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BILLY GRAHAM

April 25, 1983

APR 27 1983

Dear Bill,

I deeply regret the long delay in gathering material on this subject at your, and the President's, request. Since seeing you in San Francisco, a member of my staff (Dr. John Akers) and I have made a number of discreet inquiries among Evangelical leaders concerning possible reaction to the granting of full diplomatic status to The Vatican by the United States. In each instance the inquiry was made on a confidential basis, and no mention was made of the fact that the inquiries were being made at the request of The White House.

This is not, of course, meant to be a scientific sampling; I did, however, seek to have the issue raised only with men who are recognized leaders among Evangelicals. There were actually two purposes behind the inquiries. First, I wanted to get the opinion of these leaders about the reaction they felt such a move would bring among Evangelicals in general. They are, for the most part, men who have their fingers on the Evangelical pulse and would know the probable reactions of Evangelicals and Evangelical groups. Second, I also wanted to see what specific action some of them might take if a move were actually made. Perhaps the best way would be to summarize the views of a few of those I have contacted, and then add some additional comments.

Dr. Gilbert Beers

Dr. Beers is present editor of Christianity Today magazine, which is the most influential magazine reaching Evangelical leaders. His personal position would be cautiously neutral, although he feels many of the more conservative denominations and leaders will be vocally opposed. He fears that many responses will be uninformed, and suggested that if the issue is raised publicly he would be happy to have Christianity Today undertake a major in-depth article which would examine, as fairly as possible, both sides of the issue.

Dr. Richard Chase

Dr. Chase is President of Wheaton College, which is regarded as the leading Evangelical center of education in the United States, and is called "the Harvard of Evangelicals."

Dr. Chase fears that this has the potential of being an explosive issue which could give rise to renewed anti-Catholic sentiments on the part of some Evangelicals. This would be unfortunate after a period of peace in Protestant/Catholic relations. It would be seen as an action that gave preference to one religious group over all others. If it were proposed publicly, the reasons for such an action would have to be spelled out clearly and a case would have to be made as to why it was being done at this time.

Dr. James Dunn

Dr. Dunn is Executive Secretary of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which monitors public policy issues of interest to Baptists and acts as a lobbying group for Baptists. Nine Baptist denominations (including Southern Baptists) support the Joint Committee. In general the Joint Committee tends to be somewhat more liberal than grassroots Baptists.

The Joint Committee would clearly and unequivocally oppose upgrading the status of U.S./Vatican relations. In line with traditional Baptist views, they would see it as a violation of church/state separation. (As an aside, Dr. Dunn mentioned that the Joint Committee even considered requesting the Administration to eliminate the position of Personal Envoy of the President, shortly after the 1980 election). Dr. Dunn made it clear that the Joint Committee would not only take a public stand against recognition, but would also supply Baptist papers (most of which are state-wide) with full justification for their position.

Rev. Jerry Falwell

I asked Dr. Beers to raise this issue with Jerry Falwell since he knows him better than I do. I need not tell you, of course, that he exerts a great deal of influence over very conservative Evangelicals, especially those coming from an independent denominational background.

Rather than summarize his position, let me quote instead in full the remarks which his assistant, Nelson Keener, gave to Dr. Beers. In private conversation Mr. Keener stressed that Falwell would be placed in a very difficult position and hopes that the issue is not raised. His problem is that Moral Majority has a large number of Catholics and he would therefore have a hard time speaking against it, but on the other hand his Baptist constituency would pressure him to speak out. Here are Mr. Keener's remarks:

Jerry feels this would be a violation of the First Amendment. He told me that most fundamentalists and many evangelicals would oppose this considering the fact that there are some 30 million Catholics in the U.S. and some 40 million evangelicals/fundamentalists. This would open the door and set an unnecessary precedent, since there are probably more Muslims than Catholics in the world. He made the comment that the Vatican has no defense or economic contributions. (In regards to having to defend ourselves against the Vatican, that's not necessary. On the other hand, the Vatican doesn't even contribute from a defense standpoint.) If this would have to go through Congress, he doesn't think it would pass Congress. It would be expensive to set up an embassy with an ambassador. He assumes that the ACLU, an organization for the separation of church and state, would oppose this. He does not see any advantage to diplomatic ties with the Vatican. He feels it would put him in a difficult position, because he could not agree with the idea because most fundamentalists would oppose it. He also feels he would have difficulty opposing the idea because the Moral Majority has 30 percent Catholic support. This could possibly create an unnecessary rift between Catholics and Protestants. His bottom line is that he is against it.

Dr. David Hubbard

Dr. Hubbard is President of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, which is non-denominational and has the second largest student body of any seminary in the world. In general, Fuller Seminary would be seen as a "moderate to somewhat left" evangelical school.

Dr. Hubbard felt that among more moderate Evangelicals there would probably be little problem with the issue, as long as care was taken in how it was presented. Most of them do not share the latent anti-Catholic suspicions of some more traditional Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. He did, however, feel that Jewish groups might react negatively (because of the Pope's reception of Arafat

and the lack of pro-Israel sentiment on the part of the Vatican), and that the President would need to take some precautions about this. It would also need to be made clear that the U.S. was establishing relations with the Vatican as a political state and not as a religious power or entity.

Dr. Kenneth Kantzer

Dr. Kantzer is a respected Evangelical theologian and former editor of Christianity Today. He still writes the major editorials for that magazine.

He predicts there will be an outcry in many circles and little can be done to avoid it. The influence of Reverend Falwell must not be overlooked either. The key for some would be in getting across somehow the point that the Pope was being recognized as a political head and not in his religious capacity. The analogy is somewhat strained, but it would be somewhat similar to recognition of a communist government for political reasons, without implying acceptance of their ideological position.

Dr. Billy Melvin

Dr. Melvin is Executive Secretary of the National Association of Evangelicals, which is a coalition of a number of smaller denominations. This is the group that the President addressed in Orlando.

Dr. Melvin reacted quite negatively to the idea and felt that most member denominations of the NAE would take formal stands against it. He also felt it was likely that the NAE itself would be forced to take a public stand. Dr. Melvin also raised a question concerning the stand of the National Council of Churches; he felt there was a fair chance that they would also oppose it, although for different reasons (fearing growing Catholic--and therefore conservative--influence in political matters). He also would regret anything which would open old wounds between Catholics and Protestants. Dr. Melvin also stressed that the pro-Israel stance of many conservative Evangelicals would also cause them to oppose diplomatic recognition of the Vatican.

Mr. Richard Ostling

Mr. Ostling is religion editor of Time magazine, and an Evangelical. He is therefore in touch with a wide spectrum of religious opinion.

There would be, of course, sharp reaction from Fundamentalists and some Evangelicals. More moderate Evangelicals would have much less concern. What Evangelicals opposed to the issue might overlook would be the fact that the President would undoubtedly receive very favorable support from Roman Catholics. Jewish people would tend to oppose it. Most mainline Protestants would probably not see it as much of an issue, although the National Council of Churches would need to be consulted and made to feel influential.

Dr. Pat Robertson

Dr. Robertson is influential as the host of the "700 Club" and head of Christian Broadcasting Network, which appeals to many Evangelicals on a grassroots level (especially--although not exclusively--those of a charismatic persuasion).

Of all those polled, Dr. Robertson was the most positive toward the idea. He felt it could bring positive diplomatic and intelligence gains to the U.S. Many of the animosities of the past are forgotten and it would be an unimportant issue to most Evangelicals.

In addition to the above Evangelicals, Dr. Akers also spoke with two contacts we have had within Roman Catholicism (again on a confidential basis).

The first, Father John Hotchkin, is the Director of the Bishop's Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. He said that of course Catholics in general would welcome it, although he said that frankly some bishops might be somewhat reluctant because they might see a Pro Nuncio in Washington as something of a barrier between them and the Pope. However--unlike the past, when I believe Cardinal Spellman was rather vocal about this issue--he felt the Bishop's Committee would certainly not initiate any movement toward full diplomatic relations and might try to keep a low profile. He stressed that if an Administration decided to act on this it would be very important for them first to have active liaison with the Bishop's Committee and leading Roman Catholics.

The second meeting was with the Office of the Apostolic Delegate, which as you know functions as the Papal emissary to the United States. (Dr. Akers met Archbishop Laghi briefly (whom I had known in Rome), and discussed the matter in detail with his associate,

Father Purcell.) It was stressed that under present policies the Apostolic Delegate would never act to initiate such a move and would try to maintain a low profile. There would be some advantages; at present the Apostolic Delegate has almost no access to the Department of State, etc. It was their feeling that Mr. William Wilson, the President's Personal Envoy to the Vatican, enjoys a high degree of access in Rome, although that is in large part due to his person and might not be the case with a successor. The official position of the Apostolic Delegate is that full diplomatic relations would not open the door to greater Roman Catholic influence on political affairs. Again it was suggested that liaison between the Administration and the Vatican and its representatives would be important if this issue was to be pursued.

I hope this has been somewhat helpful--although I honestly don't know what I personally would recommend that the President do. One person said, "If anyone can do it and get by with it, it is Mr. Reagan." I think he would need to cover his political bases, so to speak, and be sure he brought people into the picture who might cause him trouble (Jews, Bishop's Committee, National Council, etc.) It may be also that some people (like Jerry Falwell) could be persuaded to keep silent on the issue. One idea I had might be worth exploring--although I'm not sure if it is at all feasible. The Apostolic Delegate is the Pope's personal representative to the American Catholic Church. I'm not sure to what degree it is customary for a full Papal Nuncio or Pro Nuncio to be the contact person with the Roman Catholic Church in that country, but possibly there would be a way of dividing it so that the Office of the Apostolic Delegate continued and was the religious contact with the American Church, and a second diplomatic office were opened which was seen as the channel of communication between the U.S. and the Vatican as a political entity. Maybe that would underline the fact that the U.S. was recognizing the Vatican as a political state only. On the other hand, the Vatican might not agree to this. I honestly do not know enough about how the Vatican conducts its relations with other countries.

As a final thought, I might mention that when I decided to visit the Pope in January of 1980, I was braced for a lot of controversy from those who would normally support my ministry. The visit received a reasonable amount of publicity, but we actually were surprised at how little vocal opposition there was. Many of the

extreme Fundamentalist people who tend not to support me anyway were, of course, opposed, but on the whole, Evangelicals in the mainstream were not.

As a footnote, I might suggest that if this issue is pursued by the Administration that it be made clear that the position would be open to a non-Roman Catholic. I believe in the past the Personal Envoy of the President has always been a Roman Catholic.

With warmest personal greetings. If I can be of further service, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill", with a stylized flourish underneath.

The Honorable William P. Clark  
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500