

LETTER TO THE HON. JOHN HICKERSON, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, IN BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN ITALY.

May 9, 1950

Hon. John Hickerson,
Assistant Secretary of State,
Department of State,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Secretary Hickerson:

C It is with considerable thought, meditation and prayer that we come to you, as the representative of our government, with the problems of our Christian Brethren in Italy and the great suffering that they have endured at the hands of those who have failed to understand the spirit for which World-War-Two was fought.

O After millions of men died on the beach-heads and on the battle-fields of the world that people might have freedom, and above all things, freedom of the right to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience as we are led by the Holy Spirit, through the revealed word of God, the Holy Bible. We now find that in an enlightened country like Italy, there has been a complete failure to understand the meaning of the rights of others. And a persecution after persecution has occurred of Italian Protestants of Americans and various denominations on the part of the Italian populace, agitated by the local priest-hood while the local and provincial officials and with the National Government doing very little to prevent these occurrences and abuses and molestations and murder of our Brethren, from Sicily to the Alps.

P Some two and a half years ago, the National Association of Evangelicals of the United States, The American Committee for Religious Liberty in Italy and a number of other interested people sent Dr Charles Fama, of New York City, and myself on a mission to Italy where we helped guide the writing into the Italian Constitution of the three Articles 17, 18 and 19, which deal with freedom of assemblage, freedom of association and freedom of religious worship. These articles, as we understood them, were to be further guarantee on the part of the Italian Government that they took seriously Articles 15 of the Peace Treaty between the United States and the new Italian Republic. But

V since its enactment as a part of the fundamental law of Italy, there has been very little evidence on the part of the Clergy of the Roman Catholic Church to respect these three Articles in word or in spirit.

While we were in Italy struggling and straining to see evidence of the new freedom, the Protestant Churches of Sicily were closed, their ministers beaten and their Communion tables desecrated.

We took to Sicily with us, a number of American journalists and photographers, including the representative of the Chicago Tribune. When we got there, he made the statement: "As a Roman Catholic, it is hard for me to believe." But he could see with his own eyes and touch with his own hands the charred hymnbooks, broken pews and smashed windows. The fruit of mob-violence agitated by the local clergy, while the police as representatives of the Italian Government stood by and did absolutely nothing with the exception that they did arrest the Protestants and tried to hold them incommunicado, until we protested.