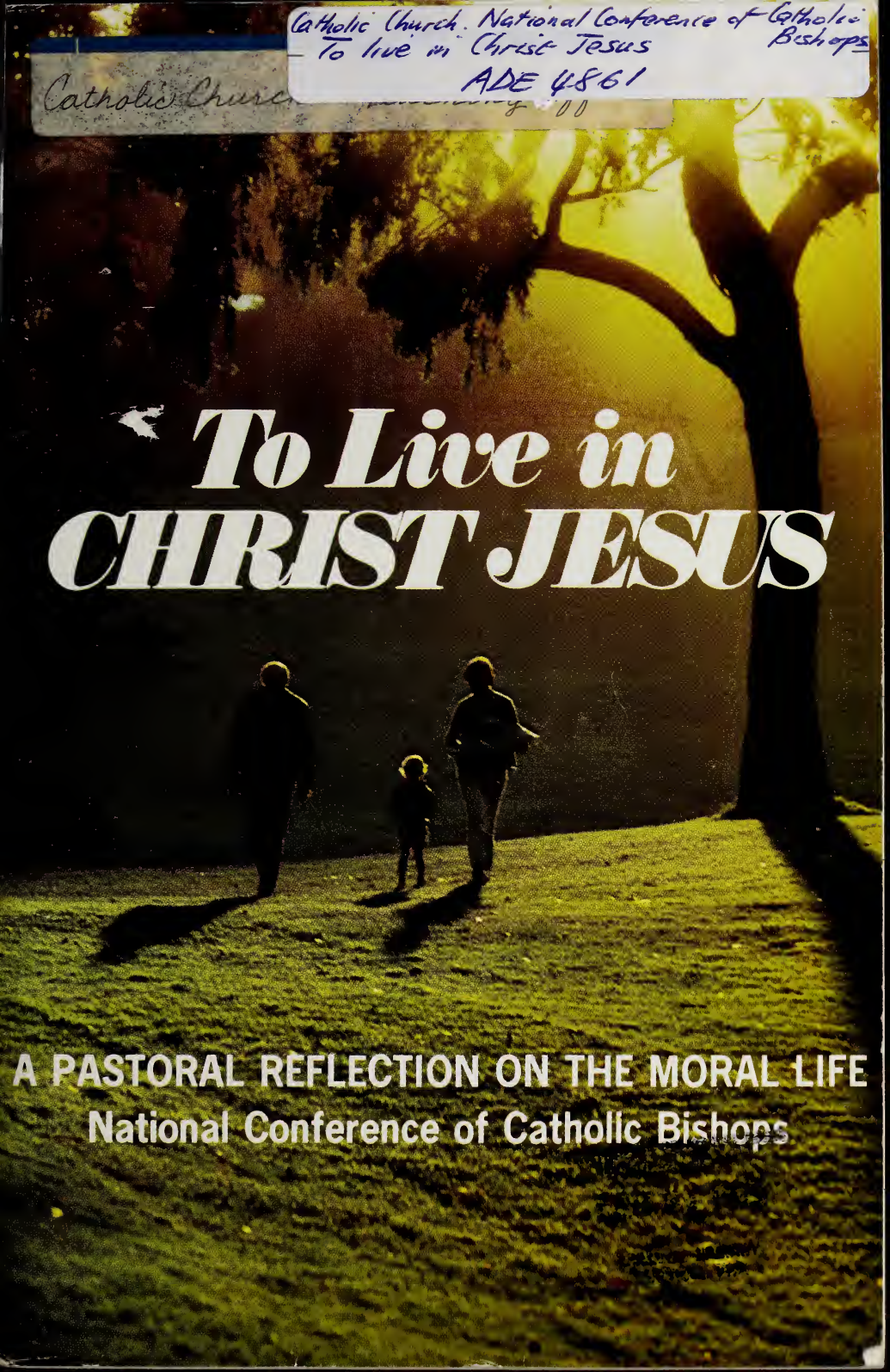


Catholic Church, National Conference of Catholic Bishops
To live in Christ Jesus

ADE 4861

Catholic Church



To Live in **CHRIST JESUS**

A PASTORAL REFLECTION ON THE MORAL LIFE
National Conference of Catholic Bishops



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/toliveinchristjecath>

**To
Live
in
CHRIST
JESUS**

A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life

NOVEMBER 11, 1976

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
CATHOLIC BISHOPS**

©United States Catholic Conference

**1976
Publications Office
UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005**

CONTENTS

TO LIVE IN CHRIST JESUS: A PASTORAL REFLECTION ON THE MORAL LIFE

	<i>PAGE</i>
I. Introduction: Principles of the Moral Life	3
Christ, Our Life	3
Sin and Grace	5
Conversion	7
Fulfillment	8
Guidance in Christ	8
Conscience	10
The Church	10
II. Moral Life in the Family, the Nation, and the Community of Nations	13
The Family	14
Children	17
The Aged	20
The Family and Society	22
The Nation	23
The Individual and the Nation	23
Respect for the Unborn	23
Women in Society	24
Respect for Racial and Ethnic Groups	25
Employment	27
Housing	28
Crime and Correction	29
The Nation and the Individual	30
The Community of Nations	30
The Development of Peoples	32
Peace	33
Human Rights	36
III. Conclusion	37
Footnotes	40
Study Questions	42



Introduction

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We wish to share our faith with you. We wish to speak of its power, of the great hope that is in us, of the Spirit that has been poured into human hearts. We wish to discuss some moral questions of our day which affect the dignity of human persons and to respond to them in accordance with what we have seen and heard concerning the word of life. "What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you so that you may share life with us."¹ We also address these words in charity and respect to our fellow Christians and to others who, although they do not share our religious beliefs, may wish to know our vision of the moral life and our perception of many of the critical issues of our day.

Christ, Our Life

We believe the meaning and destiny of our lives are most fully revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth, whom we acknowledge as Son of God made man, Savior and Lord of creation. In Him are revealed two great truths:

- who God is and
- who we are.

He tells us that God, whom we are to love and serve above all else,² loves us more than we can hope to understand and offers us His love irrevocably. As St. Paul says: "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the Love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord."³ Jesus Himself is the new covenant, the sacred and enduring bond, between God and ourselves.⁴

"Whatever came to be in Him, found life . . . any who did accept Him He empowered to become children of God."⁵ Christ, in whom God and man are most perfectly one, manifests in the world

We wish to share our faith with you and others who may wish to know our vision of the moral life.

God's hidden plan to share His life with us, to pour out His own Spirit upon all flesh,⁶ so that we who were formed in His image should be called and be children of God,⁷ addressing Him in truth as "our Father."

Christ also reveals the response which we are to make to our calling and gives us the power to make it. This is the power of God's own Spirit. "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."⁸ Jesus lived and was led by the Spirit as the dynamic force of His life.⁹ As Son of God made man, He loves not only His Father but each human being. He teaches us that love of God and love of neighbor spring from the same Spirit and are inseparable.¹⁰ "If anyone says, 'My love is fixed on God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar."¹¹ We are to love all human beings, even our enemies, as we love ourselves;¹² even more, we are to obey Christ's new command to love all others as He has loved us.¹³

By this commandment Christ tells us something new

- about God,
- about love, and
- about ourselves.

His commandment to love is new not simply because of the scope and unselfishness of the love involved, but because it calls us to love with a divine love called charity, as the Father, Son and Spirit do. This call carries with it the inner gift of Their life and the power of Their love, for Christ does not command what is impossible.

Christ's life is one of total obedience to the Father in the Spirit. His obedience entailed hunger and thirst and weariness, obscurity and rejection, suffering and death. Yet in accepting the suffering which came to Him as He walked the way of loving obedience, Jesus did not deny His humanity but realized it perfectly. In giving His Son the glorious victory over death, the Father showed His pleasure with the Son's loving obedience.¹⁴

His life challenges the lives we lead. He began His ministry by calling us to change our lives completely.¹⁵ His very first word summons us to turn away from sin, turn toward God, and receive the gift of the Spirit.

Sin and Grace

We must recognize the brutal reality of sin. It is different from unavoidable failure or limitation. We all fail often through no fault of our own, and we all experience human limitations, among which the ultimate limitation is death. It is a sign of maturity to be able to accept our limitations and discover meaning in our failures.

Sin is different. It is a spirit of selfishness rooted in our hearts and wills which wages war against God's plan for our fulfillment. It is rejection, either partial or total, of one's role as a child of God and a member of His people, a rejection of the spirit of sonship, love and life. We sin first in our hearts, although often our sins are expressed in outward acts and their consequences.¹⁶

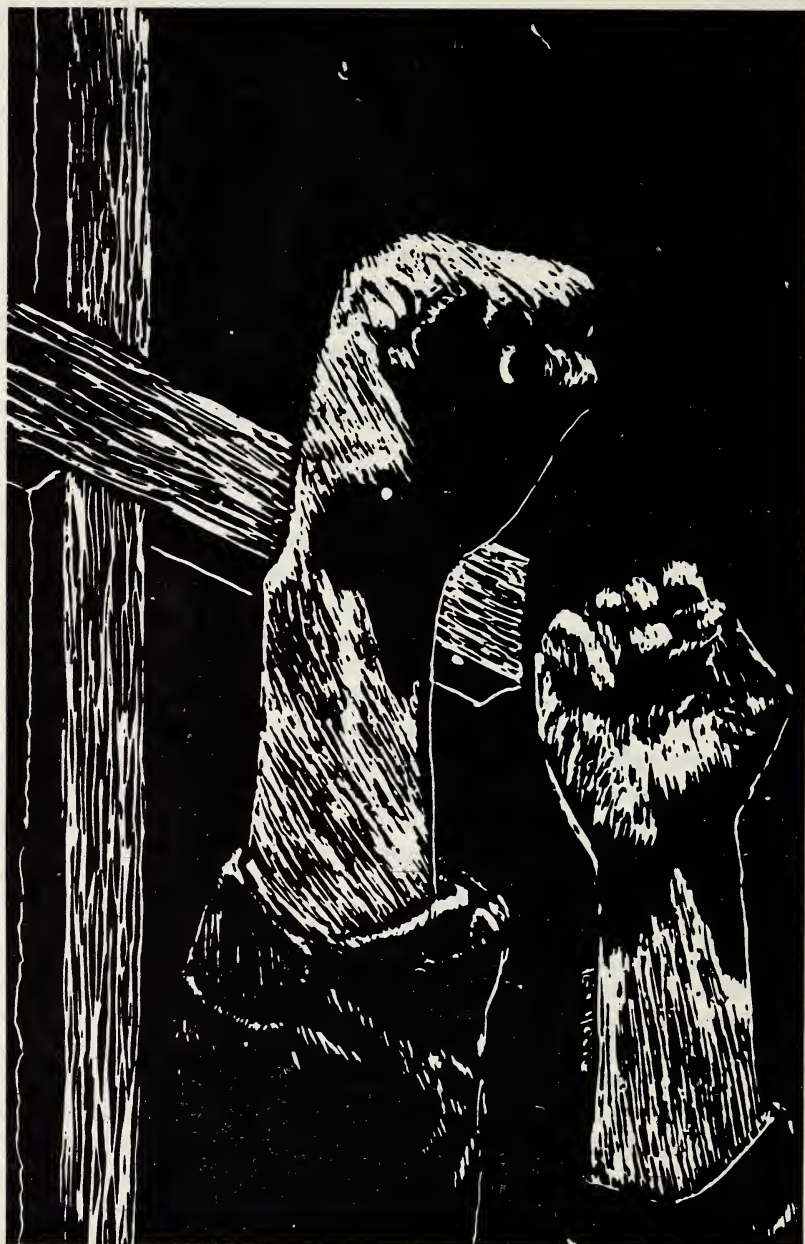
There is vast goodness in our world, yet sin's effects are also visible everywhere:

- in exploitative relationships,
- in loveless families,
- in unjust social structures and policies,
- in crimes by and against individuals and against God's creation.

Everywhere we encounter the suffering and destruction wrought by egoism and lack of community, by oppression of the weak and manipulation of the vulnerable; we experience explosive tensions among nations, ideological, racial, and religious groups, and social classes; we witness the scandalous gulf between those who waste goods and resources and those who live and die amid deprivation and underdevelopment — and all this in an atmosphere of wars and ceaseless preparations for war. Ours is a sinful world.

Sin is a spirit of selfishness rooted in our hearts and wills which wages war against God's plan.

“But despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it.”¹⁷ God remained faithful to His love for us, sending His own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh”¹⁸ into the midst of this sinful world. Jesus, “who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned,”¹⁹ accepted in Himself the full force of our sins, of the powers of darkness at large in the world, and of all the suffering which fidelity to God entails. So that by His obedience many might be made righteous,²⁰ He was faithful unto death. This was His final, irrevocable act of absolute self-giving in love to God and to us.



In a special way we engage in a continuing process of conversion through the Sacrament of Penance.

Christ's offer of love and life is valid forever. Transcending space and time, He is present to all and offers to each the life that is in Him. It is freely offered, there for the taking, unless in our freedom we choose to reject His call and not to be united with Him.

Because of sin we are helpless if left to ourselves, unable even to do the good we know and truly wish to do.²¹ But God, who loves us and is faithful to His promise, saves us from sin through Jesus.

- Through baptism we enter into Christ's saving death and are buried with Him;
- through baptism we enter into His saving resurrection;
- through baptism we are united to His body and share in His Spirit.

We who have been baptized in Christ are to consider ourselves "dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus."²² "Since we live by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's lead."²³

Conversion

Even so, our final triumph over sin is a lifelong task. Christ's call to conversion is ever timely, for we still live in a sinful world and the power of sin is strong in us. "My inner self agrees with the law of God, but I see in my body's members another law at war with the law of my mind; this makes me the prisoner of the law of sin in my members."²⁴

As disciples of Jesus who accept Him as our way and desire to love God and each other as we have been loved, we must acknowledge our sinfulness. We have to undergo conversion: "a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge, and arrange his life according to the holiness and love of God."²⁵ In a special way we engage in a continuing process of conversion through the Sacrament of Penance, in which our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled with God and with the community of faith. We are to live the paschal mystery, which we proclaim at Mass: "Dying, He destroyed our death and, rising, He restored our life."²⁶ This paschal mystery is central to Christ's life and mission and to ours as His disciples.

Living in His spirit, we must deny ourselves, take up the cross each day, and follow in His steps.²⁷ Christ's atoning sacrifice is, in Cardinal Newman's words, "the vital principle in which the Christian lives, and without which Christianity is not."²⁸ As brothers and sisters of Jesus who are also His followers and members of His body, we must accept suffering and death as He did, and in so accepting them share His life. "If we have been united with Him through likeness to His death," so also "through a like resurrection" we shall be raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.²⁹ By our union with Christ we have already begun to share that risen life here on earth.

Fulfillment

All of us seek happiness: life, peace, joy, a wholeness and wholesomeness of being. The happiness we seek and for which we are fashioned is given to us in Jesus, God's supreme gift of love. He comes in the Father's name to bring the fulfillment promised to the Hebrew people and, through them, to all people everywhere. He is Himself our happiness and peace, our joy and beatitude.

Of old the divine pattern for human existence was set forth in the decalogue. And Jesus said: "He who obeys the commandments he has from Me is the man who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father."³⁰ In the beatitudes³¹ Jesus, our brother, promises us the dignity of life as sons and daughters of God, the eternal enjoyment of a destiny which we now grasp imperfectly and which has yet to appear in its glorious fullness. Through these beatitudes, Jesus also teaches us values we must cherish and qualities we must cultivate if we are to follow Him.

Living these values by the grace of Christ, we possess in some measure even now the fulfillment promised to us. As God's reign takes root within us we become "gentle and humble of heart" like Jesus³² through deeds done in holiness, and thus "a kingdom of justice, love and peace is furthered in this world."³³

Guidance in Christ

God reveals to us in Jesus who we are and how we are to live. Yet He has made us free, able and obliged to decide how we shall respond to our calling. We must make concrete in the particular circumstances of our lives what the call to holiness and the commandment of love require. This is not easy. We know, too, that our decisions may not be arbitrary, for 'good' and 'bad,' 'right' and 'wrong'

We must make decisions of conscience based upon prayer, study, consultation and an understanding of the teachings of the Church.

are not simply whatever we choose to make them. And so God gives us His guidance in manifold forms.

The human heart is alive with desire for created goods. Behind this desire is our longing for God. "Athirst is my soul for God, the living God."³⁴ Our desire for created goods and our longing for the uncreated good are not in contradiction, since Christ came to perfect our nature, not to destroy it. He is the goal to whom all creatures tend, for whom all creatures long, in whom all hold together.³⁵ Everything good and worthwhile in the adventure of a human life is such because it shows forth in some way the glory of God and points back to Him. Created goods and loves are His gifts, and they tell us of their giver and His will for humanity. Though all other goods draw us in part to our perfection as individuals, members of human communities, and stewards of the world, union with God is the supreme and only perfect fulfillment. Those who follow Christ will value all that is truly human and be reminded by it of His call.

We rejoice in friends, in being alive, in being treated as persons rather than things, in knowing the truth. In this we are rejoicing in being ourselves, images of God called to be His children. Truth and life, love and peace, justice and friendship go into what it means to be human. Morality, then, is not simply something imposed on us from without, but is ingrained in our being; it is the way we accept our humanity as restored to us in Christ.

In giving us these goods and the desire for them, God wills that we be open to them and eager to foster them in ourselves and others. All these goods form a starting point for reflecting upon the meaning and purpose of our lives. In the life of every human person are reflected many elements of the "divine law — eternal, objective, and universal — whereby God orders, directs, and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community."³⁶ All these goods together bear witness to the existence of what is often called the natural moral law. No disciple of Christ will neglect these goods. We are not possessed of His Spirit, therefore, if we toss them

aside with contempt, spurning the loving gifts of our Father; if we grasp at them selfishly and deny them to others; or if we make them, not their giver, the ultimate end and meaning of our lives.³⁷

Conscience

Even when we have become conscious of these fundamental goods and have cultivated an attitude of cherishing them in ourselves and others, more remains to be done. We still must decide how to realize and affirm them in the concrete circumstances of our lives. Such decisions are called judgments of conscience. In the final analysis, they take place in the “most secret core and sanctuary” of a person, where one “is alone with God.”³⁸

We live in good faith if we act in accord with conscience. Nevertheless our moral decisions still require much effort. We must make decisions of conscience based upon prayer, study, consultation and an understanding of the teachings of the Church. We must have a rightly informed conscience and follow it. But our judgments are human and can be mistaken; we may be blinded by the power of sin in our lives or misled by the strength of our desires. “Beloved, do not trust every spirit, but put the spirits to a test to see if they belong to God.”³⁹

Clearly, then, we must do everything in our power to see to it that our judgments of conscience are informed and in accord with the moral order of which God is creator. Common sense requires that conscientious people be open and humble, ready to learn from the experience and insight of others, willing to acknowledge prejudices and even change their judgments in light of better instruction.

Followers of Jesus will have a realistic approach to conscience. They will accept what Jesus taught and judge things as He judges them.

The Church

Where are we to look for the teachings of Jesus, hear His voice and discern His will?

In scripture, whose books were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In prayer, where we grow in knowledge and love of Christ and in commitment to His service. In the events of human life and history, where Christ and His Spirit are at work. In the Church, where all these things converge. This is why the Second



Vatican Council said: "In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church."⁴⁰

There are many instruments and agents of teaching in the Church. All have roles in drawing out the richness of Christ's message and proclaiming it, each according to his or her gift. Although we cannot discuss their role at length here, we wish in particular to acknowledge and encourage the contributions which theologians make to this effort.

The Holy Father and the bishops in communion with him have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the official and authentic teachers of Christian life. For Jesus "established His holy Church by sending forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father (cf. Jn. 20:21). He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world."⁴¹ It is their office and duty to express the teaching of Christ on moral questions and matters of belief. This special teaching office within the Catholic Church is a gift of the Lord Jesus for the benefit of all His followers in their efforts to know what He teaches, value as He values, and live as free, responsible, loving, and holy persons. As Christ says, "He who hears you, hears Me."⁴² The authoritative moral teachings of the Church enlighten personal conscience and are to be regarded as certain and binding norms of morality.

Following the teaching and example of Christ in the family of the Church, we become more like Him and more perfect as the Father's children and people. Christ brings us the life of the Father and fills our lives with His Spirit. So our best answer in face of the challenges we encounter in living the Christian life is this: "In Him who is the source of my strength, I have strength for everything."⁴³

It is their (the bishops') office and duty to express the teaching of Christ on moral questions and matters of belief.



Moral Life in the Family, the Nation, and the Community of Nations

Every human being is of priceless value: made in God's image, redeemed by Christ, and called to an eternal destiny.

We turn now to three social clusters, three concentric communities, which provide the setting for human life and fulfillment in Christ:

- the family,
- the nation,
- and the community of nations.

In speaking of matters which bear upon these three communities today, we treat them as moral issues in light of the values given us by Jesus Christ and His Church, in whose name we proclaim them. We cannot here discuss every important issue. Moreover, we admit that in some cases the complexity of the problems does not permit ready, concrete solutions. Nevertheless, as teachers of morality we insist that even such complex problems must be resolved ultimately in terms of objective principles if the solutions are to be valid.⁴⁴

Our point of focus is the human person. "The progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on each other."⁴⁵ Every human being is of priceless value: made in God's image, redeemed by Christ, and called to an eternal destiny. That is why we are to recognize all human beings as our neighbors and love them with the love of Christ.

This love of neighbor, inseparably linked to love of God and indeed an expression and measure of it, is summoned forth first in regard to those closest to us — the members of our own families.

THE FAMILY

Every human being has a need and right to be loved, to have a home where he or she can put down roots and grow. The family is the first and indispensable community in which this need is met. Today, when productivity, prestige or even physical attractiveness are regarded as the gauge of personal worth, the family has a special vocation to be a place where people are loved not for what they do or what they have but simply because they are.

A family begins when a man and woman publicly proclaim before the community their mutual commitment so that it is possible to speak of them as one body.⁴⁶ Christ teaches that God wills the union of man and woman in marriage to be lifelong, a sharing of life for the length of life itself.

The Old Testament takes the love between husband and wife as one of the most powerful symbols of God's love for His people: "I will espouse you to Me forever: I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy: I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord."⁴⁷ So husband and wife espouse themselves, joined in a holy and loving covenant.

The New Testament continues this imagery: only now the union between husband and wife rises to the likeness of the union between Christ and His Church.⁴⁸ Jesus teaches that in marriage men and women are to pledge steadfast unconditional faithfulness which mirrors the faithfulness of the Son of God. Their marriages make His fidelity and love visible to the world. Christ raised marriage in the Lord to the level of a sacrament, whereby this union symbolizes and effects God's special love for the couple in their total domestic and social situation.

Jesus tells us that the Father can and will grant people the greatness of heart to keep such pledges of loving faithfulness.⁴⁹ The Church has always believed that in making and keeping noble promises of this sort people can through the grace of God grow beyond themselves — grow to the point of being able to love beyond their merely human capacity. Yet contemporary culture makes it

The covenant between a man and a woman joined in marriage is as indissoluble and irrevocable as God's love for His people.



difficult for many people to accept this view of marriage. Even some who admire it as an ideal doubt whether it is possible and consider it too risky to attempt. They believe it better to promise less at the start and so be able to escape from marital tragedy in order to promise once again.

But this outlook itself has increased marital tragedy. Only men and women bold enough to make promises for life, believing that with God's help they can be true to their word as He is to His, have the love and strength to surmount the inevitable challenges of marriage. Such unselfish love, rooted in faith, is ready to forgive when need arises and to make the sacrifices demanded if something as precious and holy as marriage is to be preserved. For the family to be a place where human beings can grow with security, the love

pledged by husband and wife must have as its model the selfless and enduring love of Christ for the Church. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. He gave Himself up for her."⁵⁰

Some say even sacramental marriages can deteriorate to such an extent that the marital union dies and the spouses are no longer obliged to keep their promise of lifelong fidelity. Some would even urge the Church to acknowledge such dissolution and allow the parties to enter new, more promising unions. We reject this view.⁵¹ In reality it amounts to a proposal to forego Christian marriage at the outset and substitute something entirely different. It would weaken marriage further, while paying too little heed to Jesus' call to identify ourselves with His redeeming love, which endures all things. Its fundamental difficulty is that it cannot be reconciled with the Church's mission to be faithful to the word entrusted to it. The covenant between a man and woman joined in Christian marriage is as indissoluble and irrevocable as God's love for His people and Christ's love for His Church.

Since the following of Christ calls for so much dedication and sacrifice in the face of strong, contrary social pressures, Christ's Church has a serious obligation to help His followers live up to the challenge. In worship, pastoral care, education, and counseling we must assist husbands and wives who are striving to realize the ideal of Christ's love in their lives together and with their children. Young people and engaged couples must be taught the meaning of Christian marriage. Married couples must have the support and encouragement of the Christian community in their efforts to honor their commitments.

It remains a tragic fact that some marriages fail. We must approach those who suffer this agonizing experience with the compassion of Jesus Himself. In some cases romanticism or immaturity may have prevented them from entering into real Christian marriages.

But often enough 'broken marriages' are sacramental, indissoluble unions. In this sensitive area the pastoral response of the Church is especially needed and especially difficult to formulate. We must seek ways by which the Church can mediate Christ's compassion to those who have suffered marital tragedy, but at the same time we may do nothing to undermine His teaching concerning the beauty and meaning of marriage and in particular His prophetic

In contraceptive intercourse the procreative or life-giving meaning of intercourse is deliberately separated from its love-giving meaning.

demands concerning the indissolubility of the unions of those who marry in the Lord. The Church must ever be faithful to the command to serve the truth in love.⁵²

Children

The love of husband and wife finds its ideal fulfillment in their children, with whom they share their life and love. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage who in turn substantially enrich the lives of their parents.⁵³

Openness to children is vitally linked to growth in marital and family love. Couples have a right to determine responsibly, in accord with God's law, how many children they should have, and they may also have valid reasons for not seeking children immediately. But in marrying with the intention of postponing children indefinitely, some appear simply to wish to enjoy one another's company without distraction or to achieve an arbitrary level of material comfort. This can mark a selfish entry into what should be an experience of generous giving. Even worse, children may come to be regarded as an intrusion and a burden instead of a gift. This may lead to a rejection of the children, particularly those who are disadvantaged, either before or after birth.

In order to reflect seriously upon the value they assign children, couples should begin by reflecting upon their understanding of marriage itself. Do they believe God is with them in this adventure to which they have committed themselves? If so, their love will reach confidently toward the future and provide a setting in which new life can be generously accepted, take root and grow. Openness to new life, founded on faith, in turn will strengthen their love. They will come to see how the love-giving and life-giving meanings of their love are joined in loving acts of marital intercourse, linked by a necessary relationship which exists not only on the biological level but on all levels of personality.

One need not always act to realize both of these values, but one may never deliberately suppress either of them. The love-giving

and life-giving meanings of marital intercourse are real human values and aspects of human personhood. Because they are, it is wrong to act deliberately against either. In contraceptive intercourse the procreative or life-giving meaning of intercourse is deliberately separated from its love-giving meaning and rejected; the wrongness of such an act lies in the rejection of this value.⁵⁴

Some distinguish between a so-called contraceptive mentality — a deep-seated attitude of selfish refusal to communicate life and love to a future generation — and particular contraceptive acts during a marriage otherwise generally open to the transmission of life. Though there is a difference, even in the latter case an act of contraceptive intercourse is wrong because it severs the link between the meanings of marital intercourse and rejects one of them.

We ask Catholics to reflect on the value at stake here. The Church is not engaged in a mere quibble over means of birth regulation; it is proclaiming the value of the life-giving meaning of marital intercourse, a value attacked, though in different ways, by both the ideology of contraception and by contraceptive acts.

Pastoral sensitivity requires that we be understanding toward those who find it hard to accept this teaching, but it does not permit us to change or suppress it. We recognize that couples face increasing pressures in family planning. Contraceptive birth control results not only from selfishness and improperly formed conscience but also from conflicts and pressures which can mitigate moral culpability. Therefore, we ask our people not to lose heart or turn away from the community of faith when they find themselves caught in these conflicts. We urge them to seek appropriate and understanding pastoral counsel, to make use of God's help in constant prayer and recourse to the sacraments, and to investigate honestly such legitimate methods of birth limitation as natural family planning.⁵⁵ At the same time we urge those who dissent from this teaching of the Church to a prayerful and studied reconsideration of their position.

Our Christian tradition holds the sexual union between husband and wife in high honor, regarding it as a special expression of

Sexual intercourse is a moral and human good only within marriage; outside marriage it is wrong.

their covenanted love which mirrors God's love for His people and Christ's love for the Church. But like many things human, sex is ambivalent. It can be either creative or destructive. Sexual intercourse is a moral and human good only within marriage; outside marriage it is wrong.⁵⁶

Our society gives considerable encouragement to premarital and extramarital sexual relations as long as, it is said, 'no one gets hurt.' Such relations are not worthy of beings created in God's image and made God's adopted children nor are they according to God's will.⁵⁷ The unconditional love of Christian marriage is absent, for such relations are hedged around with many conditions. Though tenderness and concern may sometimes be present, there is an underlying tendency toward exploitation and self-deception. Such relations trivialize sexuality and can erode the possibility of making deep, lifelong commitments.

Some persons find themselves through no fault of their own to have a homosexual orientation. Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community. Homosexual activity, however, as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong. Like heterosexual persons, homosexuals are called to give witness to chastity, avoiding, with God's grace, behavior which is wrong for them, just as nonmarital sexual relations are wrong for heterosexuals. Nonetheless, because heterosexuals can usually look forward to marriage, and homosexuals, while their orientation continues, might not, the Christian community should provide them a special degree of pastoral understanding and care.

Though most people have two families, the one in which they are born and the one they help bring into being, the single and celibate have only the first. But from this experience they, too, know family values. Love and sacrifice, generosity and service have a real place in their lives. They are as much tempted as the married — sometimes more — to selfishness. They have as great a need for understanding and consolation. Family values may be expressed in different terms in their lives, but they are expressed.

The elderly must be cherished, not merely tolerated.

The Aged

The adventure of marriage and family is a continuing one in which elderly people have important lessons to teach and learn. Contemporary American society tends to separate the aging from their families, isolating kin in ways that are more than physical, with the result that the wisdom of experience is often neither sought, imparted nor further developed.⁵⁸

Families should see the story of loving reciprocity through life's closing chapters. Where possible, the elderly should be welcomed into their own families. Moreover, children have an obligation of human and Christian justice and love to keep closely in touch with aging parents and to do what lies in their power to care for them in their old age. "If anyone does not provide for his own relatives and especially for members of his immediate family, he has denied the faith; he is worse than an unbeliever."⁵⁹ The community should provide for those who lack families and, in doing so, attend to all their needs, not just physical ones. Here the Church has played and continues to play a special role. The elderly must be cherished, not merely tolerated, and the Church community, through parishes and other agencies, should seek to mediate to them the loving concern of Jesus and the Father.

Euthanasia or mercy killing is much discussed and increasingly advocated today, though the discussion is often confused by ambiguous use of the slogan 'death with dignity.' Whatever the word or term, it is a grave moral evil deliberately to kill persons who are terminally ill or deeply impaired. Such killing is incompatible with respect for human dignity and reverence for the sacredness of life.

Something different is involved, however, when the question is whether hopelessly ill and painfully afflicted people must be kept alive at all costs and with the use of every available medical technique.

Some seem to make no distinction between respecting the dying process and engaging in direct killing of the innocent. Morally there is all the difference in the world. While euthanasia or direct



Every human life is inviolable from the beginning.

killing is gravely wrong, it does not follow that there is an obligation to prolong the life of a dying person by extraordinary means. At times the effort to do so is of no help to the dying and may even be contrary to the compassion due them. People have a right to refuse treatment which offers no reasonable hope of recovery and imposes excessive burdens on them and perhaps also their families. At times it may even be morally imperative to discontinue particular medical treatments in order to give the dying the personal care and attention they really need as life ebbs. Since life is a gift of God we treat it with awesome respect. Since death is part and parcel of human life, indeed the gateway to eternal life and the return to the Father, it, too, we treat with awesome respect.

The Family and Society

Marriage and the family are deeply affected by social patterns and cultural values. How we structure society, its approach to education and work, the roles of men and women, public policy toward health care and care of the young and old, the tone and cast of our literature, arts and media — all these affect the family. The test of how we value the family is whether we are willing to foster, in government and business, in urban planning and farm policy, in education and health care, in the arts and sciences, in our total social and cultural environment, moral values which nourish the primary relationships of husbands, wives and children and make authentic family life possible.



THE NATION

Our nation is committed in principle to the inviolable dignity of the human person, to respect for religious faith and the free exercise of religion, to social and legal structures by which citizens can participate freely in the governmental process, and to procedures by which grievances can be adjudicated and wrongs can be righted. This commitment is a constant challenge, and at times we have failed to live up to its demands. Nevertheless, it remains possible to develop here a social order “founded on truth, built on justice, and animated by love.”⁶⁰

The Individual and the Nation

While the ultimate and most substantive values inhere in individuals, individuality and community are inseparable elements of the moral life. So, for instance, honesty, courage and hope, which abide only in individuals, can be fostered by freedom to learn, protection from violence, adequate income, and the availability of health care.

As followers of Jesus we are called to express love of neighbor in deeds which help others realize their human potential. This, too, has consequences for the structures of society. Law and public policy do not substitute for the personal acts by which we express love of neighbor; but love of neighbor impels us to work for laws, policies and social structures which foster human goods in the lives of all persons.

Respect for the Unborn

It is therefore as ironic as it is tragic that, in a nation committed to human rights and dignity, the practice of legalized abortion is now widespread. Every human life is inviolable from its very beginning. While the unborn child may not be aware of itself and its rights, it is a human entity, a human being with potential, not a potential human being. Like the newborn, the unborn depend on others for life and the opportunity to share in human goods. Their dependence and vulnerability remind us of the social character of all human life: to live and thrive as a human being, each of us needs the help and support of others.⁶¹

To destroy these innocent unborn children is an unspeakable crime, a crime which subordinates weaker members of the human community to the interests of the stronger. God who calls us to Himself loves the helpless and weak; like Him we should affirm the unborn in their being, not close our eyes to their humanity so that we may more easily destroy them. Their right to life must be recognized and fully protected by the law.

While many today seek abortion for frivolous and selfish reasons, there are women who see it as a tragic solution to agonizing problems. They deserve society's help in meeting and resolving these problems so that they will not feel a need to resort to the inhuman expedient of abortion. Recognition of the incomparable dignity of all human beings, including the unborn, obliges us to assume loving responsibility for all who are in need. The Church must take appropriate initiatives in providing support to women with problems during pregnancy or after, and in doing so bear witness to its belief in human dignity.⁶²

Women in Society

As society has grown more sensitive to some new or newly recognized issues and needs (while at the same time growing tragically less sensitive to others), the movement to claim equal rights for women makes it clear that they must now assume their rightful place as partners in family, institutional, and public life. The development of these roles can and should be enriching for both women and men.

Even today some still consider women to be men's inferiors, almost their property. It is un-Christian and inhuman for husbands to regard their wives this way; they ought instead to "love (them) as Christ loved the Church."⁶³ Such un-Christian and inhuman attitudes are expressed in a truly degraded manner when they take the form of exploiting women for pleasure and financial profit through prostitution and pornography.

Efforts to win recognition that women have the same dignity and fundamental rights as men are praiseworthy and good. But the same cannot be said of views which would ignore or deny significant differences between the sexes, undermine marriage and motherhood, and erode family life and the bases of society itself. Liberation does not lie in espousing new modes of dehumanization, nor in

enslavement to an ideology which ignores the facts of human sexuality and the requirements of human dignity.

There is much to be done in the Church in identifying appropriate ways of recognizing women's equality and dignity. We have every reason and precedent for doing so, since our tradition has always honored the Mother of God and recognized Mary as the one in whom, next to Jesus Himself, human nature is expressed most perfectly. In canonizing so many women over the centuries, including our own country's St. Frances Xavier Cabrini and St. Elizabeth Seton, the Church has proposed them to both women and men as models of what it means to live the life of Christ. Thus we fully support constructive efforts to remove demeaning attitudes and customs with respect to women, however subtle and unconscious in origin they may be.

Respect for Racial and Ethnic Groups

The members of every racial and ethnic group are beings of incomparable worth; yet racial antagonism and discrimination are among the most persistent and destructive evils in our nation.⁶⁴ Those victims of discrimination of whom we are most conscious are Hispanic Americans, Black Americans, and American Indians. The Catholic community should be particularly sensitive to this form of injustice because it, too, has experienced prejudice and discrimination in America based on national origin and religion.

It is sometimes said to be pointless to lecture those who are not personally guilty of causing or directly contributing to racism and other ills of society. But the absence of personal fault for an evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must seek to resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt for it.

It is also wrong to say that those whose energy and motivation have been sapped by social injustices bear sole responsibility for bettering themselves. Instead, the struggle for a just social order requires programs to undo the consequences of past injustices.

Racial antagonism and discrimination are among the most persistent and destructive evils in our nation.



Law has an important role to play in the fight against racial discrimination. Just laws alert people that some deeds are forbidden and others are required if all members of society are to share equitably in its goods. Laws may not be able to change attitudes, but they can deter those who might otherwise seek to violate the rights of others. By protecting minority groups and also those who wish to respect them and their rights, laws at least can foster actions and institutions essential to racial justice. Finally, and especially at a time when many are confused about morality, good laws can contribute to educating people to know right from wrong.

Thanks in great part to law and the courts, we have made progress in recent years in removing some social, political, and cultural structures which supported racism. But we are far from final success. For example, the principles of legitimacy, proportionality and restraint have sometimes been violated in law enforcement within our nation. Racial justice in such areas as housing, education, health care, employment, and the administration of justice must be given high priority. The Church, too, must continue efforts to make its institutional structures models of racial justice while striving to eliminate racism from the hearts of believers by reminding them of what it means to be sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. "There is no Greek or Jew here, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave or freeman. Rather, Christ is everything in all of you."⁶⁵

Employment

Chronic unemployment is a strong factor paralyzing some groups in our nation. 'Minorities' are not its only victims. Women and young workers suffer disproportionately.

Behind the statistics of joblessness lie human tragedies. For example, the father who cannot feed his family, in desperation often lapses into a pattern of life whose effects spread in an ever widening circle: crime, the use of drugs, alcoholism, mental illness, family

An injustice to which we have frequently drawn attention is the systematic exploitation of agricultural workers.

breakdown — all increase along with unemployment.

Blessed with God-given gifts that include creativity and imagination, the people of this affluent nation can and must find means by which everyone who is able to work can have gainful, productive employment. If we settle for less we are allowing ourselves to be ruled by our economy instead of ruling it.⁶⁶

An injustice to which we have frequently drawn attention is the systematic exploitation of agricultural workers, many of them migrants.⁶⁷ These neighbors whose work puts food on our tables are often compelled to live without decent housing, schooling, health care and equal protection of the law. The economic risks of the industry they serve do not justify denying them the right to negotiate for their own protection and betterment. If exploitation is the cost of lower food prices, it is too high a price to pay.

Housing

In many American cities affluent and impoverished neighborhoods are divided mostly along racial lines. If this were a result simply of ethnic preference or the preservation of property values, we would still be concerned that genuine 'neighborhood' was being thwarted. But, in fact, the actions of government, banks and the real estate industry at times converge to deprive some racial groups of financing for housing and to manipulate real estate values for the profit of insiders, with the result that our cities remain divided and hostile. All Americans should be able to live where they wish and their means allow. Furthermore, while society must provide decent housing for the poor, public housing may not be used as a device for consistently isolating some groups from the rest of the community.⁶⁸

In saying this, we wish also to note the many human values preserved in ethnic neighborhoods, where people are united by a common culture, common origin, and sometimes even a common language other than English. Only when their boundaries become barriers and their values are cherished in ways that exclude others from participation do such neighborhoods become elements in a larger pattern of social strife.

Clearly, though, it is not just Americans of moderate means, whether in or out of ethnic neighborhoods, who should bear the burden of achieving racial justice. This is a duty of the well-to-do as

White collar criminal fraud . . . indicates a collapse of virtues which hold society together.

well as the less affluent, of suburbanites as well as city residents: in short, of all social and economic classes. We do not have answers to all the complex issues raised by specific measures for the desegregation of schools and neighborhoods, but we believe these reflections have a significant bearing on them.

Crime and Correction

People have a right and need to live in peace, yet one of the urgent issues in our country today is crime. Violent urban crime receives most of the attention, but the apparently growing amount of white collar criminal fraud and corruption is also ominous, for it indicates a collapse of respect for virtues such as truthfulness and honesty which hold society together.

In both categories, merely emphasizing sterner law enforcement while ignoring factors which occasion criminal acts will accomplish very little. Poverty and injustice, as well as our society's spirit of acquisitiveness, contribute to crime. Whatever improvements may be needed in law enforcement and the administration of justice, society will not come to grips with the crime crisis until it seriously addresses these underlying problems.

Ironically, our penal system itself is sometimes a cause of increased crime. Long delay of trial and unequal application of the law are unjust and a source of increase in crimes. Often enough imprisonment only confirms inmates in criminal attitudes and practices. Sometimes prisons are also settings for gross violations of prisoners' rights. Prisoners, like the rest of us, are beings of transcendent value, and incarcerating them in prisons which dehumanize is a form of brutality. They have a right to protection against assault and against threats to their lives and well being. They have a right to proper food, health care and recreation, and to opportunities to pursue other human goods such as education and the cultivation of their skills. Reform of our nation's penal system in light of these and the other human rights of prisoners is urgent and long overdue.⁶⁹

The Nation and the Individual

We have spoken often of the need for just laws and wholesome public policies, for all that government can do to create a setting in which fundamental values are protected and can flourish in human lives. Among the other contributions which government should make to the creation of a more wholesome society are responsible, constitutional steps to stem the flood of pornography, violence and immorality in the entertainment media. Yet we are aware of the limitations of government and the risk of seeming to suggest that it is all-important. Just laws and policies, taxes and programs, are necessary but they will not by themselves secure justice and peace. Such values must be built upon the foundations of good and dedicated individual human lives.

THE COMMUNITY OF NATIONS

Our allegiance must extend beyond the family and the nation to the entire human family. In Christ we are brothers and sisters of people whose faces we never see, whose names we cannot spell, whose customs are unfamiliar to us, but whose Father is our Father.

Human interdependence is constantly increasing in today's world, so that many issues which pertain to human dignity call for the collaboration of a true community of nations.⁷⁰ Perhaps the central global issue of our day is how to create such a community out of a world of states. Pope John grasped the meaning of this challenge when he described the structural defect in the present situation: the lack of authority and institutions adequate to address the problems humanity faces.⁷¹ Most people agree about the problems and their seriousness: hunger, environmental pollution, population growth, glaring disparities of wealth, and the persistent danger of war, to mention only a few. But agreement is lacking on ways to cooperate in dealing with them.

Believing that the human family is called to live in unity, we speak of two goals for the community of nations which will also help bring it into being: the development of peoples and peace on earth. From the perspective of the United States, both are best addressed in the context of power. Our nation's enormous military and economic power make it essential that we understand how power should be used in the pursuit of these goals.



The powerful must work for the liberation of the oppressed and powerless.

The Development of Peoples

All power is from God⁷² and is an expression of His being. God uses His power on our behalf: by creating us and sustaining us in existence, by bestowing His gifts upon us, by enabling us to grow in likeness to Him. As His creatures and children, we are to use the power He grants us for the good of others.

Power may never be used to attack the dignity of persons, to subjugate them, to prevent them from seeking and realizing the goods to which their humanity gives them a claim. Beyond this, the powerful have a duty to work positively for the empowerment of the weak and powerless: to help others gain control over their own lives, so that as free and responsible persons they can participate in a self-determining manner in the goods proper to human beings.

The powerful must therefore work for the liberation of the oppressed and powerless. Though liberation in the fullest sense is what "Christ Himself announced and gave to man by His sacrifice," it is not possible to foster such liberation in oneself and others without also "promoting in justice and peace the true, authentic advancement" of humankind.⁷³

Our nation's power, wealth, and position of leadership in the world impose special obligations upon us. Americans have always responded generously to foreign crises involving immediate human suffering: to floods and droughts, earthquakes and famines and the ravages of war. This is to our credit. But the obligations of which we now speak extend further. We must work creatively for a just international order based on recognition of interdependence. We must live by the principle that all nations and peoples are entitled to an equitable share of the world's goods as well as respect for their right of self-determination.

The values which comprise the international common good are threatened by existing patterns of international political and economic relations. Our lives, policies, and patterns of consumption and production should be examined in light of their impact on other

nations and peoples. Pope Paul has urged such examination: When so many people are hungry, so many families are destitute, so many enchained by ignorance, so many schools, hospitals and homes worthy of the name have yet to be built, all public or private squandering of wealth, all expenditure prompted by national or personal ostentation, and the exhausting arms race become intolerable scandals.⁷⁴

The discussion of international justice and of institutions for its realization has become more specific as a result of the call at the United Nations for a New International Economic Order. Its significance lies in its effort to change the language of the debate from that of aid and charity to that of obligation and justice. The traditional question about foreign aid has been how much we of the industrial nations would choose to give others within the framework of the existing international order. By contrast, a discussion cast in terms of justice would examine the rules by which the system works — such things as trade treaties, commodity prices, corporate practices and monetary agreements — with a view to making them more just. New rules would clarify obligations among the parties. Politically, they would be designed to improve the bargaining position of the developing nations in relation to the industrialized countries.

Such discussion of rules for relationships and the distribution of power on the international level may be new to us as Americans but the themes are familiar to our experience. The American tradition emphasizes that rules of fairness are central to a just political system. The developing countries argue that it is precisely rules of fairness in economic relations which do not now exist. Similarly, their quest for a new and more equitable form of bargaining power in relation to us echoes the drive for bargaining power by American workers over the last century.

Peace

We are also obliged as Americans and especially as Christians to reflect profoundly upon war and, more importantly, upon peace and the means of building it.⁷⁵

The Church has traditionally recognized that, under stringent conditions, engaging in war can be a form of legitimate defense.⁷⁶ But modern warfare, in both its technology and in its execution, is so savage that one must ask whether war as it is actually waged today can be morally justified.

At the very least all nations have a duty to work to curb the savagery of war and seek the peaceful settlement of disputes. The right of legitimate defense is not a moral justification for unleashing every form of destruction. For example, acts of war deliberately directed against innocent noncombatants are gravely wrong, and no one may participate in such an act.⁷⁷ In weighing the morality of warfare today, one must also take into consideration not only its immediate impact but also its potential for harm to future generations: for instance, through pollution of the soil or the atmosphere or damage to the human gene pool.

A citizen entering the military service is fulfilling a conscientious duty to his or her country. He or she may not casually disregard the nation's conscientious decision to go to war in self-defense. At the same time, no nation, our own included, may demand blind obedience. No members of the armed forces, above all no Christians who bear arms as "agents of security and freedom,"⁷⁸ can rightfully carry out orders or policies requiring direct force against noncombatants or the violation of some other moral norm. The right to object conscientiously to war in general and the right of selective conscientious objection to a particular war should be acknowledged by government and protected by law.⁷⁹

With respect to nuclear weapons, at least those with massive destructive capability, the first imperative is to prevent their use. As possessors of a vast nuclear arsenal, we must also be aware that not only is it wrong to attack civilian populations but it is also wrong to threaten to attack them as part of a strategy of deterrence. We urge the continued development and implementation of policies which seek to bring these weapons more securely under control, progressively reduce their presence in the world, and ultimately remove them entirely.

The experience of the last fifteen years shows clearly that it is not only nuclear weapons which pose grave dangers and dilemmas. We must learn from the moral and political costs, to ourselves and others, of conventional war as it was waged in Vietnam. With much

Modern warfare is so savage that one must ask whether it can be morally justified.



of the world undergoing or approaching a period of deep and sometimes drastic change, there is need for restraint and for clear reflection about the purposes which can justify the use of force. The moral reasons and political purposes said to call for even conventional force of arms, besides being valid, must be clear and convincing before any commitment is made to a policy of force.

Today, however, the human family longs for peace which is more than the mere absence of war, peace rooted in justice and brought alive by charity. Such peace truly reflects Christ's vision of human life. Why is it so difficult to achieve?

Peace depends upon both the policies of states and the attitudes of peoples. A policy of peace can only be conceived and supported where a commitment to peace prevails. Cultivating this commitment and carrying forward this policy are intricate, delicate tasks. It is not that some among us desire war, but that those who speak of the risks of weakness are likely to dominate public debate. So the race to accumulate ever more destructive weapons continues in this and other nations.

Human Rights

There are considerable differences between what is required internationally and what is required domestically to preserve peace and promote justice. On another broad issue, however, the protection and promotion of human rights,⁸⁰ the values sought in our domestic political life and our foreign policy converge.

This nation's traditional commitment to human rights may be its most significant contribution to world politics. Today, when rights are violated on the left and the right of the international political spectrum, the pervasive presence of our nation's political power and influence in the world provides a further opportunity and obligation to promote human rights. How this should be done will vary from case to case; at the very least, however, national policy and our personal consciences are challenged when not only enemies but close allies use torture, imprisonment, and systematic repression as measures of governance.

The issue of human rights in foreign policy is ultimately a question of values. There is a direct, decisive bond between the values we espouse in our nation and the world we seek to build internationally. When human rights are violated anywhere without protest, they are threatened everywhere. Our own rights are less secure if we condone or contribute even by passive silence to the repression of human rights in other countries.



CONCLUSION

Many institutions of society have roles to play in realizing the vision we have attempted to sketch here. In a pluralistic society, religiously neutral public institutions and structures cannot be expected to embody the beliefs of any one religious group, nor indeed should they reflect an anti-religious view of life. They can and should help create the conditions in which values flourish in human lives and persons committed to Christian goals can pursue them without hindrance, without surrendering their rights, and with full opportunity to transmit their principles to future generations.

The obligation of creating these conditions rests in different ways upon different elements in society:

UPON GOVERNMENT:

- to infringe upon the authentic rights of none;
- to create through the instruments of law and public policy conditions for the fullest possible flowering of the rights of all, with particular attention to family values and family needs;
- to seek a true community of nations with international structures able to address the real problems of today's world and work for the common good of all nations and peoples.

UPON BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, LABOR AND THE PROFESSIONS:

- to define their roles not in relation to narrow self-interest but in relation to the well being of all members of this society, especially the poor and the vulnerable;
- to seek for all a good life encompassing a broad spectrum of values in addition to economic ones;

- to show by responsible actions that the common good can be realized in our nation without intrusion by the state into ever more areas of life.

UPON THE MEDIA, EDUCATION, AND ALL WHO TRANSMIT INFORMATION AND HELP FORM ATTITUDES:

- to be deeply committed to the truth;
- to be respectful of persons and scrupulous to avoid advocating or inculcating false and corrosive values;
- to be eager to foster such community-building values as justice, charity, and the understanding that all human beings have a claim upon the goods of human life.

UPON CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS:

- to be teachers of holiness and justice;
- to give witness to their teaching through policies and practices which seek to further the realization of human goods in the lives of all, those who are not their members as well as those who are;
- to exercise a prophetic role in society by calling individuals, groups, and institutions to be ever more mindful and supportive of authentic values.

With all this said, however, the most important thing is still unsaid. The values proclaimed by Jesus Christ are not expressed by structures and institutions if they are not lived by men and women. Jesus is not the way, the truth, and the life for corporate abstractions like 'government,' 'business,' and 'religious groups' but for human beings.⁸¹ Yet people live in and depend upon communities and social structures of many kinds; and so the reason for cherishing moral values in families, nations, and the community of nations, and the test of how well they are fostered there, are individual human lives lived according to God's will for us made manifest in Jesus Christ. For Christians the goal is holiness.

Because we have been made holy in Jesus, we are, He teaches us, also to be "made perfect . . . as your heavenly Father is perfect."⁸² All of us are to be perfectly what we really are: living temples of the holy God. "All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity."⁸³ We are all challenged to grow in holiness ac-

according to our "own personal gifts and duties," and above all by loving service, which guides and energizes all the paths of holiness.⁸⁴ To do this requires self-discipline and self-sacrifice. But it is possible in the strength of Christ and His Spirit which we share. Recognizing its possibility is a step toward making it real. We, your bishops, pray that these reflections will help bring this possibility more alive in our lives and the lives of many, will help open our hearts and yours, our brothers and sisters in Christ, to God's immeasurable love for us all.

St. John of the Cross tells us that at life's nightfall "we will be examined in love."⁸⁵ A life of faith is one measured constantly throughout its course in light of the love and life of Christ in us. When we come to die, much we have cherished will seem worthless, many things deemed urgent and attractive now will appear useless or worse. What will matter then is how much we love now and how we live in response to our Father's love for us.

The cross of Jesus Christ shows us the deficiency of other value systems. Jesus yielded up His life for us in perfect loving union with the Father's will, and this is the meaning of His life which also gives meaning to our lives as His followers. If we can acknowledge selfishness as folly and self-sacrifice as victory, if we can love enemies, be vulnerable to injustice and, in being so, still say that we have triumphed, then we shall have learned to live in Christ Jesus.

FOOTNOTES

1. 1 Jn. 1:3
2. Cf. Dt. 6:5; Mt. 22:37
3. Rom. 8:38-39
4. Cf. *Words of Institution, Eucharistic Prayers*
5. Jn. 1:4-12
6. Acts 2:17
7. 1 Jn. 3:1; Ga. 4:5-7
8. Rom. 8:14
9. Cf. Lk. 4:14
10. Cf. 1 Jn. 4:12; 20-21
11. 1 Jn. 4:20
12. Cf. Lv. 19:18; Mt. 5:44-48, 22:37-40; Lk. 10:25-28
13. Jn. 13:34; 15:12-13
14. Phil. 2:9-11
15. Cf. Mk. 1:14-15
16. Cf. Lk. 6:43-45
17. Rom. 5:20
18. Rom. 8:3
19. Heb. 4:15
20. Rom. 5:19
21. Cf. Rom. 7:11-15
22. Rom. 6:11
23. Ga. 5:25
24. Rom. 7:22-23
25. Paenitemini, February 17, 1966
26. Cf. *Memorial Acclamation, Roman Sacramentary*.
27. Cf. Lk. 9:23-24
28. Parochial and Plain Sermons, V, 7
29. Rom. 6:4-5
30. Jn. 14:21; cf. 15:14
31. Mt. 5:3-12; Lk. 6:21-26
32. Mt. 11:29
33. *Preface of Christ the King*
34. Ps. 42:3
35. Cf. Col. 1:15-20
36. *Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Freedom*, 3. Cf. *St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae*, 1-2, 91, 1 and 2; 94, 1
37. Cf. *Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 16
38. *Ibid.*
39. 1 Jn. 4:1; cf. 1 Cor. 12:10
40. *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, 14
41. *Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 18
42. Lk. 10:16
43. Phil. 4:13
44. *Many of the matters treated here have been discussed in detail in papal and conciliar documents, documents of the Holy See and the Synods of Bishops, and statements of national episcopal conferences. The references which follow note a few of the sources.*
45. *Vatican Council II, The Church in the Modern World*, 25
46. Cf. Gn. 2:24
47. Ho. 2:21-22
48. Cf. Eph. 5:25-32
49. Cf. Mt. 19:10-12
50. Eph. 5:25
51. Cf. *Vatican Council II, The Church in the Modern World*, 48
52. Eph. 4:15
53. *Vatican Council II, The Church in the Modern World*, 50

54. Cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 12, 13
55. Cf. *Vatican Council II*, The Church in the Modern World, 52; *Humanae Vitae*, 24
56. Cf. *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, December 29, 1975
57. Cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 18
58. Cf. *United States Catholic Conference*, Society and the Aged: Toward Reconciliation, May 5, 1976
59. 1 Tm. 5:8
60. *Vatican Council II*, The Church in the Modern World, 26
61. Cf. *Vatican Council II*, The Church in the Modern World, 51
62. *National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, November 20, 1975
63. Eph. 5:25
64. *The National Conference of Catholic Bishops and its predecessor, the National Catholic Welfare Conference*, have often spoken on racial justice. Cf., for example, The National Crisis, NCCB, April 25, 1968
65. Col. 3:11
66. Cf. *United States Catholic Conference*, The Economy: Human Dimensions, November 20, 1975
67. Cf., for example, *National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, Resolution on Farm Labor, November 16, 1973
68. Cf. *United States Catholic Conference*, The Right to a Decent Home, November 20, 1975
69. Cf. *United States Catholic Conference*, The Reform of Correctional Institutions in the 1970s, November 14, 1973
70. Cf. *Vatican Council II*, The Church in the Modern World, 26
71. *Pacem in Terris*, 132-135
72. Cf. *Jn. 19:11*; *Rom. 13:1*
73. *Pope Paul VI*, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 38, 31
74. *Populorum Progressio*, 53
75. Cf. *National Conference of Catholic Bishops*, Human Life in Our Day, II, November 15, 1968
76. Cf. *Vatican Council II*, The Church in the Modern World, 79
77. Cf. *ibid.*, 80
78. *Ibid.*, 79
79. Cf. *United States Catholic Conference*, Declaration on Conscientious Objection and Selective Conscientious Objection, October 21, 1971
80. Cf. *Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 1971, Justice in the World
81. *Jn. 14:6*
82. *Mt. 5:48*
83. *Vatican Council II*, Constitution on the Church, 40
84. *Ibid.* 41, cf. 39-42
85. *Spiritual Sentences and Maxims*, 57

Study Questions

I. Introduction

Christ, Our Life

1. How and why are the meaning and destiny of our lives most fully revealed to us in Jesus?
2. How does Jesus empower us to respond to our calling?
3. What is the role of the Spirit in the Christian moral life?
4. What kind of love does Jesus command us to show to others?
5. How is it possible to say that love of God and love of neighbor are really one law of love?
6. How does this law of Jesus include the Ten Commandments?

Sin

1. What is the difference between sin and unavoidable human failings and limitations? How do we make ourselves sinners?
2. What should our attitude be toward: 1) sin; 2) unavoidable failings and limitations?
3. Give some examples of the social consequences of personal sin.
4. If Jesus Himself never sinned, what does it mean to say that he "accepted in Himself the full force of our sins"?
5. What consequences does this have for us? What is the significance of baptism in this context?

Conversion

1. What is the meaning of "conversion" as it is used here?
2. What is meant by the expression "the paschal mystery"?
3. How are we to participate in the paschal mystery?
4. How does the Sacrament of Penance relate to conversion?

Fulfillment

1. What is meant by saying that Jesus is our fulfillment — "our happiness and peace, our joy and beatitude"?
2. The beatitudes tell us something about our life here and now, and also about our future destiny. Explain.

Guidance in Christ

1. Since we must decide for ourselves what specific things we should do and not do, why isn't it true that whatever we decide is the right thing for us?
2. Created goods, and our desire for them, tell us something important about God and about ourselves. Explain.
3. Give some examples of created goods to which we are attracted.
4. What should be our attitude toward created goods in our lives and the lives of others? What wrong attitudes are possible?
5. What is meant by the universal moral law?

Conscience

1. What is the meaning of the expression "judgment of conscience"?
2. In what sense is it true that we are obliged to act in accord with our own consciences?
3. How can we make our judgments of conscience truthful and informed?

The Church

1. Where should we look to learn what Jesus teaches and wills for us?
2. Why do the pope and the bishops have a special role in the Church as moral teachers?
3. How do you think individuals should relate the moral teachings of the pope and bishops to their own efforts to make true and informed judgments of conscience?

II. Moral Life in the Family, the Nation, and the Community of Nations

1. How do the bishops describe their approach in this document to complicated social and political questions?
2. Why is the emphasis placed here upon the human person?
3. How does respect for life relate to what is said here?

The Family

1. At a time when individuals are often valued for accidental or extrinsic reasons (wealth, good looks, prestige, etc.), what special role does the family have? What is its basic role?
2. What can we learn about God's plan for marriage from the symbolism used in the Old Testament and the New Testament?
3. How does rejection of the idea of lifelong marriage contribute to marital tragedy and marital breakdown?
4. Why does the Church teach that sacramental marriages cannot be dissolved?
5. What are some of the things you think the Church should do — at the national, diocesan, and parochial levels — in order to help married couples and families?
6. What are some of the things the Catholic community should do to minister to the needs of divorced Catholics?

Children

1. Raising children is a difficult task. In what sense, then, can it be said that children are "the supreme gift of marriage who in turn substantially enrich the lives of their parents"?
2. What does responsible parenthood mean?
3. What are the two basic meanings or values involved in acts of marital intercourse?
4. What is the difference between a 'contraceptive mentality' and a single act of contraception?
5. Why, in the face of so much opposition, does the Church continue to teach that contraceptive acts are wrong?
6. Why is sex outside marriage morally unacceptable?
7. What should be our attitude toward persons with a homosexual orientation?
8. What special role do unmarried persons have in the Church? What special needs?

The Aged

1. Do you see evidence in your community of a tendency to isolate elderly people from their families and from the community at large?

2. How can families be more responsive to the needs of their elderly members?
3. What can the community and the parish do to fulfill their responsibility to the aged?
4. How should Christian compassion be expressed toward the dying and the terminally ill?
5. What is the difference between mercy killing and allowing a dying person to die?

The Family and Society

1. Why should people who are concerned about the well being of families also be concerned about such things as government policies, the actions of business and industry, the communications media, etc.?
2. What are some of the elements which should be part of a well-rounded social policy to foster healthy family life?

The Nation

The Individual and the Nation

1. What is the connection between laws and public policies on the one hand and the moral life and growth of individuals on the other?

Respect for the Unborn

1. Morally speaking, what is the significance of the fact that the unborn are totally dependent on others?
2. Why is it so important to insist on the fact that the unborn are truly human?
3. What should society and the Church do to help people who tend to think of abortion as a solution to their problems?

Respect for Racial and Ethnic Groups

1. If an individual is not personally guilty of racist acts, what further responsibility does he or she have with regard to the evil of racism?
2. It is often said that 'you can't legislate morality.' If that is so, what can laws do about racism?
3. What evidence of racist attitudes and practices do you find in your community?

4. What can the Church do about racism?

Women in Society

1. This document says that progress in achieving equality for women should be enriching for men, too. But isn't such progress really at men's expense?
2. In what ways is the attitude that women are 'men's inferiors, almost their property' expressed in our society?
3. This document suggests that not everything proposed in the name of women's 'liberation' is acceptable or truly liberating. Can you think of examples to illustrate this?
4. What special motives does the Catholic Church have for being committed to women's equality and dignity?
5. What are some of the special problems of defining women's role in today's society?
6. What should the Church do to foster women's equality?

Employment

1. What does an economic issue like unemployment have to do with Christian morality and the moral life?
2. Why should farm workers be singled out for special mention in a document like this?

Housing

1. What basic value or group of values do you think are included in the expression "genuine 'neighborhood' " ?
2. In line with the principles expressed here, what practical steps might be taken to achieve justice and respect for dignity for all Americans in the area of housing?
3. How would you apply what this document says to such issues as school desegregation, busing, neighborhoods, and Church membership?
4. What fundamental principle underlies this document's treatment of housing?

Crime and Correction

1. Do you think that 'white collar' fraud and corruption can be compared as problems with violent crime? What makes them so serious?

2. This document says the basic solution to crime is to remove the factors which influence some people to commit crimes. As a practical matter, how can that be done?
3. What obligation does society have to convicted criminals in prison beyond seeing to it that their minimum needs (food, housing, clothing, etc.) are met?

The Community of Nations

1. Can you suggest examples which show how “human interdependence is constantly increasing in today’s world”?
2. What are some of the implications of saying that the central international problem today may be the “lack of authority and institutions” capable of dealing with global problems?

The Development of Peoples

1. Why is it that ‘liberation’ — in the essentially spiritual sense in which the term is used by Pope Paul — can hardly be accomplished in the absence of political, economic, and cultural liberation?
2. In light of the principles expressed here, how would you evaluate the United States’ role in the world since World War II?
3. Many of the so-called developing countries do not seem very sympathetic to the goals and policies of the United States. If the United States is to share wealth and power with them, does it not have a right to expect reciprocity in return?
4. Most people know very little about things like trade treaties, commodity prices, corporate practices, and monetary agreements. What can they do to foster justice in regard to these matters?
5. What are the practical implications of stressing ‘justice’ in discussing these issues?

Peace

1. Under what conditions can engaging in war be a legitimate form of defense?
2. What are the practical implications of saying that a citizen may not casually disregard or resist his or her nation’s conscientious decision to go to war in self-defense?

3. Do you agree that the right of conscientious objection and selective conscientious objection should be recognized and respected? Why?
4. In light of what is said here about nuclear weapons, how would you evaluate U.S. defense policy?
5. What lessons for the future should the U.S. learn from the war in Vietnam, especially in light of what is said here?
6. What can individuals and groups do to promote a policy of peace and commitment to peace?

Human Rights

1. Evidently some governments which are friendly to the United States violate the human rights of some of their citizens. What can or should the U.S. do about that?
2. For that matter, what can or should this country do about human rights violations by foreign governments which are unfriendly to us?
3. Why are our rights less secure if we condone or contribute to the repression of human rights in other countries?

III. Conclusion

1. In a pluralistic society such as ours, what role should public institutions play in regard to religious and spiritual values?
2. What responsibility, if any, does government have with regard to religious education?
3. A number of obligations are noted here for various institutions of society: government, business and industry, labor and the professions, the media, education, churches. Do you agree that the obligations mentioned are real ones? Can you think of others? Do you feel these institutions in our country are living up to their obligations at the present time?
4. What connection do social structures and institutions have with individual holiness?
5. Many people would say they hope to go to heaven but, realistically speaking, they do not have time or opportunity to work at being "holy." The bishops say here that everyone is called to be holy. Which point of view do you think is correct?
6. What does it mean to say that the cross of Jesus Christ shows the deficiency of other value systems?

NOTE TO READERS

This pastoral letter "To Live in Christ Jesus" was approved by the Catholic bishops of the United States on November 11, 1976, during their semiannual general meeting. The pastoral had been commissioned by the bishops two years earlier when they approved a proposal for "a major document on moral values" dealing with particular problems and issues "in the context of a well developed theory of the principles of Christian morality and the ways in which moral values are formed and sustained." (Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Moral Values in Society, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 19, 1974)

One of the first decisions of the committee which was appointed to prepare the pastoral letter was to engage in a wide consultation with priests, religious, and laity, and especially with Catholic scholars in fields pertaining to the subject matter of the pastoral. More than 8,000 letters were sent initially to members of scholarly societies, seminary rectors, and college and university presidents, inviting suggestions concerning the document. Dialogue with those who responded to this and subsequent consultations continued throughout the preparation of the letter. Though the resulting document is the bishops' pastoral, it reflects this consultative process in many ways.

Approval of the pastoral by the body of bishops reflects a judgment on their part that it expresses the authentic teaching of the Church. At the same time, it is the intent of the document to express authentic teaching in a manner that reflects the compassion of Jesus. Achieving holiness is difficult for all of us. But with God's help, in Christ Jesus, it is possible. It is in this spirit of Jesus' love, compassion, and truth that the pastoral letter is presented.