

The Hon'ble Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy (Assam: General): Mr. President, Sir, it appears to me that the clause as it came out of the Advisory Committee is sufficient and should not be amended at all. The amendment seeks to prevent a minor, who is of twelve years of age, or thirteen years of age, up to eighteen years of age from exercising his own conscience. The age limit may be quite right in law. But to think that a youth under the age of eighteen does not have a conscience before God and, therefore, he cannot express his belief is wrong. That side of the question must be appropriately considered. There is a spiritual side in conversion which ought to be taken notice of by this House. Conversion does not mean only that a man changes his form of religion from one religion to another or adopts a different name of religion, such as, a Hindu becomes a Christian. But there is the spiritual aspects of conversion, that is, the connection of the soul of man with God, which must not be overlooked by this House. I know there are those who change their religion being influenced by material considerations, but there are others who are converted being under the influence of spiritual power. When a boy feels that he is called by God to adopt a different faith, no law should prevent him from doing that. The consciences of those youths who want to change their religion and adopt another religion from a spiritual should not be prevented from allowing these youths to exercise their right to change their legal status and change their religion. We know, Sir, in the history of Christianity, there have been youths, and I know personally, there have been many youths, who, have been converted to Christianity, who are ready to die for their conviction and who are ready to lose everything. I myself was converted when I was about fifteen years old when I heard the voice of God calling me. I was ready to lose anything on earth. I was ready to suffer death even. I did not care for anything save to obey and follow the voice of God in my soul. Why should a youth who has such a call of God be prevented by law from changing his religion and calling himself by another name when he feels before God that he is influenced by the Spirit of God to do that end is ready even to sacrifice his life for that. This part of the amendment about minors is absolutely wrong when we consider it from the spiritual standpoint, From the standpoint of conscience I consider that it is altogether wrong not to allow a youth from the age of twelve to eighteen to exercise his own conscience before God. It will oppress the consciences of the youths who want to exercise their religious faiths before God.

Therefore, I am against this amendment as it is. The clause should be left as it was before. The legal and other aspects have been discussed by Mr. Anthony regarding the conversion of the children of the converted parents. Certain minors should be allowed to follow their own conviction if they have any, and should not be forced to do anything against their own conviction. Why should the law not allow them if they themselves do not care for their former legal status? Why should they one Prevented from changing their religion? Why should their consciences be oppressed? That is a very important point, Sir, to be considered by this House. This freedom I consider to be a Fundamental Right of the, Youths. No law should be made which will work against good spiritual forces. India, especially, is a country of religions, a country where there is religious freedom. If this amendment is carried in this House, it will only mean that in making a law to prevent the evil forces our minds lose sight of the real religious freedom which the youths of this land ought to have. Therefore, I am against this very principle of forcing the youths by not allowing them to exercise their religious conviction according to their consciences. I would suggest, Sir, that if in the amendment moved by Mr. Anthony the words 'or save when the minor himself wants to change his religion' are included, then I do not object to this amendment. I am against any conversion by undue influence or by fraud or coercion. When we make a law against all these evils we should be careful to see that that law does not oppress the consciences of the youths who also need freedom.