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"Tolerance Rallies" An Abuse.

Archbishop McNicholas, of Cincinnati, has recently laid down rules governing public "debates" on religion within the limits of his jurisdiction. Since his statement covers an important phase of the question of religious controversy, we reproduce for your information its most important points. It would be well for you to file this Bulletin for future reference. If your future lies in public life, it will be a safe guide for your conduct; in private, it will help you to explain things to non-Catholics. His statement, in part, reads as follows:

"Debates and conferences, especially those of a public character, in which Catholics and non-Catholics participate, are forbidden generally by Pontifical law. The permission of the Holy See is required for such forums and conferences (Canon 1325). We, as the Ordinary of the diocese, are authorized to permit them only in cases when, convinced of their utility or necessity, there is not time to have recourse to the Holy See.

"While we are most anxious to promote good will in the community, it is our duty to express very emphatically our disapproval of religious debates, forums or seminars which expose a mixed audience to three dangers:

"First, indifferentism, which is likely to send those present away feeling that, after all, organized religion is not essential, but rather, that religion is a purely personal affair, and that it is of little or no consequence whether or not one has any church affiliation. All who believe in a divinely organized religion must be on their guard against falling into indifferentism.

"Secondly, eclecticism, which makes each individual feel at liberty to constitute himself the judge of what he shall or shall not accept as of binding force in the various forms of religion. All who believe in divine revelation must realize the danger of this form of eclecticism.

"Thirdly, a forum, a public disputation or seminar in which members of different religions participate is likely to make the audience feel that it is a jury passing on the conflicting claims of religion, as presented by the various speakers. Such forums, disputations and seminars, if they admit clever, facile and even sincere opponents of religion, can only be detrimental to the audience. There should be no toleration of speakers who ridicule and scoff at religion. Those who seek popular applause by undermining religion or by sneering at the revealed mysteries of eternity and of faith which no human mind can comprehend, should be given no public opportunity to carry on their work. Assuring, even, that men with sincere motives are striving to undermine belief in the supernatural, there can be no justification for aiding them in their destructive propaganda.

"Granted that the religious forum and seminar movement is initiated by men of different faiths, men whose characters are above reproach and whose motives are the highest, yet is it not inevitable that fundamental differences must be treated, with a consequent loss rather than gain of good will? There is also the ever-present danger that these public discussions will fall into the hands of those who will commercialize them, or so conduct them as to render them most detrimental to the supernatural life."

The Archbishop then lays down the conditions under which such disputations may be conducted in the archdiocese of Cincinnati. Briefly, these are: 1. Catholic speakers must have a whole evening to themselves; 2. Only the Archbishop may name or approve the speakers, and these must be well versed in their religion; and 3. A goodwill banquet may conclude the series of discussions, provided the talks at the banquet do not take on the character of a forum.