

Bishops' Statement

(N.C.W.C. News Service)

Washington, Nov. 21. — The following is the full text of the statement issued by the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of the United States at the close of their annual meeting here:

The Dignity Of Man

Every man knows instinctively that he is, somehow, a superior being. He knows he is superior to the land he tills, the machine he operates or the animals which are at his service. Even when unable to define this superiority in terms of "honor" and "dignity", if a man enjoys the fruits of his nobility, he is content and accepts that status as his due; lacking honor and dignity for any cause, a man is restless, depressed, even rebellious because something proper to him, as a man, is withheld or denied.

The Catholic Church has always taught and defended the natural dignity of every human being. She has preached the burdens of individual responsibility and has insisted upon the supremacy of personal conscience. She has reminded mankind that there is a great division between "things" and "men." She has never forgotten that "things" were made for men and that "men" were made for God.

In thus holding up a mirror to men that they may see their own greatness and realize their personal dignity, the Catholic Church has taught that man's true honor is from God, has been enhanced spiritually by divine grace and is preserved without degradation only when the honor and dignity of God Himself are first maintained.

Often in times past men have failed to live up to the honor of their state. They have degraded their dignity in many ways. But, always till now, violence and vice, injustice and oppression or any other assaults on human dignity were recognized as abominations and were so abhorred. It has remained for our day to attempt to disregard human personality and to fortify such disregard with the force of legislation or the approbation of custom, as if a man were only a "thing."

The present has been described as a rationally established inhumanity working with all the expedients of administrative and mechanical techniques. Our Holy Father Pope Pius XII, in his 1952 Christmas allocution, gave warning of the attempted mechanization of mankind and protested the stripping of personality from men by legal or social devices. The Bishops of the United States, conscious of the growing impersonalization of man, reaffirm man's essential dignity and reassert the rights which flow from it.

True Roots of Human Dignity

Man's essential worth derives from a threefold source: from the fact of his creation, from the mode of his existence, and from the nobility of his destiny.

The mere fact that any creature exists at all requires the creative and sustaining power of God. When God exercises this power to summon any possible reality into actual existence, that reality is thereby sealed from within with value. Such a dignity man shares with the animal and material world around him.

But his special type of existence confers on man a special claim to honor. Though immersed in a universe of fleeting and random sensations, he is endowed with an intellect able to pierce the flux of passing images and discover beneath them enduring patterns of truth. Though subjected to the pressures of his environment, and a prey to unthinking appetites, he is endowed with a self-determining will capable of choosing wisely within the framework of law.

Intellect and will, then, are man's distinctive adornments. It is his distinctive role to allow a finite creature to grasp truth consciously and to choose goodness freely, and thus to mirror the Infinite Creator who is conscious Truth and absolute Goodness.

Man's natural honor, however, has been enhanced by grace, conferred at creation, lost through sin, but restored through the Incarnation and Redemption of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. When the Son of God took human flesh as an instrument of salvation, all human flesh was honored by His association with it. Through His death and resurrection Christ demonstrated the role and destiny, the honor and dignity of every man for whom He lived and suffered.

Since those days of Christ on earth, no man lives by his body alone, nor by the natural powers of his soul alone; every man is sanctified, made holy, made more worthy and more honorable by the enjoyment of the special spiritual life which flows from the Cross, or by the possibility that this life will one day be his, if he raises him above the limitations of nature, to honor him in

unending union with the God Who became man.

Such is the triple fountain of man's dignity. To the extent these truths cease to energize the sense of reverence in every man, assaults upon the majesty of the human person must increase and intensify. Heedless that his nature has God for its origin and destiny, and reason and revelation for its divinely commissioned guide, man will do what no other creature can — he will deny his true nature and will destroy all that is good within himself.

Mans' Dignity and the Body

Such a process of degradation is viciously at work in our own country, where the delinquency of the flesh continues to enlist new devotees. Through its jargon of advertisement, national sense and literature, this cult bids fair to corrode our national sense of decency. When reason abdicates its sovereignty over bodily energies, their purpose is destroyed; and, by a sort of instinctive vengeance, they themselves become destroyers. Like wild animals, these energies are hard to tame, and remain dangerous even when tamed. But whatever lawful use an animal may serve, it is not wisdom for man to accept as his master the lion who seeks to devour him.

The Catholic Church, however, has never failed to accord the human body an immense measure of honor. She affirms that it was originally created by God; in one instance actually assumed by Him; in every instance meant to be on earth His special temple, and destined eventually to rejoin the soul in His beatific Presence. Whatever is unpromising in her teaching about the body stems from her realism on two points: the body, though good, is not the highest good; and the undisciplined body is notoriously bad.

Other sacrileges against personality flow from errors less crude perhaps, but hardly less injurious. Such are some prevailing misconceptions about society, liberty, economics, labor and education.

Man's Dignity and Society

The practical social theory of the last century enthroned the individual but not the person. An individual can be a thing; as for instance an individual tree; but in virtue of his rational soul, a person is more than a thing. Yet the depersonalized view of man gained ascendancy, and generated a society which was a crisis of individual egotisms, and in which each man sought his own.

Against this error our century has seen a reaction which has sought to overcome the isolation of man from man by imposing upon rebellious individuals a pattern of compulsory and all-embracing state organization, with unlimited power in the hands of the Civil Government. Hence socialism in its various guises, has appeared as forcible organization imposed upon the confusion which resulted from false concepts of human freedom.

The Christian concept of man, however, is that he is both personal and social. As a person he has rights independent of the state; as a member of society he has social obligations. Parents and society contribute to the making of a man, hence man is indebted to the social order. At the same time, since his soul comes not from society but from God, a man has rights which no society may violate. The state is a creature of God; hence the state exists for man, not man for the state.

Man's Dignity and Liberty

The Christian view, then, avoids the opposing extremes of individualism and collectivism, both of which are grounded on false concepts of liberty — either the unfettered liberty of individualism which gives the "individual" the right to ignore society; or the unfettered liberty of dictatorship, which gives the government the right to ignore the person by absorbing him into a race or class, thus destroying his freedom of choice.

The false liberty of individualism wrecks society by defining freedom as individual license; the false liberty of dictatorship wrecks humanity by defining freedom as the right of the dictator to nullify the person — a right which he claims to derive from social necessity.

Concerning the results of such false notions of liberty Leo XIII issued these warnings: "The true liberty of human society does not consist in every man doing what he pleases, for this would simply end in turmoil and confusion, and bring on the overthrow of the state. . . likewise, liberty does not consist in the power of those in authority to lay unrea-

sonable and capricious demands upon their subjects, a course which would be equally criminal and would lead to the ruin of the commonwealth."

Liberty in political life may be described as the condition in which the individual finds himself unhampered in the discharge of his duties and in the exercise of his rights. Liberty, however, is something more than a political phenomenon as tyrannical dictatorship contends; it is more than an economic phenomenon as some disciples of free enterprise maintain. It is something more mature than that dream of rights without responsibilities which historic liberalism envisioned; it is certainly different from that terrorism of responsibilities without rights which Communism imposes. It is something wiser than free thought, and something freer than dictated thought. For freedom has its roots in man's spiritual nature. It does not arise out of any social organization, or any constitution, or any party, but out of the soul of man.

Hence to the whole tradition of the Western world liberty does not come essentially from improved conditions of living, either political or economic, but is rather the spring out of which better conditions must flow. A free spirit creates free institutions; a slave spirit permits the creation of tyrannical ones.

Man's Dignity and Economics

Closely connected with freedom and human dignity is the right of private property. On the question of private property the aforementioned misconceptions of liberty beget two other extremes: first the belief that a man's right to property is absolute, and that he may do with it what he pleases, without regard for the moral law or social justice; and, secondly, the reactionary error of Communism, which denies all personal rights and lodges all property in the hands of the state.

The Christian position maintains the right to property is personal, while the use of property is also social. Unrestrained capitalism makes its mistake by divorcing property rights from social use; Communism hits wide of the mark by considering social use apart from personal rights.

Much of our economic restlessness, however, is the festering of man's wounded dignity. Karl Marx himself was perceptive enough to see that "Democracy is based on the principle of the sovereign worth of the individual, which, in turn, is based on the dream of Christianity that man has an immortal soul." (Marx-Engels Historical-Critical Edition, Karl Marx Institute, Moscow, Vol. 1, No. 1, P. 590)

Ignoring the testimony of both reason and revelation and believing the "dream" to be only a dream, modern men have tended to concentrate almost exclusively on economic security and to pursue it at times with the fervor of religious devotion.

Often the hope is voiced that man will turn to the cultivation of the spirit after all his economic needs are supplied. We are reminded of the delusion of Jean Jacques Rousseau that man, good in himself, has been corrupted only by society. Marxism, changing the formula, gives the same false primacy to external circumstances — man's goodness will depend upon the economic system under which he lives. But the exclusive dependence on economic security and social reform to right the wrongs of mankind is by no means confined to Marxism. It affects the thought of great masses of men who reject the fundamental tenets of Marxism.

While we have deep sympathy with all people in their craving for economic security and while we acknowledge the evils, individual and spiritual as well as social, which often flourish in a society when many are forced to live in conditions of degrading poverty, yet we cannot refrain from pointing out the fact that man's goodness is from within. It depends upon man's personal convictions and upon his efforts aided by God's grace. Economic and social reform, to be effective, must be preceded by personal reform. The perfection of a society may not be measured by the moral goodness of the individuals who compose it; but the goodness of a society cannot rise above the goodness of its members.

Regain Reverence For God

Every day in Holy Mass, Almighty God is addressed as He Who wondrously established the dignity of man, and restored it more wondrously still. Only by regaining our reverence for God can we of America in the 20th century rediscover both our own value and the solid basis on which it rests. We must at the same time expend every effort to see that this dignity is reflected in our sense of decency, made aware of itself by education, nurtured by society, guarded by the state, stabilized by private ownership, and exercised through creative activity.

The alternative is increasing chaos. The words of a contemporary historian of culture may serve to summarize the issues at stake: "Unless we find a way to restore the contact between the life of society and the life of the spirit, our civilization will be destroyed by forces which it has had the knowledge to create but not the wisdom to control."

New Bishop Chicago — (NC) — Bishop-designate Raymond P. Hillinger of Rockford, will be consecrated in Holy Name Cathedral here on the feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, December 29, it has been announced.

dignity and importance of labor become evident. Labor is not something detached from the rest of life. Economically, it is bound up with capital as a co-partner in production. Socially, it is bound up with leisure as an avenue to cultural enrichment. Spiritually, it is bound up with the soul's development and with salvation. The worker is not a hand, as individualistic capitalism contends; not a stomach to be fed by commissars, as Communism thinks; but a person who through his labor establishes three relations: with God, with his neighbor, and with the whole natural world.

First of all, work unites us to God not only by its ascetic character and through the discipline it imposes on man by subjugating his lower passions to order and reason, but principally because, through the intention of the worker, the material universe is brought back again to God.

Second, labor is also the bond uniting man to man, a kind of school of social service, a base of human solidarity, a testimonial to man's insufficiency without his neighbor. In working with others, man ratifies his social dependence and performs an act of natural charity, because he helps create utility for others and thus promotes the happiness of his fellow men. The Catholic view, it will be noted, here adds that labor must always be used, not to dissociate ourselves from our neighbor, but to unite us with him. The greater the material advancement of any country, therefore, the more energetic should be its spirit of neighborliness.

Finally, work unites us with nature. It does this by enabling us to share in the creative work of God and by making each of us, in the language of St. Paul, the supreme Artist, has communicated artistic causality to men, so that they can now make image and likeness of their own things and shape events to the ideas. The marriage of man's intelligence and will with the material world and the natural forces with which he is surrounded becomes a fruitful union, and from them is generated a culture.

Man's Dignity and Education

In transmitting culture from generation to generation, it is the purpose of education to safeguard and develop the dignity of man. At the end of the 18th century our first president spoke of religion and morality as indispensable supports of political prosperity. At the end of the 19th century our highest court declared that "The reasons presented affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation." What is true of our political prosperity and our nation is true as well of our Western culture in general.

Yet everywhere modern education is being drained of moral content through the movement which is known as Secularism. It has been well said that the education of the soul is the soul of education. Therefore when education tries to thrive in a religious and moral vacuum, and does not aspire to impart a set of principles and a hierarchy of values, it degenerates into a dead and deadening juxtaposition of facts.

And even worse. For though it tries to thrive in such a vacuum, education can never really be neutral in practice. It has been truly said that "Men must be governed by God or they will be ruled by tyrants." Similarly, education must inculcate a religious and moral outlook, or it will inculcate a materialistic one. And there is no word for dignity in the vocabulary of materialism.

Man's Dignity and Liberty

The position of the Church relative to the economic order is based on the principle that the rights man possesses as an individual and the function he fulfills in society are inseparable. Many of the rights of the individual depend upon the function he fulfills in society. Capital and labor from this point of view are related and made inseparable by the common good of society. This is a prime principle of social justice. The right of the capitalist to his business and to his profits and interest, and the right of the laborer to his wages and his union, are both conditioned by their service to the common good.

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