

The Christian in Action

November 21, 1948

1. Human life centers in God. The failure to center life in God is secularism—which, as we pointed out last year, is the most deadly menace to our Christian and American way of living. We shall not successfully combat this evil merely by defining and condemning it. Constructive effort is called for to counteract this corrosive influence in every phase of life where individual attitudes are a determining factor—in the home, in the school, at work, and in civil polity. For as man is, so ultimately are all the institutions of human society.

2. To combat secularism, the individual Christian must get the full vision of Christian truth. It is not divisible. One cannot pick and choose from it. Either it is accepted as a whole or it counts for little in real life. When the Christian does get this full vision, he becomes enthusiastic in trying to share it with the world about him. It is a wonderful vision which gives new meaning to human life, and an impelling urge to selfless action. The sorry fact is that many, very many Christians see this vision only dimly and vaguely and miss its impact on reality. They hold themselves to be Christians and are accepted as Christians, but they have never been thrilled by the glory of the truth of Christ in action. By their apathy they actually abet those who work for destruction and chaos. They criticize and even deplore the

decay of morality and the spread of corruption in public life, but they feel no obligation to do anything about it. They simply do not realize that the great wonder of Divine Love is that it brings the divine into human life and that godliness in living is giving self to God. The great Christian paradox is that to find you must lose, to get you must give. Much of the confusion and chaos about us is attributable more directly to the inaction of Christians than to the effectiveness of the feverish efforts of the destroyers. The destroyers are definitely a minority, and yet the work of destruction goes on. The crisis is at hand. Today every Christian must face the full Christian vision and with no thought of compromise must seek vigorously to live it. Every day he must ask himself: What am I doing to build a Christian world? No matter what his condition or state, there is much that he can do. The reconstruction must start with the individual. He must be vigorously Christian in thought and in action—in the home, in the training of his children, in his office or workshop, and in his community.

Religion in the Home

3. In the full Christian vision, there is the divine ideal of the home—the basic social institution. It is not enough to profess the Christian truths of the stability and sanctity of the marriage bond and to keep in mind the purposes of marriage. The

Christian must make his home holy. It remained for modern history to record the first experiment in secularizing the home, an experiment which is at the root of so many of our greatest social evils. The Christian home must realize the Christian ideal. The whole atmosphere of the home must be impregnated with genuine Christian living. The domestic virtues must be practiced and family prayer made a daily exercise. It is in the home that the children learn their responsibility to God and in this responsibility their duty to others. The home is the child's first school, in which he is taught to make the vision of Christian truth the inspiration of all living. We strongly commend organized effort to make the home more truly Christian. Our Catholic Family Life Bureau plans and offers programs which make for a veritable apostolate of the Catholic home. It is gratifying to see the use that is being made of these programs by our Catholic lay organizations and the spread of this work in our dioceses. These activities serve as a powerful antidote to the venom of secularism and withstand its withering effect on piety and virtue in the American home. All of us are familiar with the problems which the family faces in our complex and maladjusted society. In trying to solve these problems we must not compromise our Christian principles. The solution of these problems is only a part of the solution of the wider social problems of our day. To do their part, our homes must be thoroughly Christian and must let the glory of the full vision of Christian truth illumine them.

Religion in Education

4. We know the sacrifices made by our people to educate their children

in schools in which the "superabundant wisdom" is the Gospel of Christ. Catholic parents closely associate their schools with their Christian homes, because they know that human living must center in God. Year after year we are making wider provisions for the education of our Catholic youth. At a time when secularism has captured the minds of very many leaders in education, it is heartening that Catholic parents are becoming more insistent in their demand for schools in which the best standards of instruction and training are integrated in the teaching of religion. It behooves us to see that we enable our schools to work out fully the Christian educational ideal. The field of higher education in particular demands a wider and more active interest. Our institutions of higher learning are the natural training grounds for Christian leadership. The ranks of Christian leadership will draw recruits largely from the undergraduate schools, but these ranks will not be filled without the Christian scholars who are formed in graduate schools. Perhaps much of the success of the secularist is due to the fact that the number of excellent Christian scholars is inadequate for the needs of our times. We ask a deeper appreciation of the contribution our institutions of higher learning are making to Christian reconstruction of society, and we urge a more generous support of their work. For if we as Christians are to do our part in restoring order to a chaotic world, Christ must be the Master in our classrooms and lecture halls and the Director of our research projects.

Religion in Economic Life

5. Christian principles should be put into action in economic life. It is not enough to find fault with the

way our economic system is working. Positive, constructive thought and action are needed.

6. The secularist solutions proposed by eighteenth-century individualism or twentieth-century statism issue either in perpetual conflict or deadening repression. Christian social principles, rooted in the moral law, call insistently for co-operation, not conflict, for freedom, not repression in the development of economic activity. Co-operation must be organized—organized for the common good; freedom must be ordered—ordered for the common good. Today we have labor partly organized, but chiefly for its own interests. We have capital or management organized, possibly on a larger scale, but again chiefly for its own interests. What we urgently need, in the Christian view of social order, is the free organization of capital and labor in permanent agencies of co-operation for the common good. To insure that this organization does not lose sight of the common good, government as the responsible custodian of the public interest should have a part in it. But its part should be to stimulate, to guide, to restrain, not to dominate. This is perfectly in line with our federal Constitution which empowers government not only "to establish justice" but also to "promote the general welfare."

7. Catholic social philosophy has a constructive program for this organic development of economic life. Pope Pius XI, rounding out the social principles formulated by Leo XIII, laid down the broad outlines of this program seventeen years ago. In line with that constructive program we advocate freely organized co-operation between the accredited representatives of capital and labor in each industry and in the economy as a

whole under the supervision but not the control of government. The agencies of this freely organized co-operation have been called by various names: Occupational Groups, Vocational Groups, or, more recently, Industry Councils. American Catholic students of the Social Encyclicals have expressed their preference for the name "Industry Councils" to designate the basic organs of a Christian and American type of economic democracy into which they would like to see our economic system progressively evolve. This evolution can come only as the fruit of painstaking study and effort to safeguard in justice and charity, the rightful interests of property and the rightful interests of labor in the pursuit of the dominant interest of all, which is the common good.

8. Such a constructive program of social order seems to us to be the answer to the questionings of high-minded leaders of industry and to the explicit proposals of sound and responsible leaders of organized labor. We bespeak for it in these critical times dispassionate consideration and calm, open discussion in an atmosphere of good will and in a disposition to seek solutions by agreement rather than by force, whether political or economic. We call upon men of religious faith and principle, both in management and labor, to take the lead in working out and applying, gradually if need be, a constructive social program of this type. For the moral and social ideals which it would realize are their heritage.

Religion and Citizenship

9. The inroads of secularism in civil life are a challenge to the Christian citizen—and indeed to every citizen with definite religious convictions.

The essential connection between religion and good citizenship is deep in our American tradition. Those who took the lead in establishing our independence and framing our Constitution were firm and explicit in the conviction that religion and morality are the strong supports of national well-being, that national morality cannot long prevail in the absence of religious principle, and that impartial encouragement of religious influence on its citizens is a proper and practical function of good government. This American tradition clearly envisioned the school as the meeting place of these helpful interacting influences. The third article of the Northwest Ordinance passed by Congress in 1787, re-enacted in 1790, and included in the Constitutions of many states enjoins: "Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good citizenship and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." This is our authentic American tradition on the philosophy of education for citizenship.

10. In the field of law our history reveals the same fundamental connection between religion and citizenship. It is through law that government exercises control over its citizens for the common good and establishes a balance between their rights and duties. The American concept of government and law started with the recognition that man's inalienable rights—which it is the function of government to protect—derive from God, his Creator. It thus bases human law, which deals with man's rights and their correlative duties in society, on foundations that are definitely religious, on principles that emerge from the definite view of man as a creature of God. This view of man anchors human law to the natural law, which

is the moral law of God made clear to us through the judgments of human reason and the dictates of conscience. The natural law, as an outstanding modern legal commentator has written, "is binding over all the globe, in all countries and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this." Thus human law is essentially an ordinance of reason, not merely a dictate of will on the part of the State. In our authentic American tradition this is the accepted philosophy of law.

11. On this basically religious tradition concerning the preparation of the citizen through education and the direction of the citizen through law, secularism has in the past century exercised a corrosive influence. It has banned religion from tax-supported education and is now bent on destroying all co-operation between government and organized religion in the training of our future citizens. It has undermined the religious foundations of law in the minds of many men in the legal profession and has predisposed them to accept the legalistic tyranny of the omnipotent State. It has cleverly exploited, to the detriment of religion and good citizenship, the delicate problem of co-operation between Church and State in a country of divided religious allegiance. That concrete problem, delicate as it is, can, without sacrifice of principle, be solved in a practical way when good will and a spirit of fairness prevail. Authoritative Catholic teaching on the relations between Church and State, as set forth in papal encyclicals and in the treatises of recognized writers on ecclesiastical law, not only states clearly what these relations should normally be under ideal conditions, but also indicates to what extent the Catholic Church can adapt herself to the par-

ticular conditions that may obtain in different countries. Examining, in the full perspective of that teaching, the position which those who founded our nation and framed its basic law took on the problem of Church-State relations in our own country, we find that the First Amendment to our Constitution solved the problem in a way that was typically American in its practical recognition of existing conditions and its evident desire to be fair to all citizens of whatever religious faith. To one who knows something of history and law, the meaning of the First Amendment is clear enough from its own words: "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion or forbidding the free exercise thereof." The meaning is even clearer in the records of the Congress that enacted it. Then, and throughout English and Colonial history, an "establishment of religion" meant the setting up by law of an official Church which would receive from the government favours not equally accorded to others in the co-operation between government and religion—which was simply taken for granted in our country at that time and has, in many ways, continued to this day. Under the First Amendment, the federal government could not extend this type of preferential treatment to one religion as against another, nor could it compel or forbid any State to do so. If this practical policy be described by the loose metaphor "a wall of separation between Church and State," that term must be understood in a definite and typically American sense. It would be an utter distortion of American history and law to make that practical policy involve the indifference to religion and the exclusion of co-operation between religion and government implied in

the term "separation of Church and State" as it has become the shibboleth of doctrinaire secularism.

12. Within the past two years secularism has scored unprecedented victories in its opposition to governmental encouragement of religious and moral training, even where no preferential treatment of one religion over another is involved. In two recent cases, the Supreme Court of the United States has adopted an entirely novel and ominously extensive interpretation of the "establishment of religion" clause of the First Amendment. This interpretation would bar any co-operation between government and organized religion which would aid religion, even where no discrimination between religious bodies is in question. This reading of the First Amendment, as a group of non-Catholic religious leaders recently noted, will endanger "forms of co-operation between Church and State which have been taken for granted by the American people," and "greatly accelerate the trend toward the secularization of our culture."

13. Reluctant as we are to criticize our supreme judicial tribunal, we cannot but observe that when the members of that tribunal write long and varying opinions in handing down a decision, they must expect that intelligent citizens of a democracy will study and appraise these opinions. The *Journal of the American Bar Association*, in a critical analysis of one of the cases in question, pertinently remarks: "The traditionally religious sanctions of our law, life and government are challenged by a judicial propensity which deserves the careful thought and study of lawyers and people."

14. Lawyers trained in the American tradition of law will be amazed

to find that in the McCollum case the majority opinions pay scant attention to logic, history or accepted norms of legal interpretation. Logic would demand that what is less clear be defined by what is more clear. In the present instance we find just the reverse. The carefully chiseled phrases of the First Amendment are defined by the misleading metaphor "the wall of separation between Church and State." This metaphor of Jefferson specifies nothing except that there shall be no "established Church," no state religion. All the rest of its content depends on the letter of the law that sets it up and can in the concrete imply anything from the impartial co-operation between government and free religious bodies (as in Holland and traditionally in our own country) all the way down to bitter persecution of religion (as in France at the turn of the century). As was pointedly remarked in a dissenting opinion: "A rule of law cannot be drawn from a metaphor."

15. A glance at the history of Jefferson's own life and work would have served as a warning against the broad and devastating application of his "wall of separation" metaphor that we find in this case. The expression first appears in a letter written by Jefferson in 1802 and significantly enough, in a context that makes it refer to the "free exercise of religion" clause rather than to the "establishment of religion" clause of the First Amendment. Twenty years later Jefferson clearly showed in action that his concept of "separation of Church and State" was far different from the concept of those who now appeal to his metaphor as a norm of interpretation. As the rector of the State University of Virginia, Jefferson proposed a system of co-operation between the various reli-

gious groups and the university which goes far beyond anything under consideration in the case at hand. And Mr. Madison, who had proposed the First Amendment and who led in carrying it through to enactment by Congress, was one of the visitors of the University of Virginia who approved Jefferson's plan.

16. Even one who is not a lawyer would expect to find in the opinion of the court some discussion of what was in the mind of the members of Congress when they framed and adopted the First Amendment. For it would seem that the intent of the legislator should be of capital importance in interpreting any law when a doubt is raised as to the objective meaning of the words in which it is framed. In regard to the "establishment of religion" clause, there is no doubt of the intent of the legislator. It is clear in the record of the congress that framed it and of the State legislatures that ratified it. To them it meant no official Church for the country as a whole, no preferment of one religion over another by the federal government—and at the same time no interference by the federal government in the Church-State relations of the individual states.

17. The opinion of the court advances no reason for disregarding the mind of the legislator. But that reason is discernible in a concurring opinion adhered to by four of the nine judges. There we see clearly the determining influence of secularist theories of public education—and possibly of law. One cannot but remark that if this secularist influence is to prevail in our government and its institutions, such a result should be achieved by legislation adopted after full popular discussion, and not by

the judicial procedure of an ideological interpretation of our Constitution.

18. We, therefore, hope and pray that the novel interpretation of the First Amendment recently adopted by the Supreme Court will in due process be revised. To that end we shall peacefully, patiently, and perseveringly work. We feel with deep conviction that for the sake of both good citizenship and religion there should be a reaffirmation of our original American tradition of free co-operation between government and religious bodies—co-operation involving no special privilege to any group and no restriction on the religious liberty of any citizen. We solemnly disclaim any intent or desire to alter this prudent and fair American policy of government in dealing with the delicate problems that have their source in the divided religious allegiance of our citizens. We call upon our Catholic people to seek in their faith an inspiration and a guide in making an informed contribution to good citizenship. We urge members of the legal profession in particular to develop and apply their special competence in this field. We stand ready to co-operate in fairness and charity with all who believe in God and are devoted to freedom under God to avert the impending danger of a judicial "establishment of secularism" that would ban God from

public life. For secularism is threatening the religious foundations of our national life and preparing the way for the advent of the omnipotent state.

Signed by the members of the N.C.W.C. Administrative Board in the names of the bishops of the United States:

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- ✠EDWARD CARDINAL MOONEY, Archbishop of Detroit
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