a distinguished member of Father Cox's own church, Miss D. J. Collier, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, in an article entitled "A Catholic Doctor in Barcelona," published in The London Tablet of Oct. 15, 1938, tells that she herself attended mass on two successive Sundays in Barcelona; that she saw notices on church doors announcing mass was said every half hour from 6 A. M. to 11:30 A. M. on Sundays and festivals, and from 7:30 A. M. to 9:30 A. M. on weekdays; that soldiers on leave from the front collected at house doors for mass; that she talked with the leader of the Christian Youth Federation, who had been to mass every Sunday in August, 1936; and that "by November, 1936, worship was being performed in private houses unofficially but with government cognizance," that "no one need have any difficulty about attending mass on Sundays or weekdays" and that--this is in truth startling--the government wished to open all the churches to the public, but that "the Vicar General has advised against publicly opening the churches."

Changed Situation

I submit that Father Cox cannot refute this evidence, vouched for by a most reputable journal of his own church. I submit further that if he were not aware of these facts he should have been.

I am amazed at the refusal of the Roman Catholic Church in this country, as represented not only by Father Cox but by many of its other spokesmen, to admit that the situation in Spain has changed since the first chaotic days when excesses occurred (which no one deplores more deeply than I do) because the rebellion of the army and a majority of the police force and the Civil Guard, supported by the Bishops, deprived the legitimate government of its regular forces for maintaining law and order.

The Catholic Church should, instead, congratulate the government which, put upon so sorely, has constructed order out of chaos. The Catholic Church should look more closely at Franco's Spain, where intolerance of the old familiar sort admittedly reigns and where the swastika already casts its shadow on the Cross. It seems strange, to say the least, to note this reluctance to face facts of such importance not only to the Catholic Church itself but to everybody in this country who believes in the inalienable right of individual liberty. JOHN HAYNES HOLMES.

New York, Dec. 12, 1938.