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REMARKS

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TENTH ANNUAL CONVENTION

NATIONAL CATHOLIC SOCIAL ACTION CONFERENCE

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It is a privilege for me to address the 10th Annual
Convention of the National Catholic Social Action Conference.

Your challenging program reaffirms what some of us
have known for a long time: Namely, that you are operating
at the cutting edge of the critical social issues of our time.

< One of the most heartening developments in recent
history has been the growing realization among men of all
religions that the tenets of their faiths necessarily lead them
to confront -- and to combat -- human suffering, misery
and injustice wherever they are found.

↳ The National Catholic Social Action Conference has been providing, in a most literal sense, "a basis for dialogue between the Church and the world," as recommended by the Vatican Council.

↳ These are trying days for all people whose cause is social justice and human dignity.

↳ We are told that rioting and violence in our urban areas threaten our achievements of the past and our progress of the future.

↳ We are told ^{that} ~~the~~ national consensus which recently seemed so much in favor of equal rights and opportunity for all has been weakened -- and is being replaced by a growing antagonism to progress in civil rights.

↳ We are told that our democratic system has not been dealing effectively with the urgent human needs which exist in our inner cities -- or in our rural areas.

⌞ We are told that the civil rights movement itself is rent by factionalism, antagonisms, and personal rivalries -- that the unity which had been its hallmark, and source of strength, is slipping away.

⌞ Yes, we are told these things daily. And, as a result, some people believe that our march toward freedom and human rights has been halted -- and some even see us falling backward.

Question ⌞ Are the victories of 1964 and 1965 -- the legislative victories and the successes in all parts of America -- our stopping point? Are the remaining problems too big to be solved?

⌞ There is enough truth in some of these reports to cause deep concern among us.

But I know of no person who truly believes in the dignity of all men -- or who understands the relationship

between freedom for Negro Americans and other minorities and freedom for every American -- who doubts for a moment the eventual outcome of this struggle.

↳ Believing as I do, and confident as I am, there is nevertheless a need to set forth with greater clarity and vision why we are now experiencing these apparent setbacks when victory seemed so near only one year ago.

↳ It is time to examine more carefully the problems which clearly exist, but to do so in relation to the undeniable progress which has been, and is still being, made.

↳ It is, for example, time to face the fact that the struggle for human rights and equal opportunity is confronted with a crisis of confidence among many citizens of America.

↳ We hear these questions asked in honesty:

"Given the many legislative and administrative victories for civil rights, why are we still confronted with such complex and unresolved issues?"

"Have we made any progress at all toward lasting solutions?"

"Where do we go from here?"

I will not presume to attempt any final answers today -- even among good friends.

∠ But I do wish to offer several observations about why our present state of affairs has arisen -- and what this perhaps means to Christians committed to translating their faith into action in ways relevant to the social issues of our time.

∠ Today we are participants in a worldwide surge throughout humanity. People in many walks of life realize that the attainment of human values is crucial to their survival as individuals -- and, indeed, to the maintenance of the social order.

∠ By human values I mean such qualities as self-respect and self-confidence -- coupled with a sense of respect for the accomplishments of others.

I mean the realization of a sense of identity among individuals and groups -- an understanding of one's role in life and one's value to society.

I mean the commitment to self-sacrifice -- the willingness to labor for the common good even if it entails personal hardship and danger.

We must, of course, concern ourselves with the physical needs of life.

And that is why this Administration is, to the limit of its resources, waging this battle on a scale never before achieved.

In this regard, you might be interested in knowing that total federal assistance to cities will increase by almost 2.5 billion dollars between Fiscal Years 1965 and 1967.

Federal assistance to urban areas will, in fact, rise ^{much} faster than both total federal aid and total federal spending.

But, We understand that even this is not enough. We must do more. But it is also important that we understand how much is being done right now.

✓ We also know that a truly humanized life consists of more than merely possessing adequate food and shelter. We know it involves primarily the chance to use the unique spiritual qualities which man alone possesses -- the ability to create, to judge, to exercise freedom, to accept responsibility and to acquire dignity and self-respect.

✓ In the terrible rioting and violence which have gripped our cities, we can often discover twisted and mistaken attempts to achieve a sense of ~~self-respect and self-sacrifice~~ *identity* by persons who blindly retaliate against a society that has seemingly denied them all chance to achieve their humanity in acceptable ways.

✓ We cannot condone or excuse this violence -- whatever the cause, nor can we overlook the role of hoodlums and agitators in certain of the disorders. We cannot condone rioting ~~and~~ civil disorder, ^{and} ~~looting~~, ~~and~~ ~~burning~~

✓ But we can -- and we must ~~learn~~ from these outbreaks that a major factor in our remaining problems of human rights is the vicious and interlocking system of the ghetto which mercilessly strips all vestiges of humanity from its victims.

✓ We can -- and we must -- learn that lasting solutions will have to involve the chance for the people who live there to become real persons -- in their own eyes and in the eyes of society.

And this is achieved when there exists the opportunity to hold a meaningful and rewarding job . . . to live in a decent home . . . to accept the challenge of raising a family . . . to participate in the governing of a neighborhood, a city, or a nation.

Yes, this involves the freedom to exercise meaningful choice in the vital areas of life -- and the willingness to accept responsibility for those decisions.

As President Johnson said last weekend: "In the law courts, in the city halls and school boards, in Congress and in the White House, men are constantly trying to balance one man's rights fairly with another's. And this entire work of balancing -- of seeking justice between men -- rests on the acceptance of responsibility among men."

This involves casting aside forever the clever and sophisticated techniques which sought, and usually produced, deadened and dependent -- yes, dehumanized -- persons.

and This We must not underestimate the historical significance of these developments. Seldom, if ever, has a nation embarked on such a revolutionary course, or mounted such a massive program of conscious ~~self-examination~~ self-improvement.

↳ We must also understand that this revolution -- peaceful and non-violent as it largely has been -- must also produce instances of acute frustration and despair as expectations outstrip reality and performance falls short of promises.

↳ To expect that such a momentous effort could go forward without friction, controversy and occasional setbacks is to underestimate the barriers to social progress which exist in any society -- even one as relatively free and democratic as ours.

↳ But the progress is nevertheless real. We are moving forward -- and we desperately need the support and involvement of persons like yourselves if this progress is to be sustained over the difficult months and years ahead.

↳ It is interesting to note the similar emphasis on the dignity of the human person in the historic encyclicals of Pope John XXIII and Paul VI -- notto mention the documents of the Vatican Council.

Let me quote just one sentence from the text of The Church in the Modern World, " . . . there is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person . . . therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human . . . "

✓ Yes, we seek the right for all men to lead a life truly human -- and we know this involves both worldly and spiritual pursuits.

✓ The Vatican Council also stressed the importance of increasing the involvement and activity of the laity in these social issues and crises.

This theme is sounded in many of the Council's documents -- and these pronouncements reaffirmed vigorously what had already become evident in recent years as the Church grappled with the complex forces which help shape human lives and determine human history.

∟ I remember vividly the impact which churchmen of all faiths made in bringing to sharp focus the moral imperatives which confronted the Congress during the civil rights debate of 1964.

∟ I have said from many platforms -- and I repeat today -- we could never have enacted that legislation without the dedicated labors of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders.

∟ Today the challenge we face is even more urgent than 1964 -- not only on Capitol Hill where a difficult struggle awaits in the Senate, but also in the streets and alleys of our urban ghettos and the roads and fields of our rural slums.

∟ For it is one thing to enact legislation which outlaws flagrant examples of racial discrimination -- segregated hotels, buses and parks -- but it is another thing to eliminate the more subtle and sophisticated techniques which effectively limit true freedom of choice in jobs, education and housing.

It is one thing to cry "Freedom Now" on a picket line. But it is another to achieve true freedom in the squalid world of the ghetto -- where generations of exploitation have produced problems which ^{or government} no man can overcome in a day, a week or a year -- where we see and feel the devastating impact of the tragic equation which has too often decreed that poor shall beget poor, that ignorance shall beget misery.

It is one thing to demand the federal government meet its growing responsibilities in civil rights -- and it will -- but it is another to generate in our states and in our localities the commitment and urgency required to produce significant improvement in the lives of people, where they live, right in their communities.

But this is the job which must be done and you are the people who must help do it.

I have spoken here today of the crisis we face here at home and of our responsibility in meeting it. This responsibility does not stop at the water's edge.

↳ In an age where science and technology have shrunk our physical neighborhood, no crisis is wholly foreign to us, no curse or blessing is received in isolation. ↳ Today responsibility for our fellow man in other parts of the world is inescapable.

↳ All of you ~~here today~~ are well aware of the challenge to the Christian conscience posed by the growing disparity between rich nations and poor, the widening gap between the affluent minority and the impoverished masses of the human race.

↳ Our obligation here was spelled out in bold language by Pope John XXIII in his encyclical Mater et Magistra:

"The solidarity which binds all men and makes them members of the same family requires political communities enjoying an abundance of material goods not to remain indifferent

to those political communities whose citizens suffer from poverty, misery, and hunger, and who lack even the elementary rights of the human person.

This is particularly true since, given the growing interdependence among the peoples of the earth, it is not possible to preserve lasting peace if glaring economic and social inequality among them persist."

This concern for assisting the less fortunate peoples of the world in achieving dignity and self-respect has been reaffirmed by Pope Paul in his eloquent plea at the United Nations last year.

It was recognized by the Vatican Council which called upon the entire Christian community to give special attention to the problem of world poverty. It was the central preoccupation of the men and women who met in Geneva last month for the Church and World Order Conference of the World Council of Churches.

Responding to the Vatican Council's recommendation, the Catholic Church is now moving to establish institutions whose primary responsibility will be to educate the Christian conscience on the problem of social justice. A report has been prepared for the Pope and the establishment of a permanent Secretariat on World Justice is under consideration. These new initiatives -- which have been developed in close cooperation with the World Council of Churches -- are of great importance to all men concerned with the pursuit of human dignity.

We are, then, both here and abroad, participants in a "worldwide surge throughout humanity" with people long denied, but who today have glimpsed the dimensions of what such a life entails -- liberty, freedom, responsibility, dignity, and justice. And who can doubt the ultimate outcome of this struggle?

If we become discouraged -- or are tempted to abandon the fight for human dignity and social justice -- let us only recall the teachings of Pope John XXIII as set forth in Pacem in Terris:

" . . . Every believer in this world of ours must be a spark of light, a center of love, a vivifying leaven among his fellowmen . . . In fact, there can be no peace between men unless there is peace within each one of them: unless, (that is) each one builds up within himself the order wished by God."

↳ You have gathered together to carry forward the urgent task of building peace among men, and peace within men.

There is no more urgent -- and no more sacred -- task.

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