

THE SPIRIT OF '76

Two hundred years of life as a nation is a relatively brief period of existence compared to the lengthy history of the European nations from which many of our forefathers came. We began as a nation of immigrants with a vast expanse of space which appealed to the imaginations and the hopes of a people which relished the great dream that life could be new and better. Thomas Jefferson helped to focus our consciousness not on past glories but on the horizons of a hopeful people and spoke of our beginnings as a "new chapter in the history of man."

And now, 200 years later, we pause to reflect on our history and to celebrate. A bicentennial is a civic event but it should also be a religious event. It offers the Christian and Jewish communities in America a unique opportunity to celebrate on the deeper level of our distinct faith experience as well as our expressions of faith in work and prayer.

What will a worthy celebration be like? I see two extreme approaches that should be avoided. Some may wish to make it merely a nostalgic review of the past with uncritical affirmations that all is right and just with America. Others may wish to use the occasion for an exaggerated negative criticism of our real or imagined betrayals of principle. A middle road between these extremes offers an approach that fits in with the sound convictions of the great majority of Americans. They love America and respect its traditions; but, at the same time, they are realistic enough to admit that neither now nor in the past has it fully lived up to the ideals on which it was founded.

The Special Committee for the Bicentennial organized by the Catholic bishops of the United States has asked the American Catholic Community to focus its reflection on its contributions to American vitality around the theme "Liberty and Justice for All." The Committee has prepared an excellent discussion guide to offer us a method of worthy participation in the celebration. It offers directions

for a process of reflection and action to promote freedom and justice in our society and in the world, and to stimulate a wider dialogue with American society to seek ways to move from inequality to equality, from injustice to justice on a broad spectrum of issues.

Liberty and justice are natural rights of all persons. We are blessed in the fact that our nation aspires to liberty and justice for all people.

Liberty and justice are also biblical realities. They are concepts of faith expressed explicitly in the teaching of Jesus Christ. At those most important moments when he was announcing his mission and describing judgment, Jesus expressly identified Himself with the people who suffer from the oppressions and divisions in the social order. He identified Himself with the poor, with prisoners, the sick and strangers — with those human beings who suffer deprivations of liberty and justice.

The mission of the Church, the community of believers, includes the goals of liberty and justice — not only in the next life, but in this one. We are moved both by our belief in these natural rights and in the teaching of Jesus to work for liberty and justice for all: to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to offer sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free. Mature commitment to Jesus Christ compels us, individually and together, to work and pray continually for these goals. In fulfilling its mission the Church must continue to serve the world and all people. It must work for betterment here and now while at the same time being a sign of hope concerning what is to come.

Gratitude to God for the many ways in which He has blessed us must be part of our celebration of the bicentennial. For many generations of Americans the promise of America has been richly fulfilled — thanks to the American system, thanks to their own talents and hard work, and thanks above all to the goodness of God. Others have not been so fortunate, in various ways and degrees they have been excluded from the American promise. Celebration of the bicentennial must also acknowledge this reality and include commitment to working for the welfare of all.

Our prayers of praise and thanksgiving, pardon and reconciliation, are an honest recognition of our dependence on God and a challenge to renew our commitment to strive for what is right and just. The theme of "Liberty and Justice for All" is related profoundly to this acknowledged dependence and accepted responsibility. Thus the bicentennial is a time for rejoicing in the gifts and blessings granted this nation and also for cleansing, reconciliation and rededication. You are invited to join in the celebration of our nation's bicentennial by lifting your heart to God in prayer.

"Almighty, everliving God, you alone are Lord.

Before you, we and all our institutions, our nation and our government are modest creatures,

bound by human limits, possessing fragile power.

We give you thanks and praise you

for our two hundred years as a nation, for the gifts of this land's native people, for the vision and aspiration of the founders,

for people from many countries

who have here found a home and cherished liberty.

Let your Spirit purify our love of country that it may be true,

that it may face the evil in us without being diminished,

caring for all that is good in our heritage,

striving for all that is possible in our future.

Heal the wounds that injustice, past and present, has inflicted.

Lay low the barriers that it has built.

Move us to find ways of sharing the resources of the world

as sisters and as brothers,

with liberty and justice for all people.

Through Christ our Lord, Amen."

Vatican Document Lauded By U.S. Official

Washington, D.C. (RNS) — A 3,500-word Vatican declaration on sexual ethics was hailed by the president of the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops' conference as a clear and timely assertion of Christian values "fundamental to the defense of human dignity" in these times.

Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin of Cincinnati said that "the Holy See's declaration is a welcome reaffirmation of the traditional Catholic teaching on sexual morality." The declaration takes into account the insights of the behavioral sciences regarding the centrality of sexuality in the development of human personality and the living of human life," he observed.

"If the Church has often found it necessary to repeat Christian tradition in these matters, it is because of her intense dedication to a teaching that is so often flouted," he added.

Archbishop Bernardin went on to note that the contemporary culture's "obsession with sex gives a hollow ring to the frequent charge that the Church is preoccupied with the subject."

The Vatican declaration, issued with the approval of Pope Paul and signed by Cardinal Franjo Seper, prefect of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation, specifically condemns pre-marital sexual relations, homosexual acts, and masturbation in rejecting "certain serious errors and modes of behavior" contrary to Catholic teaching.

While not mentioning birth control specifically, but remarking in a footnote that "these norms have been clearly taught" in such encyclicals as *Humanae Vitae*, the document also refuted "the current tendency to minimize the reality of grave sin" and extolled the virtue of chastity as a "higher and more positive" goal.

Meanwhile in Washington, the president of the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) welcomed the Vatican declaration as a clear outline for the moral upbringing of youth.

"The climate of indifference and

often rejection in regard to basic norms of morality, leads only to chaos in our society," said the NCCW leader, Mrs. Arthur H. Horsell of Oakland, Calif.

She said "the words of the Second Vatican Council, included

in the declaration, are particularly significant today: 'Children and young people have a right to be encouraged to weigh moral values with an upright conscience and to embrace them by personal choice, so that they may know and love God more adequately.'

Also Some Criticism

Rome — While the official Church generally commended the new Vatican declaration on sexual ethics, there also was a great deal of criticism from other quarters throughout Europe.

The document issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was described by some Vatican experts as a response to theologians and scholars within the Catholic Church who have challenged or renounced traditional norms of sexual morality.

Father Roberto Tucci, who heads Vatican Radio, told a news conference that the Vatican declaration reaffirmed traditional Catholic doctrine condemning sexual activity outside marriage. He declared that the Church "is fully in favor of sexual pleasure so long as it is exercised in a legitimate way in marriage."

A leading Italian homosexual rights group, Fuori, vigorously attacked the Vatican declaration. A spokesman said the document confirmed the group's view of the

Church as "one of the most dangerous elements of social and sexual oppression" and described it as "among the most ridiculous, criminal and grotesque ever put out by the modern S.S. of the Vatican."

The left-wing Catholic weekly, *Com Nuovi Tempi*, said the document would soon "fall into oblivion" and the result it achieved was to make the supreme authority of the Catholic Church "still more incredible."

Declaring that the document utilized the Gospel "as a pretext to imprison consciences," the weekly said "fortunately Catholics throughout the world are becoming increasingly aware that their sex life cannot be based on documents of the hierarchy that are quite divorced from the real problems of people."

In Utrecht, a spokesman for the Dutch episcopal conference said the document should be seen basically as a set of guidelines and an appeal to Catholics to adhere more closely to traditional norms of sexual morality.

"It can help people who are in a dilemma about sexual morality in a permissive society," he said. But he also noted that "developments in recent times have broadened people's vision of human sexuality by doing away with prudery and certain sexual taboos."

The Bishop's Public Appointments

February

- 1— Installation Ceremony of Rev. Jerome R. Robinson, OP, Executive Director of Black Ministries, Immaculate Conception Church, Rochester — 4 p.m.
- 2-3-4— Annual Retreat, Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua.
- 5— School Planning Assistance Program Meeting — 9:30 a.m.
- 9— St. Bernard Seminary Board of Trustees Meeting at St. Bernard's Seminary — 10:30 a.m.

- 19— Pastoral Office Staff Meeting — 9 a.m.
- 22— Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, Our Lady of Mercy Church — 10:30 a.m.
- 25— Priestly Spirituality Meeting, Becket Hall — 12:30 p.m.
- 26— Elmira Area Clergy Meeting, St. Mary's, Elmira — Noon.
- 26— Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, Notre Dame High School — 8 p.m.
- 28— Radio Message, Family Rosary Network — 7 p.m.

