

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

**A GENTLEMAN OF THE
COMMUNITY**

BY

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The ninth in a series of addresses by prominent Catholic laymen entitled "THE ROAD AHEAD," delivered in the Catholic Hour, broadcast by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men, on August 4, 1946, by Dr. George F. Donovan, President of Webster College, Webster Groves, Missouri. After the series has been concluded on the radio, it will be made available in one pamphlet.

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A GENTELMAN OF THE COMMUNITY

At the outset of this talk, one is proud and happy to give public and sincere thanks for the honor of participating in the Catholic Hour, a radio program that is a significant and outstanding network contribution to the religious and intellectual thinking of our country!

Today, the position of man, the single member of society, has been challenged as never before. He is often regarded as a non-entity on the local scene, especially in our cities, which, through the industrial civilization, have more or less swallowed up the individual man. Even our national life bears witness to an economy that tends to the suppression of the average American and to the removal of his personal identity, particularly in the practice of rights and privileges which are and should be common to all our fellow-citizens and this deprivation has often been carried out through policies of segregation and discrimination.

On the world fronts, the past great World War II has led to the death of millions of men and women and to the suffering of countless others. North Africa, Normandy, Okinawa, the Philippines, and other and similar sites bring to mind the great sacri-

fice in human life. We have seen the rise of false gods under the forced decrees of Nazism, Fascism, and Communism.

Even here at home, indifference to a belief in a Supreme Being has and does hold sway. Man doubts and denies God. This evaluation of man and his relationship indicates without argument that his dignity has been shattered and the pieces of that broken humanity have been thrown down to the ground and smothered in the gravel and dust of contemporary forgetfulness and selfishness.

That picture, desolate and disconsolate, does not present the whole truth. It is not the final word. In its place there is, and has been, and will be, a hope for man in his efforts to improve himself, to aid his fellow-man to attain happiness, and to establish order and peace in the world. In this series of four discourses, I propose to answer, in a positive and constructive way, the challenge hurled at man, especially against his dignity. One may look toward this dignity and see an inspiring, respectful and hopeful future.

Man possesses certain qualities which give him a dignity enjoyed by no other earthly creature. He possesses an intellect whereby he

can come to a knowledge and understanding of life itself, and a will with which he may choose between what is right and what is wrong. He possesses a soul which is made to the image and likeness of God, and which is destined to live for all eternity.

A man so endowed possesses dignity. And now let us go ahead and examine this human pattern.

That dignity of man has offered freedom to the slave-man, has brought destruction to the dictator and has given hope to the segregated and under-privileged member of our democracy. There are four steps in this process by which it is hoped that the principles of justice and peace among our fellowmen and among nations may be finally established. The individual man on the local scene, the human being as an American citizen in the national field, man as a world citizen, and man as a citizen of God's kingdom, represent the four main areas of this discussion. There are four relationships, man and his neighbor, man and his country, man and the world, and man and his Creator. In this talk, I plan to discuss the first of these subjects, "Man, as a Gentleman of the Community."

History recalls with traditional respect the democracy of the Greek city-state, the justice

of the local medieval guilds, the republican practices of the Swiss cantons, and the direct and immediate action of the New England town meeting. Through these political channels the individual citizen of such a community had the right to raise his voice for or against local measures and proposals. In that atmosphere freedom of speech, of petition, of assembly, freedom from want and fear existed entirely in some instances and in a partial degree in others. Freedom of religion, the right to organize politically and economically, the right to conduct a business, to own property, to educate one's children according to the conscience of the parent—these freedoms came later and, in the history of the United States, they have become an essential part of local village and town development.

Yet, along the way terrible mistakes were made. Disgraceful public health nuisances, especially in growing factory and mill communities, unsatisfactory working conditions, inadequate housing, excessive tenantry, and many other problems were present to plague and retard the growth of the community. Selfish individuals and a soulless system stifled the solution of many of these community evils.

How, much of this backward

situation has been changed. Community planning, the vision of understanding leaders, the growing appreciation of the right of the individual to follow his conscience, the growth of collective bargaining between workers and employers—all these developments are fundamental. They are inherent in the natural and constitutional rights of Americans everywhere from a village on the coast to a mining town in the interior. These rights are recognized as desirable, essential, and just for the happiness of the individual and of the community.

Such a progressive and helpful change exerts considerable and favorable influences toward a fuller recognition of the dignity of man. When the American citizen walks down a street of his town to the ball game on a Sunday afternoon, to the motion picture theatre on a Friday evening, or to Church on Sunday morning, it is because of these practical principles that he is able and proud to hold his head erect when he realizes that he possesses those factors which make him a true and a complete American citizen. A guaranteed annual wage, based on fifty-two weeks a year; the ownership of one's own home; security against long unemployment and old age; proper clothing and nourishing

food for the family; the right to provide equal educational opportunities for the children—all these help to make a man a gentleman of dignity in his own community.

Despite these improved and recognized conditions, there are still remaining many things to be done in the local area, especially, if the spirit of democracy and the right understanding of the spirit of justice are to be preserved. Voting, holding public office, access to educational facilities, frequent conferences between employer and employee, and other procedures are important and essential. But for the healthy growth of American life, we must have cooperation among the principal groups on the local level, especially in the economic field, if man is to have his rights, and thus live in accordance with his true dignity.

Our rapidly developing industrial economy suggests the formation in a community, where possible, of a local economic council composed of representatives from four principal units: labor, management, the consumer, and the local government. Such a local economic council, composed of representatives of the four groups, would meet to discuss such matters as prices of consumer goods in the community; wages; working conditions

and hours; taxes on manufacturing company property; the quality and the service of the industry. Such an organization, formulated on a cooperative basis and similar to metropolitan groups of the present day in medical and hospital services, would be a safeguard against political or economic domination by one or more groups. It would be active and constructive participation in the responsibilities which affect all local citizens.

The operation of such a council would reflect these characteristics:

First: It would be democratic because all four principal groups, the employer, the employee, the public, and government are represented and have something to say.

Second: The interest is very complete because the whole community is included, not just capital alone, or labor, or any other group but all four are participating. It would be limited to the local area, just the community itself. Outside factors and problems could best be determined by economic councils organized on state, regional, and national bases according to the scope of economic life.

The council would be a practical demonstration of neighborly cooperation, all interests working together for a common ob-

jective—the good of the local area. The council would stress a greater and more equitable distribution of wealth among all occupational groups. The governmental participation would be at a minimum, and then merely for the purpose of coordinating the procedure and technique of cooperation.

This economic council is an example of local citizens working together for the love of their fellowman. With this ideal in mind it is not difficult to visualize greater aims including the giving of greater glory and happiness to the community, the nation, and even to God Himself.

Such a cooperative program might easily be extended to other fields such as medicine, dentistry, nursing, mining, transportation, retail establishments, and other manufacturing industries. It would give added life and prestige to the dignity of man. Man as an individual in the sight of his fellowman would not be regarded as a one-sided figure or be totally disregarded but would be looked upon as a responsible individual with rights as well as obligations.

Some years ago, as a boy, I recall attending a celebration in connection with the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Lexington in Massachusetts. One of the speakers

very proudly declared on that memorable occasion that he would never want to go down in history as a Massachusettsan, or as a Virginian, or as a native of any commonwealth of the Union, but as an American. Translating this thought to the community and to the dignity of man, one might say, in comparable fashion, "I do not want to be regarded just as an employer,

just as an employee, or just as a member of a local government, or as a consumer, but I want to be looked upon in the pages of history and by my fellow-citizens as a protector and defender of human rights, and as a gentleman of the community."

The dignity of man then would make our community relations what they ought to be—and may that day come with God's help.

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year through a number of stations varying from 90 to 110, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting usually of an address, mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers—though sometimes of talks by laymen, sometimes of dramatizations—and of sacred music provided by a volunteer choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. An average of 100,000 audience letters a year, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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