

ON THE RELIGIOUS BILL



Soon after my inauguration as President of the Philippines, there was a reunion of all the bishops and archbishops of the Philippines in Manila. One day they sent word that they would like to pay their respects and submit a petition to me. I decided to invite them to a luncheon in Malacañan with the exception of the Archbishop of Manila who had been, on several occasions, both before my election as President of the Philippines and after, my guest. After the luncheon, I told the bishops that I had been so pressed for time that I have adopted the practice of inviting people either to breakfast or lunch, who had some business to discuss with me, and that this invitation to the bishops of the Philippines was done for the double purpose of having them as my guests and to hear what they have to say or petition to make. The bishops asked Archbishop Reyes from Cebu to be their spokesman since he was the president of the committee in charge of the matter of which they were going to talk to me. Archbishop Reyes proceeded and said that the bishops have come to ask me that the Constitution be enforced in reference to religious instruction. I answered Archbishop Reyes that my first duty was to enforce the Constitution and that therefore they could take their request for granted. Then I asked the archbishop to tell me in what way the Constitution had not been enforced in reference to religious instruction and Archbishop Reyes



said that religious instruction has not been made mandatory in the public schools, to which remark I answered by asking the Archbishop if he or anyone of the bishops present had read the Constitution and to be kind enough to show me the provision of the Constitution to which they have averted and which, in their opinion, I have not enforced. Archbishop Reyes then answered that he had not read the Constitution but that their lawyer had assured that there was such provision of the Constitution. I turned to the bishops and asked them if anyone of them has read the Constitution and could point out to me which provision of the Constitution I have violated or not enforced. It appeared that not one of the bishops has taken trouble to read the Constitution. Then I told them that I would send for a copy of the Constitution so that we might all see what it says for it was not necessary to have any lawyer to explain the meaning of the Constitution in view of the fact that it was written in a very plain language, both the English as well as the Spanish copy. The Constitution was brought and, of course, no provision such as was claimed by the bishops to exist was found.

Later on or one year later, the pressure was being made to induce the government to make religious instruction compulsory and since the Bureau of Education paid no heed to their petitions, at last a memorial was presented to the Secretary of Public Instruction signed by more than one half of the members of the National Assembly, making the same



request. The Secretary of Public Instruction, after consulting with me, answered the petition of the members of the National Assembly stating that it could not be granted being contrary to the policy thus far adopted by the government. When the National Assembly convened, members of the National Assembly came to me and told me that they intended to present a bill affecting religious instruction in the public schools. I told them that I had not formed any definite opinion of the subject but that my attitude was to approve the bill if it was constitutional and to disapprove it when it was otherwise. Assemblyman Cuenco submitted to me the proposed bill and I told him that certain provisions of the bill were clearly unconstitutional. Upon his request, I amended those provisions. I told him, however, that I did not want him to show the bill to anybody because I did not want to be understood as approving the bill with those amendments. After innumerable changes, the Assembly finally approved onw bill by two-thirds vote of the members present. During the discussion of the bill my wife had been seriously ill with malaria and did not know how she felt about this bill. However, when she was convalescing I told her something about the bill which had tremendously a bad impression on her and I thus discovered that se was very strongly in favor of the said bill. I said nothing more about it until the bill was finally passed by the House. Then when the bill was sent to me for my action, having



discovered how my wife felt about it and foreseeing the possibility of my taking an action contrary to what she wanted, in order to prepare her for the worst, I asked her: "Do you believe in me as a public official?" Here answer was: "I am surprised you asked me that question, if I don't believe in you who else can or will!" I said: "I have asked you this question not because I doubt what your answer will be but because I wanted to hear from your own lips what you have to tell me." But I asked her again: "Do you think that I would do my duty even if it was contrary to your wishes or to the interest of the family?" She said "Yes". "Do you think that it is right for me to follow that conduct?" She said: "Certainly", and added "When I married you I knew that you were already wedded to our people and in marrying you I always assumed that I only be second in your consideration, that your paramount obligation was to our people." Then I told my wife: "I am glad to hear that from you, the Religious Bill has already passed the National Assembly and I have to act on it. I am going to study it very carefully and I want you to know that if in my opinion I should veto the bill, I will veto it.

After my conference with my wife, assuming that my daughters who are in a religious school may have formed their own opinion in favor of the bill, when I had come to the conclusion that I was forced to veto the bill, I told them I would and gave them the reasons. Fortunately my daughters



agreed with me and so I proceeded to veto the bill without any worries as to how my family would feel about it.

This is the first time that I was somewhat interested in preparing my family for the action I was going to take because I know that religious matters divide even families.

Aboard the "Casiana"
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