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# God's Law

The Measure Of  
Man's Conduct



*U. S. Bishops' Statement on*  
**MORALITY IN PUBLIC LIFE**



# Introduction

Contained in this booklet is the full text of the annual Statement of all of the Bishops of the United States. It was released on November 18, 1951, immediately following the general meeting of the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops in Washington.

The Statement voices a clear call for the recognition of the moral law as the only permissible and reliable guide for human actions in private and public life.

The Statement was signed by members of the Administrative Board of the National Catholic Welfare Conference:

- ✠ Francis P. Keough, Chairman
- ✠ Joseph E. Ritter
- ✠ Patrick A. O'Boyle
- ✠ John J. Mitty
- ✠ Richard J. Cushing
- ✠ Karl J. Alter
- ✠ John F. Noll
- ✠ Matthew F. Brady
- ✠ Emmet M. Walsh
- ✠ Thomas K. Gorman



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# GOD'S LAW

## The Measure Of Man's Conduct

**A**N alarming parallel exists between the situation facing us today and that which faced the Roman Empire 1500 years ago. The problems of the Empire closely resemble those which sorely test us now—barbarism on the outside, refined materialism and moral decay within. Confronted by those problems, what were men of that time concerned with? St. Augustine, who lived in that period, gives us the answer in a memorable passage:

They do not trouble about the moral degradation of the Empire. All that they ask is that it should be prosperous and secure. 'What concerns us,' they say, 'is that everyone should be able to increase his wealth so that he can afford a lavish expenditure and can keep the weak in subjection.' Let the laws protect the rights of property and let them leave man's morals alone . . . Let there be sumptuous banquets where anybody can play and drink and gorge himself and be dissipated by day or night as much as he pleases or is able. Let the noise of dancing be everywhere and let the theatres resound with lewd merriment . . . Let the man who dislikes these pleasures be regarded as a public enemy (City of God, Bk. II, 20).

Does not all this have a modern ring? Has not a great part of our society been doing and saying much the same thing?

With the threat of the barbarian on the outside, does our conduct reflect the sobriety of citizens who are conscious that a bell may be tolling for them and for civilization?

We have sent our young men on military expeditions to far-off lands so that justice and freedom may be kept alive in the world; and yet at home we have become careless about the foundations of justice and the roots of freedom. It cannot go well with us if we continue on this course.

The lessons of history are evident to those with eyes that will see. The Roman Empire disintegrated from within; and moral corruption was the main cause of its decline and disappearance. The same fate will befall us if we do not awaken to the danger which threatens from within our own household. Mastery over material things will avail us nothing, if we lose mastery over ourselves.

### *Morality—The Need Today*

Mastery over self is the primary concern of morality. The right ordering of our lives in relationship to all other beings so that we may attain our true destiny is the proper function of morality. The fundamental problem which faces us, then, is a moral one.

Morality involves the correct and careful

regulation of three relationships: man to God, man to himself, and man to his fellow men. These relationships are so closely linked together that to disturb one is to disturb the whole moral order.

Morality, therefore, viewed in its entirety, has three dimensions: height, depth, and breadth. In its height, it soars up to God the Supreme Being, from whom it takes the definitive of what is true and good. In its depth, it penetrates deep into the heart of man, laying hold of his entire personality so that even his innermost thought and motives are subject to its rule. In its breadth, it embraces man in every station and condition of life and establishes among them mutual rights and duties.

### *The Moral Order*

By nature, man is a creature, subject to his Creator and responsible to Him for all his actions. By selfish inclination, at times, he chooses to be something else, assuming the prerogatives of a Creator, establishing his own standards of conduct, and making himself the measure of all things. This prideful folly on his part brings discord into his own life, and profoundly affects the whole moral order. Frustration rather than fulfillment becomes his characteristic mark because he does not possess wholly within himself the way to fulfillment. That he can discover only in God's plan.

God's will, therefore, is the measure of man. It is the standard by which all human actions must meet the test of their rightness or wrongness. What conforms to God's will is right; and what goes counter to His will is wrong. This is the great and controlling rule of the moral order. Unless man recognizes and lives by this rule, he cannot come to that abundance of life destined for him by God.

If man is to reach this abundance of life, which depends on the fullness of moral character, it must be through the way he lives his everyday life. He has no other course. It is idle and dangerous for him to dream otherwise. The thoughts, attitudes, motives, judgments, and deeds which make up his daily round will determine his growth in character. He must use all his powers to cultivate that growth as the condition for attaining the true purpose of his life. For this it is necessary that he should be guided by a knowledge of what is right and what is wrong in the particular situations of everyday existence.

### *Moral Order and Human Reason*

How does he come to such knowledge? How can man know what is his place in the divine plan, and what is God's will in the moral decisions he is called upon to make? God has endowed man with intelligence. When rightly used and directed, the



human intellect can discover certain fundamental spiritual truths and moral principles which will give order and harmony to man's intellectual and moral life.

What are these truths which right reason can discover? First in importance is the existence of a personal God, all knowing and all powerful, the eternal Source from Whom all things derive their being. Next come the spiritual and immortal nature of man's soul, its freedom, its responsibility, and the duty of rendering to God reverence, obedience, and all that is embraced under the name of religion.

From man's position as God's rational, free and responsible creature, destined for eternal life, spring the unique dignity of the human individual and his essential equality with his fellow men.

Out of the inherent demands of human nature arises the family as the fundamental unit of human society, based on a permanent and exclusive union of man and woman in marriage. From the essential character of marriage come not only the right of parents to beget children, but also their primary right and duty to rear and educate them properly.

Since neither the individual nor the family is completely independent and self-sustained, there arises the necessity of organized civil society, and, in turn, the

mutual responsibilities of the individual and family on the one side and of the civil government on the other.

Man's social life becomes intolerable if not impossible unless justice and benevolence govern the operations of the state and relationship between individuals and groups. Without temperance, man can neither live in accordance with his human dignity or fulfill his obligations to his fellow men. Without fortitude, he cannot bear the trials of life or overcome the difficulties with which he is surrounded.

Furthermore, it is clear that the inherent dignity of the individual and the needs of the family and of society demand a code of sexual morality within the grasp of every mature mind.

These are some of the basic elements of natural law, a law based on human nature; a law which can be discovered by human intelligence and which governs man's relationship with God, with himself, and with the other creatures of God. The principles of the natural law, absolute, stable, and unchangeable are applicable to all the changing conditions and circumstances in which man constantly finds himself.

### *Natural Law and Revelation*

These religious and moral truths of the natural order can be known by human

reason; but God, in His goodness, through Divine Revelation has helped man to know better and to preserve the natural law. In the Old Testament this revelation was given to God's chosen people. Completed and perfected in the New, it has been communicated to mankind by Jesus Christ and His apostles and it has been entrusted to the Church which Christ Himself established to teach all men.

While the natural law, taught and interpreted by the Church, gives us a guide in many areas of human life, the perfection of human nature is revealed to us in Christ Himself, God-become-Man, the Word-made-Flesh, "full of grace and truth," dwelling among us to be our Way, our Truth and our Life. Prayer and the Sacraments are the channels through which the grace of Christ comes to elevate human nature until it becomes like unto Him, who is true God and true man. In the supernatural order of grace Christ, the God-man, is the measure of man.

Divine revelation then not only includes the natural law, it complements it, and points the way to the supernatural order of grace. The natural moral law, however, remains the foundation of the supernatural order, as it is the foundation of all man's relations to God to himself and to his fellow men. Upon that law, strengthened, and clarified by divine revelation, man strength-

ened by grace, must build his life. He need never fear that it will give way under the weight of the trials and tests which life imposes; for he has the inspired words of the Psalmist to assure him: "The man whose heart is set on the law of the Lord stands firm."

When the human heart is so governed by the law of the Lord, all human actions, no matter how commonplace or how removed from the eyes of men, are made pleasing to God and meritorious of eternal life. This means that God's will and God's plan for man are kept constantly in mind. When man has learned to direct his thoughts, his speech and his actions in this way, it is a sign that he has mastered the great maxim of the moral order—"not my will but Thine be done." It is an indication that he realizes he must at all times be about his Father's business. The point of reference in his life is no longer his own selfish will, for such a man sees clearly that God holds the central place in his life. He also sees that he enjoys a unique stature in that God has committed to him a work which no one else can do. His only reason for existence is to perform that work faithfully and diligently. This is the thought which Cardinal Newman so beautifully expressed:

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some

work to me which he has not committed to another, I have my mission . . . I have a part in a great work; I am a link in the chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good. I shall do His work.

### *Moral Integrity*

Doing God's work means doing God's will. This requires the services of the whole man at every moment of every day he exists. There is all too frequent today the spectacle of men who divide their lives to suit their own convenience. Only when it serves their selfish purpose do they conform to God's will. Their business life, their professional life, their life in the home, at school and in the community occupy separate compartments unified by no central force. God's claims upon such men exist, but they are not honored. Expressions such as "my life is my own affair," or "I may do as I please," or "in politics, anything goes" are all too common today. They betray a gross misunderstanding of the moral order and the inter-linking relationships which find their correct measure only in God's will.

We must be clear on this point. Man must either acknowledge that a personal God exists or he must deny His existence altogether. There is no middle course. Once he acknowledges that God exists,

then the claims of God are co-extensive with all the activities of His creatures. To pretend that any part of life can be a private affair is to violate the most basic claim which God has on man. Man is a creature. As a creature, he is subject to His Creator in all that he does. There is no time in his life when he is excused from obeying the moral law. The clergyman, the educator, the doctor, the lawyer, the politician, the employer, the employee, husbands, wives and children are alike strictly bound. All human rights and obligations have their source in God's law; otherwise they are meaningless.

### *Morality and Education*

Morality, concerned with bringing human activity into conformity with God's will, has, therefore, a bearing on everything that touches human rights and duties. It has a definite place in the educational life of a nation. The forming of character is part of the educational process; and character cannot be formed unless children are given a clear indication of what is right and what is wrong. This cannot be done without reference to the ultimate standard which determines right and wrong, namely God's law.

No state, no group of educators may reject a truth of the moral order to suit the claim of convenience. The process of

determining moral values by the consent of the majority is false in principle and sanction.

Morality has its source in God and it binds all men. It cannot be adequately taught without the motivation of religious truth. Although the training of children along moral lines is primarily the business of the parents and the Church, yet it is also the business of the school if education is to give formation to the whole human personality.

### *Morality and Economics*

Morality has its place in business and industry because the conditions under which men work, the wages they get, the kind of work they do, all are bound up with the moral law. When economic conditions are such that the raising of a family by working people is made difficult and at times impossible, then, those responsible for this deplorable situation are guilty of breaking God's law and they are also accomplices in the sins resulting from their injustice.

### *Morality and Politics*

In politics, the principle that "anything goes" simply because people are thought not to expect any high degree of honor in politicians is grossly wrong. We have to recover that sense of personal obligation

on the part of the voter and that sense of public trust on the part of the elected official which gives meaning and dignity to political life. Those who are selected for office by their fellow men are entrusted with grave responsibilities. They have been selected not for self-enrichment but for conscientious public service. In their speech and in their actions they are bound by the same laws of justice and charity which bind private individuals in every other sphere of human activity. Dishonesty, slander, detraction, and defamation of character are as truly transgressions of God's commandments when resorted to by men in political life as they are for all other men.

### *Universal Moral Standard*

There are not two standards of morality. There is only one. It is God's standard. That single standard covers all man's relations to God, to himself, and to the world about him. It applies to every conceivable situation in life,—in the home, in business, in the school, or in the field of entertainment. By its very nature, it precludes that double standard which not only tempts man to live his life on two levels, but beguiles him into thinking that this can be done without any compromise of moral principles. This two-faced way of living explains the scandalous anomaly, evident at times in our national life, of paying lip



service to God while failing completely to honor His claims in daily life.

One and the same standard covers stealing from the cash register and dishonest gain derived from public office. It will not do to say, by way of extenuation, that the latter can be excused or condoned because it occurs in the political order. One and the same standard prohibits false statements about private individuals, and false statements about members of minority groups and races. It will not do, by way of excuse, to say that statements of the latter kind can be excused because of long-standing prejudice.

This single standard of morality sets a clear, positive, and complete pattern of right living. It gives an integrity of outlook and an integrity of action to daily life. By adhering to this standard, man's life becomes all of a piece, characterized by a sincere singleness of purpose. Such a life will not have its "Sunday side" in which God's claims are fully respected for a single day and its "weekday side" in which those claims are completely ignored for the remaining six. Rather, all aspects of life will be so integrated that the standard to which a man subscribes in his private life will be logically extended to his life in the community. Then, if faithful to moral principles as an individual, he will be faithful to moral

principles as a citizen, as a voter, and in all his actions as a member of society.

### *Religion and Morality*

To live by this single standard of morality man needs the motivations and sanctions which only religion can supply. He is not self-sufficient. He must have God's help. As a creature, he is obliged to adore his Creator, to thank Him for blessings conferred, to ask His pardon for wrongs committed and to pray daily for His help and guidance. Nothing less than the faithful discharge of these essential obligations of religion will enable him to attain integrity in his moral life.

We exhort Americans in every walk of life to rededicate themselves to the wisdom of our Founding Fathers—a wisdom which proclaimed God's rightful place in human affairs—a wisdom so memorably expressed by the Father of our Country in his Farewell Address:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports . . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.



