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Report of... ~~AD HOC~~

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REPORT OF THE
AD HOC COMMITTEE

ON MORAL VALUES
IN SOCIETY

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
CATHOLIC BISHOPS

NOVEMBER 19, 1974

Christian ethics

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Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Moral Values in Society

A. *Moral Values in Our Society*

I. *The Problem*

Men and women in every age and every society stand in need of conversion to Jesus Christ and redemption by Him. In this sense our situation today is no different from the past. Yet each era has needs and problems uniquely its own. In the United States today the most urgent need is re-commitment to Christian moral values. The alternative appears to be continued deterioration in individual and social morality. This is indeed a time to heed the admonition of Jesus: "Anyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house on rock." (Matt. 7, 24)

In recent years there have been fundamental changes in the values espoused by Americans, including many Catholics. Evidence of such change is overwhelming. Nor is it all negative. Many of the new emphases are positive and praiseworthy: sensitivity to the dignity and fundamental equality of all men and women; increased concern for individual self-realization; broadened perception of the moral decisions which must be made concerning participation in warfare; new appreciation of the imperatives of social justice. Despite the new complexities which they have introduced into contemporary life, such insights represent progress.

But other aspects of the current scene are anything but positive. For example, while some important advances have been made in our understanding of social justice, available information seems to indicate enormous failures in that area of justice usually designated as honesty. Certain violations of honesty are justified by disturbing rationalizations. Shoplifting has become widespread; its practitioners excuse themselves because no individual is really being robbed. Students have destroyed buildings and facilities because the school is nothing but an establishment pre-

tense. Blue collar workers claim fictitious working hours and white collar workers pad their expense accounts because the company somehow owes it to them. Citizens cheat on their taxes and politicians take bribes because that is the system; they explain, "Everybody's doing it." Perjury and other violations of honesty at even the highest levels of public life have scandalized the nation. Economic exploitation of the poor continues to find new expression as we experience spiraling inflation and high interest rates. Ultimately, all this adds up to a progressive rejection of responsibility. It is not fanciful to think that, if this were to continue, our society would reach the point where no one would acknowledge responsibility for anything except his own interests and his own person.

Other examples of moral decline abound. The significance of the sexual revolution to many people seems to be that they now regard sex as primarily a means of self-gratification. For example, sexual relations in marriage are often regarded in this way, rather than as a sacred instrument fundamentally oriented to begetting new life and one of the ways by which a husband and wife express their mutual love and commitment. Pornography is widespread, and society seems unable or unwilling to control it. The family has been placed under exceptional strain by changing attitudes toward sex, toward the roles of men and women, and toward relationships among members of different generations. Divorce is commonplace; its easy availability and social acceptability contribute to a "divorce mentality." Abortion is widely accepted, even on grounds of convenience, and a woman's right to control her own body is taken by many as a total, self-evident justification for the destruction of unborn human life. Similar attitudes underlie much of the growing pressure for legalized euthanasia. Although euthanasia is generally supported by "humane" arguments, the reality is that "convenience" factors figure at least as largely as "humane" ones. The poor and powerless are subjected to continued exploitation by unjust social and economic structures. Negligent and brutal attitudes toward human life are also manifested in much of the "entertainment" offered to mass audiences by the media; in the appalling national rate of murder and violent crime; and, macroscopically, in a defense policy which could involve this nation, in certain circumstances, in repetition on a far vaster scale of the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The communications media mirror the deterioration of moral

values in our society. Indeed in some cases the media do considerably more than “mirror” what is happening; at their worst, they proselytize for what amounts to a pagan system of morality.

The current situation is, in its most negative aspects, a radical challenge to Christian moral values. In the United States today transcendent religious belief is locked in conflict with a secularistic, humanistic world view. Morality is the domain in which this struggle is enacted most dramatically. In this conflict even many nominally religious persons have in fact opted for the value system of secular humanism or yielded to the temptation to compromise sound moral principles, despite the clear statement of Jesus that “he who is not with me is against me.” (Matt. 12, 30)

At the same time, it is important that, in defending moral values, the Church not adopt a simplistic and reactionary posture. For example, the Church should applaud and support the movement for women’s dignity and rights, even while it opposes the view that abortion is a woman’s “right.” Advances in ethical perception should be recognized as such; it is necessary to be discriminating and precise in distinguishing sound principle from distorted expressions in particular cases.

II. *The Christian leaven*

In the Old Testament God called His people to “hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching” (Deu. 4, 1) so that they might have life. Again and again He offered His people a covenant (cf. Fourth Eucharistic Prayer). If they lived according to its conditions, others would say that His people were “a wise and intelligent people.” (Deu. 4, 6) Jesus taught that those who heard His words would possess the Kingdom (Mt. 25, 24) and His last words to His followers were a call to live the truths He taught by being witnesses of all He said and did. (Acts 1, 8) Throughout his letters, St. Paul insists on the necessity of following the teachings of Jesus which would save those who would “hold fast” (I Cor. 15, 2) and make them the leaven of society. (I Cor. 5, 7)

The early Christians did not respond to the moral decadence of the Roman Empire merely through protest or criticism. They decried the values of the culture in which they lived, but they also proclaimed Christian values through personal witness and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit working in them. These were the values which they learned from the teachings of Jesus,

Whom they sought to follow in everything they did. Indeed, they were willing to give testimony to those values both by their lives and, if necessary, in death. They were thoroughly committed to Christ and His teachings.

Today's Christians must not think that their vocation can be fulfilled by merely protesting current values. Protest can indeed serve a purpose, but it makes sense only when it is accompanied by an affirmation. Rejecting the false values in contemporary society is not enough; we must also affirm by our lives the true moral values taught by Jesus Christ.

Counter-values presented by the example of a good life are much more convincing and attractive than critiques of existing values, however scholarly and logical or, for that matter, impassioned. There is good reason for this. One cannot respond very positively to what is simply negative: affirmations exert more appeal, to both the mind and the heart. Most important, example wins more hearers than words. The proclamation of Christian moral values must be a lived sermon, not just an exercise in argumentation, even though it is important that we be able to support the moral values we propose with sound moral reasoning.

The solution to the crisis in moral values lies in commitment to Christ on the part of all who claim to be His followers. Jesus came to earth to show us the way, not merely to talk about it. If we are to follow Him (and this after all, nothing less, is what it means to be a Christian) we must do so not in words, sentiments or even doctrine alone. We must do so by a way of life rooted in commitment to the Lord Jesus.

In the Old Covenant, God punished His people when they failed to live according to His laws and to be the wise, understanding and great people they were called to be. In the New Testament Jesus warned His people of the fate awaiting those who fail to observe His commandments and live the life of grace. (Matt. 7, 21 ff.)

III. *Metanoia*

As a preparation for the coming of the Savior on earth as a man, John the Baptist went about preaching what is rendered in the New Testament Greek as "metanoia." The word is given a wide variety of interpretations in modern translations: contrition,

performance of works of penance, repentance, conversion, change of heart.

The idea had already been expressed by the Prophets of the Old Testament. It meant a new awareness and service of God. The Prophet Joel (2, 13) cried out, "Rend your hearts, not your garments." In the New Testament, Jesus required a turning of one's innermost heart to God from which flows life according to God's will. (Matt. 5, 10 ff) Metanoia is a process which must be a way of life. "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps." (Lk. 9, 23)

Perhaps the greatest scandal in the Church today is the number of unconverted, half-hearted, indifferent Catholics who parade under its banner. Catholics by whom the message and example of Jesus are unheeded or considered matters of indifference are a source of scandal to both believers and unbelievers. "If we say, 'We have fellowship with him,' while continuing to walk in darkness, we are liars and do not act in truth." (I John 1, 6)

But the call to metanoia is directed not only to those who have been conspicuously negligent. All have sinned; each of us has in various ways held back at least some recess of his heart from commitment to Jesus. None is an exception. "If we say, 'We have never sinned,' we make him a liar and his word finds no place in us." (I John 1, 10) God stands ready to embrace us with His mercy and love, but only with our assent and cooperation. If we open our hearts to Him and abandon ourselves to the promptings of His grace, life takes on new meaning, fresh goals and enormous dignity. The significance of a "sense of responsibility" becomes clear. Since life comes to man as a God-given gift, to live fully and truly means to return this gift to its Author, each day, each moment. The Christian life, initiated at Baptism, is truly a new life. Our response to the new obligations flowing out of this new life in Christ is what we mean by the Christian moral life.

IV. *The moral life*

Complex yet integrated, the moral life can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Whatever our mode of analysis, it discloses several distinct elements: ideals, applications and actions.

Ideals are the abiding and stable principles held by an individual, the goals and purposes of life which he envisions and espouses. They are called values—an apt word, which suggests both the dimension of personal commitment (subjectivity) and the dimension of independent validity (objectivity). Ordered by the individual according to some kind of hierarchy appropriate to his situation, they constitute a plan for his life.

Ideals must be applied and lived if they are to be more than abstractions. This is not an easy task. An ideal may be so general that it is difficult to recognize its relationship to daily living. Such is the ideal of love so often presented as the sole norm of Christian morality, as if love did not absolutely require that some things be done and other things be avoided. This is a simplistic solution which makes little sense. There are God-given objective norms, some divinely revealed, some written in men's hearts (Rom. 2, 15), which should be considered in forming our ideals and should guide our actions; these norms are the objective basis of sound moral living.

The practical judgment by which we estimate the relationship of concrete acts to our value system is called the decision of conscience. Not a distinct faculty, conscience is a moral judgment by which we determine a concrete act or omission to be consistent or inconsistent with the ideals we espouse.

There remains a further aspect of the moral life: the decision to act or not to act. All that goes before this is theoretical. Once one decides to act—for or against conscience—the morality of one's response to a concrete situation is essentially determined. But the previous elements are necessary for a moral (i.e., a fully human) act. In particular it is necessary that one's decision to act or not act be genuinely free: that is, truly expressive of one's capacity for self-determination.

Moral value, then, is a specific kind of ideal. It is distinguished from aesthetic, commercial, biological and other kinds of value. We judge actions as morally good or evil, right or wrong, worthy of praise or blame in so far as they are in accord with proper values. Such judgments are moral judgments and the acts to which they are applied are "moral" acts (that is, they "count" in moral terms) because they can be evaluated in terms of a certain congruence between man's behavior and objective reality. Since man is a person, able to control some of his actions and

interactions involving his environment, he stands responsible for them. The objective context of human action includes man himself and all those external realities including God and his neighbor which go to make up his environment.

V. *Sin*

A person can have well ordered values and make an accurate judgment concerning the moral nature of a proposed action, yet act in defiance of his values and his judgment. We can verify this from our own experience. St. Paul, for example, laments: "I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend." (Rom. 7, 19) The values which we profess and hold are not always realized in the actions we perform. Even Socrates wondered why "men know what is good, but do what is bad."

In order to achieve conformity between values and actions, discipline of the will is required, so that a person is open to the promptings of grace and thereby able to resist temptation. So it is that all religions give place to asceticism and the practice of mortification and self-denial to control and channel the passions. It is true that a misunderstanding of the role of these practices can lead to the erroneous conclusion that man achieves his own salvation, but it is also true that these practices, properly understood, must be part of the Christian life. Salvation is God's gift in Christ; but man's freedom is always respected and man must therefore cooperate with God's work.

The judgment of conscience can also be faulty. This can come about from a variety of causes, extending from passion to poor instruction. Ordinarily, however, one does not long violate his values on the basis of consistent misjudgment of their practical import. Soon enough the deviation will be so obvious that he will be forced to revise either his judgments or his values.

Men have always sinned, but throughout the history of Christianity they have managed to preserve a moral character; that is, they have cared about right and wrong. They have not been unwilling to admit their wrongdoing. In contemporary society, by contrast, there is widespread, open repudiation of Christian values, to the point where it may be said that for many people "good" and "evil" have no real meaning. This points to a defect which goes beyond moral decision, beyond even conscience, to the very values espoused.

In significant ways contemporary Western culture is non-Christian; some would say it is anti-Christian. Christian beliefs and values are officially tolerated but given no active encouragement; and they are actively opposed by some extremely strong forces in society. All this tends not only to strip public institutions of positive moral content, but also to reduce religious influence on the beliefs, values and behavior of individuals.

The state of contemporary culture is a problem not only for the present but also for the future. It will not absolutely determine the beliefs and actions of future generations, but it will have a powerful conditioning effect on them. It is a modifying factor which further affects all future development of culture.

It is important to note, however, that human culture is not the product of blind forces of history or the working out of deterministic principles beyond man's power to control. While the causal elements of culture are enormously complex, the causes are essentially human choices and human acts. As man has power to create and modify his physical environment, so he has power to create and modify his social, moral and spiritual environment. For a Church which is described as a pilgrim this realization must be accepted as a challenge and with a sense of hope. The children of God must always look to the future for the fulfillment of the promises Jesus made in the past.

Values which are distorted, unsuitable and out of harmony with man's real destiny cause the entire moral life to be in disarray. Reason can help some—to the extent that native good sense can reveal the insufficiency or inappropriateness of proposed activity. In general, however, it takes a major crisis to bring men from the path of least resistance to the path of morally good living. Even then a reliable guide is required. In this crisis of Western man, the bishops of the Church in the United States confidently point to the Lord.

VI. *Look to Jesus*

For the Catholic Christian the ultimate source of all morality is God. This message is found in revelation and especially in the fullness of revelation which is found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It was His mission to reveal the Father in the fullest. Consequently, the teachings of Jesus provide a stable guide in terms of which our values can be appropriately determined and

our actions can be correctly judged. Such a foundation is not simply situational: it does not rest merely on a unique convergence of circumstances. Jesus pointed to fundamental principles which apply under all conditions, and He taught them in the most authoritative way.

His way is not the way of human reason. "For God's folly is wiser than men, and His weakness more powerful than men." (I Cor. 1, 25) Neither is the way of Jesus the easy route. "Enter through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to damnation is wide, the road is clear, and many choose to travel it. But how narrow is the gate that leads to life, how rough the road, and how few there are who find it!" (Matt. 7, 13-14) And so it is not a popular way. Indeed, it is tremendously demanding, and it is clearly the will of God. "You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5, 48)

As one reads the moral demands which Jesus taught by the authority of His heavenly Father, one might conclude that they are impossible, visionary and totally impractical. What He said about love, justice, mutual respect, marriage, forgiveness is all too clear and, from a human point of view, all too demanding. But He was quick to point out, in every instance, that these lofty demands could be met with God's help. "My grace is enough for you." (2 Cor. 12, 9) Jesus does not propose moral ideals as mere objects of our striving which are unreachable in the practical order but rather as the norms by which we are to live. We have His assurance that His way is so in keeping with what we are and what we are to be, that it is not impossible or oppressive. "My yoke is easy and my burden light." (Matt. 11, 30) He Himself gave the example of all these things by His own life. It is the Christian's obligation to keep this life alive by re-presenting Jesus to today's world. "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (Ep. 4, 1)

How can men live in Christ and come to understand more fully His teachings? Certainly Scripture is a primary source. But the Lord must be more to us than words on a printed page. He is a living person, touching our lives as the living Lord who rose from the dead and will come again in glory to complete His victory over sin and claim the Kingdom of God which He established among men. An active prayer life and the practice of self-denial give us this experiential knowledge of the living Lord. Further-

more, the message of Holy Scripture comes alive in the Church, the Paschal Mystery is made present preeminently through the Eucharist and the sacraments, and prayer and mortification are most meaningful in the community of God's people.

VII. *Look to the Church*

While Jesus lived and taught in a society very different from ours, He lives on in the Church. In order that we may translate the perennially valid principles of Christian morality into the context of contemporary society and its problems and challenges, He provides trustworthy guidance through His Church. Otherwise we would become increasingly confused and divided.

The message of Jesus comes to man in every generation until the end of time through the teaching Church—the Magisterium. This is not due to the wisdom or virtue of the imperfect human beings who perform the function of teaching in the Church; rather it is due to the will of the Church's divine Founder, Jesus Christ, and to His abiding presence in the Church through His Spirit. What Jesus taught is not only represented to each age, but is meaningfully phrased and actively interpreted with the authority and reliability which He promised and guarantees. It is for this reason that the Magisterium deserves our loyal obedience.

Through the reflection of the Church on the teachings of Jesus, His principles are extended to the problems of men in every age, even as those problems change and new ones emerge. The applications of Our Lord's teachings today are authoritatively articulated by those who hold the place of the apostles, the bishops, who in union with the Holy Father constitute the highest expression of the Magisterium. It is in this role that, faced with the circumstances of our times and our society, we call for a universal metanoia within the Church, a wholehearted return to the teachings of Jesus, a revitalized awareness of the presence of the Spirit among us, a renewal of truly Christian morality in our time. Then, please God, we can become what we are called to be: a leaven for all society.

VIII. *Evangelization and Christian values*

The vast majority of Americans take their values more or less uncritically from the society around them. This is not said in criticism or condescension, for society exercises its influence upon

all of us in ways that are both pervasive and subtle. Unfortunately, however, our society is permeated with secularism and grounded in naively optimistic assumptions about human nature. According to this view, all that is needed to perfect man and society is better education, new economic organization, different political institutions, and, perhaps, liberation from the lingering inhibitions still imposed on the individual psyche by the “old morality.” What has traditionally been called sin is increasingly explained as a psychosocial problem, not a religious one: individuals go astray solely because of family background; crimes are the result simply of a poor social environment; wrongdoing is forced upon us only by the actions and beliefs of peers. In the new lexicon actions may be “aggressive” or “self-destructive” or “anti-social” or “alienating”—but not sinful.

There are, however, signs that this way of thinking is losing its credibility. Laden with guilt and anxiety, men are looking for a different therapy. Just as in the days of the Apostles, the world is ripe for conversion. People are receptive—more so perhaps than they have been for centuries—to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Society has drifted so far from Christian values that the Gospel can be preached with new freshness and appeal. It is time for a new thrust of evangelization, so that people may be intimately acquainted with Jesus, and His teachings can be the basis of a radical change in values.

B. Recommendations for the Development of Moral Values

I. The importance of the individual

Given the magnitude of the challenge, there may be a tendency to ask: What can one person do?

It is precisely with the individual that we must start. In calling Catholics to a serious examination of their value system and to metanoia, it is essential to address each as an individual. All of us must do our part by personal witness, by instructing and guiding our children and by influencing in a positive way our circle of friends and associates.

We must begin with ourselves. Scrutinizing our values, carefully comparing them with what Jesus proposes, holding them up to the light of the Church, and then living them, we shall come to know Jesus more truly and live in Him more intimately and effectively. No other beginning can lead us anywhere. Each indi-

vidual must start with himself. "All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity." (*Lumen Gentium*, 40)

The next object of concern is the family, which, even with all its present problems remains the most powerful direct influence on the process of value formation in the young. Parents must both know the Church's moral teaching more fully and impart it to their children more effectively. As the fundamental unit of society, the family must be a prime object of our efforts. When each Christian family becomes a vibrant community of faith, then we can exert a powerful influence on the direction of society and its institutions.

Finally, each individual must endeavor to influence the segment of society in which he lives in intimate contact. Here the example of personal witness is the most effective sermon possible. There is no doubt about the attractiveness of true virtue. Men of solid moral principle proclaim God's love, peace and joy; they rouse in us the rapture of living. But as individuals we must also strive to make our part of God's world a true community. We must try to help others to share, to love, to esteem one another, to relate as members of a family in which all are brothers of Christ and children of the same God. In a word, we must strive as Christians to form society into a true community of lovers and believers.

II. *The obligation of the Church*

As Catholics, then, we should realize that we are not isolated individuals but members of a community; we are the People of God. The community which is the Church should be the setting and reinforcement for our efforts at personal conversion and commitment to Christ and Christian moral values. The contemporary world, so often a place of isolation and alienation, makes particularly acute the need for the Christian to experience the strength and encouragement that come from Christ through the various manifestations of Christian community within the Church. These multiple forms of community should be renewed, supported, and further developed in meeting today's moral crisis.

a. *Ordinary Programs*

The Church already acts as a teacher and supporter of moral values through virtually everything it says and does. It carries

on a broad and impressive range of programs which make up a massive de facto enterprise in the area of value formation; it urges mortification, self-denial and commitment to Christ. There is less need for the Church in the United States to undertake distinctly new programs in these areas, than to give a new orientation to much that is already being done. The Church's teaching and support of these values must be planned and deliberate, not incidental or accidental. Its "ordinary" means of forming values and fostering conversion must be analyzed and adapted to convey Christ-centered concepts in a consistent, comprehensive manner which responds to present-day needs.

1. Therefore it is important that the *National Catechetical Directory*, now in preparation, continue to address the question of relating the values proclaimed by the Church to the Church's ongoing programs of religious education. This would involve, for example, the relationship between religious education and "secular" subjects in Catholic schools, including the "values" dimension of the latter. It would involve relating the values being taught in out-of-school religious education classes to the values simultaneously being taught the same students in public schools: in some cases to reinforce the teaching of values in the public schools, in other cases to counteract it. Those planning and conducting out-of-school religious education programs should make a conscious, planned effort to relate religious education to the "secular" education their pupils are receiving at the same time in public schools. Teaching and formation concerning moral values must also be part of the program of Catholic colleges and universities and campus ministry efforts. Catholic education, wherever or however it is given, should stand firm on the reality of sin, the true nature of Christian moral life, and the need of conversion or metanoia. Jesus taught with authority; under the guidance of the Magisterium we, too, must teach with authority.

2. A similar effort should be made in devising and conducting programs of *adult and continuing education*. Such programs should give major emphasis to these objectives. In doing so, they should take into consideration the non-Church factors (such as secular media) which are also influencing the values and attitudes of adult Catholics. Adult religious education should not be something apart from "real life" but should directly confront the issues and concerns in which Catholic adults are involved as members of secular society.

3. Likewise, there should be emphasis on these same matters in programs of *continuing education for priests*. Such programs should take into account the moral issues and questions of the contemporary world and, in doing so, equip priests better to understand and respond to the needs of those whom they serve.

4. The "values" question should also be incorporated consciously into the Church's *communication programs*. Catholic newspapers, magazines, television and radio productions do, of course, already deal effectively and informatively with many contemporary issues. It would be desirable, however, if Catholic media efforts (including also the parish bulletin) could be brought together on the diocesan level in a coordinated program of value formation also involving schools, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, campus ministry, adult and continuing education, and the continuing education of priests.

5. There is great need to strengthen *family life programs* and to coordinate them with the sort of comprehensive effort in the area of value formation just described. In view of the current pressures on marriage and family life in secular society, Catholic husbands and wives need much assistance from the Church in living out the principles of Christian morality in their relationship with each other. Catholic parents likewise need the strong, sympathetic support of all institutions of the Church (parish, schools, CCD, etc.) in their efforts to impart moral values to their children. Support is more necessary than ever today because society at large no longer offers such assistance to parents and in many ways fosters values which directly contradict those they wish to transmit to their children.

6. It is desirable that *spiritual formation programs for religious, seminarians and clergy* also take specific note of the "values" question and be integrated in the coordinated effort at value formation which is being sketched here. Once again it is a question of insuring that such programs take conscious note of the challenges to all these essential values which exist in our secular society and respond realistically to them.

7. The contemporary problem and challenge of values should be an immediate concern of the "suffering Church" on earth. One might envision specific programs which would encourage the sick and infirm in *homes for the aged and incurables* to offer their

prayers and sufferings for the correction of moral abuses in the world today. To some such a suggestion may smack of simplistic piety, but its value will be apparent to those who appreciate the power of prayer, the role of self-denial and mortification, and the meaning of metanoia.

8. Major attention should be given to the role of the *Liturgy and especially the daily and Sunday homily* in a coordinated program of value formation. As with the other things noted here, it is clear that the Liturgy and the homily do in fact play a significant role in Catholic value formation at the present time. The emphasis, therefore, is on making them more effective agents of value formation, as part of a well thought-out diocesan program.

As was stated, we do not see a need for creating new "ordinary" programs of value formation. These already exist in sufficient number and they touch, or can touch, the lives of every segment of the Catholic community. Instead there is a need to orient these existing efforts toward the specific problem of forming and supporting committed Catholics.

b. Extraordinary Programs

To this end certain "extraordinary" efforts are needed, in order to call attention to the problem and point the way to its solution. They should dramatize the need for conversion, renewal and commitment by each individual Catholic, and provide both the substance and the impetus for a reorientation of the Church's "ordinary" programs of value formation. In particular, since the life of the Church as a community is profoundly influenced by its leadership, leaders in the Church must themselves provide models of renewal and commitment. The intention is to enlist in this effort bishops, pastors, religious superiors, teachers at all levels, scholars, parents (as leaders of the family community) and others in actions which give witness to their acceptance of the moral teaching of Christ. The following "extraordinary" actions are therefore recommended.

1. It is suggested that *the bishops collectively give some public and dramatic expression of their renewal and commitment*. This might be done on the occasion of the bishops' annual meeting, through a form of "commitment service" incorporated into their concelebrated Liturgy.

2. A similar expression of renewal and commitment might be given on *the diocesan level* by each bishop together with his priests and people.

3. Similar public acts of renewal, repentance and commitment might be encouraged on the part of *pastors and their parishes, religious superiors and their communities, teachers and students, leaders and members of diocesan and parish groups, parents and children.*

4. The bishops may wish to consider designating a national *day of penance and moral renewal* for the U.S. Church, devoted to reflection on the moral challenges which confront our society and to full personal acceptance of the moral teachings of Jesus.

5. It seems appropriate for each bishop in his diocese to issue some *formal directive to his priests and people* (including the aged, the handicapped and the suffering) concerning the teaching and reinforcement of moral values in Catholic schools, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, and all other diocesan and parish programs and institutions. While this would take whatever form the bishop deemed advisable, it might appropriately incorporate a special call to repentance, renewal, and conversion to Christ, all related to the problem of moral values in our country today and the needs of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

6. It is suggested that the bishop and his pastors arrange special "*commitment Liturgies*" on *the diocesan and parish levels*, during which the problem of moral values would be called specifically to the attention of Catholics and they would be asked to make a commitment (similar to the renewal of the priestly promises on Holy Thursday). Such special Liturgies might be developed by national or diocesan liturgical groups, but it is hoped that they would be given a specific, local orientation and concern by parish liturgical committees.

7. Special programs of renewal and reconciliation should be undertaken in each diocese as part of the *Holy Year* observance. These programs should be planned and implemented on the diocesan level, to correspond to the needs and opportunities in particular dioceses.

8. The planners of the 1976 *Eucharistic Congress* might consider incorporation of a "renewal and commitment" theme—in the context of moral values—into that observance. The NCCB

Bicentennial program might also consider appropriate ways of incorporating the same themes into its planning.

9. The USCC Communication Department should be asked to develop a proposal for *special nationwide media programs* on these themes. In this connection it is highly desirable that there be one or two major television programs—either telecast on networks or produced for syndication to local TV stations—dealing with the problem of moral values and the need for conversion and commitment. The Communication Department should be invited to present a specific plan for accomplishing this. (Syndication is perhaps the more feasible approach and, it should be noted, is a method successfully used by other religious groups.)

10. It is necessary to address *the ecumenical and interreligious aspects* of the problem of moral values. While the activities suggested here are directed specifically to the Catholic community, and Catholics should be the principal “audience” of the Church’s immediate efforts in this area, the possibilities for dialogue and even collaboration with other religious groups should not be overlooked. Among other things, it might be appropriate for ecumenical and interreligious dialogues increasingly to address themselves to specific moral and ethical issues, with a view not only to identifying areas of disagreement but also to finding areas of consensus and shared concern and exploring the possibilities of joint action on these.

11. It might also be appropriate to encourage *dialogue on specific moral and ethical issues with those who do not profess religious belief*.

12. Finally, it is recommended that *a major document on moral values be prepared and published by the bishops of the United States*. This document should be prepared in consultation with qualified specialists and in communication with the general Catholic community. It should incorporate themes and topics identified in this report, situating them 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. If appropriate, the document, or an accompanying or subsequent document, might further develop the recommendations for “ordinary” and “extraordinary” activities contained in this report. In any case, planning for follow-up activities of many kinds should accompany the preparation of the document. The bishops’ meeting

of November, 1976, is suggested as the occasion for approval and publication of this major document.

It is also recommended that this urgent and sensitive topic be considered as a point of discussion between the bishops and the community of Catholic scholars. There can be great value in a planned dialogue among representatives of both groups concerning the problem of moral values in our society.

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