

# Ecumenism, Religious Freedom and State Power

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The Article opens by discussing the history of ecumenical movements as pioneered by the leaders of different Protestant sects with the intent to unite the three sections of universal and universalist Christianity – the Roman, Greek, and Protestant “Catholicity.” The series of events discussed placed an emphasis on the initial non-participation of the Roman Catholic Church up until the formation of the Orthodox Declaration on 7 December 1965, which ended the conflict between the Churches.

The Article then outlines the various steps made by the Roman Catholic Church to foster and promote unity and understanding of all religions as enunciated in the Declaration on Religious Freedom of the Second Vatican Council. Here, emphasis was placed on two basic doctrinal themes – human dignity and political consciousness to be unhindered in the free exercise of religion. This was discussed in conjunction with the role of the government who, by force or other means, may compel, oppress or limit the right of the people in the exercise of their freedom of religion.

The Article then proceeds by discussing the historical background of religious freedom, starting from the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States as reproduced in the Bill of Rights of the Philippine Constitution. It then focused on the religious liberty in the Philippines as introduced by two documents, namely: the Treaty of Paris concluded between the United States and Spain and the Malolos Constitution promulgated under General Emilio Aguinaldo. Both documents secured the free exercise of religion for the people of the Philippines. This was followed by a discussion of a series of events that led to the full, equal, and undisturbed exercise of religious worship that we enjoy today.

The Article points out, however, that although principles of religious freedom and ecumenism had been established, its ultimate realization lies on how the people will respond to the challenge of fostering brotherhood within their communities.