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# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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## AS AN AMERICAN

BY

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The tenth in a series of addresses by prominent Catholic laymen entitled "THE ROAD AHEAD," delivered in the Catholic Hour, broadcast by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men, on August 11, 1946 by Dr. George F. Donovan, President of Webster College, Webster Groves, Missouri. After the series has been concluded on the radio, it will be made available in one pamphlet.

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National Council of Catholic Men  
Washington, D. C.

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CAPAM

## AS AN AMERICAN

It is easy to be satisfied with one's condition in life. Despite the war and the immediate post-war problems, some men see in their imagination a peaceful security in the seclusion of their homes or in the rooms of an apartment house. From a local point of view there are some who are justifying their present contentment.

In a way it is not difficult for one to say, and it has been said many times, "I am an American," and to be thoroughly satisfied with all that statement implies. In over a century and a half of American history too many citizens of the United States have considered it sufficient to pay respect to the lofty traditions of our constitutional government and the high ideals of our nation. Our country is prosperous, our nation has never lost a war, the idea that there is no other land in the world like the United States, or no other man like an American, represents a spirit and a situation of complete gratification. In a way, all that is true, but it should not remain that way.

At the present time high incomes, satisfactory employment, and the growing abundance of goods and services, tend to make

man all the more comfortable and tranquil-going in his attitude toward life and, especially, toward his fellow-Americans.

There are some who feel that the dignity of man is reflected in the self-satisfied American who pays his bills, joins a local organization, supports community relief appeals, and in the evening looks forward to seating himself leisurely beside a radio, and with his cigar and a liquid refreshment—he is all set.

From time to time such a man calls himself a friend of labor, the champion of reform, and a true American citizen and, yet, a brief examination reveals that he has never subscribed to a progressive measure under discussion in Congress or the state legislature, nor has he identified himself with a program aimed to protect the public as a whole, nor has he advocated the repeal of laws and policies discriminating against minorities. Certainly such a man has neither a public nor a private conscience. To him the dignity of man is smothered in his own deep-rooted selfishness and greedy outlook toward life.

Is there an answer to this indifference, to this blackout of interest in our fellow-Americans,

to this blindness, toward the injustice practiced in our human relations? Is there not a way to revive the dignity of man in the American scene? There is a reply which manifests itself in three areas: political life, economic relations, and education.

It does not take an overly astute student of American affairs to recognize the fraud and dishonesty practiced by some of our public officials both in high and low places. We all hear of the pressure exerted on members of our legislatures, of the offers and acceptances of bribes, of the lack of fairness in the administration of the law. The political machine is still known to be important. The boss still secures silent and respectful obedience, and even the public gives adulation and praise to demagogues and to public leaders who have betrayed the confidence placed in them by the citizens. Mere man, in this great maelstrom of political instability, is certainly not clothed in dignity. He has lost practically all his own influence for the good of the common welfare.

The answer to this problem is to be found in an enlightened and determined citizenry who have the courage to pursue the

American way of fair play and justice to all citizens, irrespective of their race, creed, color, or status in life. The steps for re-establishing this impartial outlook are:

- 1) An attitude of mind leading to the belief and the understanding that it is important to every American citizen to participate effectively and to the full in the public life of our country.

- 2) The establishment of a more complete and long-range program of education for our youth on the principles and practices of American government beginning with the town and going all the way up to the federal Government itself, such a course should run from the elementary grade school through the college and university levels.

- 3) Participation in movements designed to promote equality of opportunity for assuming responsibility in government among the people, particularly in the institution of such practices as the initiative, referendum, the recall, the extension of the merit system, greater scrutiny of public funds, and a more adequate expression of opinion on public

questions by the rank and file in Government service.

4) The support of programs destined to spread democratic benefits among the citizens, especially in the removal of unfair voting restrictions, raising of the salary scale and promotional standards in public positions, and the expansion of educational and medical facilities throughout the nation.

A lack of understanding of our government is manifested in the failure of many Americans to recognize the inferior position of man in our economic life. The economic dignity of man has suffered much. Many Americans have not completely seen the necessity of fighting those evils which have threatened and lowered the economic status of many of our fellow-citizens. Low wages, high prices, plus arbitrary control of prices and goods, strong monopolies, insecurity, especially in old age and for persons disabled by accident or illness, the great expansion of the apartments and hotels as the so-called substitute for the American home, the wide discrimination, especially in securing and holding a job, and conducting a business, are among some of the modern practices of

American economic life that tend to reduce and break down the dignity of man.

The answer to these economic problems is not hard to find. The endorsement of a program involving a living wage for a man and his family, reasonable prices that will give a fair profit to the producer, and quality and service to the consumer, the extension of both public and private security to all Americans, such as domestic workers, employees of non-profit organizations, and rural workers, the recognition of collective bargaining, the abolition of racial, religious, and economic discrimination, greater freedom in the establishment of business, especially small business enterprises, greater opportunity in purchasing one's own home, are the answer.

These solutions may be accomplished through a strong cooperative, mutual organization of all the groups concerned and if their efforts do not succeed entirely, or fail, then government has the obligation to step in for the purpose of providing for the common welfare of the distressed and handicapped citizens.

As one who has had the experience of living in an indus-



trial community and working in a factory, I recall very well one manufacturing concern owner who dedicated his life to the welfare of his employees and their families, not in a paternalistic role, but as a leader who recognized his essential obligations to his fellowman. His workers shared in the management, assisted in formulating policies, received a portion of the profits, took part in sales discussions and assumed many other obligations within the company. The result was very evident. High wages, year-round employment, satisfactory working conditions, friendly relations between the workers and the employers and never a strike in the entire history of the industry. An exception, yes, but it could easily be the rule.

In addition to the political and economic dignity of man as factors in American success and happiness, there are also some educational implications which are pertinent. The United States has seen the growth of two systems of education—public and non-public. Many of the non-public schools are controlled by the churches. Both systems of education, public and non-public, train children for parti-

cipation in American democratic life.

Under the Constitution, American parents are assured of freedom of education. They may send their children to either a public school or a non-public school. In the celebrated Oregon School case the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that no state law could abridge this fundamental American freedom by compelling parents to send their children only to the public schools.

Likewise, under our Constitution, parents are guaranteed freedom of religion. They may worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. Furthermore, they may choose for the education of their children a school where religion is taught along with the other subjects. Any state or local law which would prohibit parents from enrolling their children in church controlled schools would be declared unconstitutional by our courts.

Although freedom of education and freedom of religion are guaranteed rights of every American citizen, in many cases American parents cannot exercise these rights. I know of a small community where the ma-

majority of parents would prefer to send their children to a parochial school. This preference is based upon sound religious convictions. Nevertheless, these parents are sending their children to a public school—why? The state will not provide any public funds for a parochial school. The parents and the other members of the religious group have low incomes. They simply cannot afford the cost of erecting and maintaining a parochial school in addition to paying high taxes for the public school. Technically, therefore, these parents enjoy freedom of education and freedom of religion, but it seems to me these freedoms will have little practical meaning in their lives unless the state adopts a fairer method of distributing public funds for educational purposes.

The answer, simple and direct, according to traditional American practices, should be to give all parents the same opportunities to participate equally and fully in all educational plans and curricula so that the parent who desires to send his children to a non-public school where a belief in God is taught may do so without impairing his own financial status or depriving

himself or his children of public funds which should be available to all Americans. This program of equal distribution of public funds should begin on the local level so far as grade and high schools are concerned and on the state level for higher education. If necessary in larger areas, I believe the national government has a responsibility to step in and provide funds for students who wish to secure an education. This is fair play. It is the recognition of dignity in the parent who exercises the right to send his children to the school which his conscience selects.

All through these areas, political, economic, and educational, where Americans may and should participate, there is ever present the idea of a permanent place of instruction from which the interest, the leadership, and the action should emerge. That place is the family. A stable, happy family where there are just and understanding relations between the husband and wife, between the father and the son, the mother and the daughter, where there is no room for unhappiness and where there will not be any divorce.

Such principles rooted in a true family life may be easily

translated into the political, economic, and educational fields where opportunities will be provided for the recognition of the obligations of the American citizen to his government, to his occupation, and to the education of his children.

God in His greatness and kindness will then give, as He does to the family, that love of fellowman, a love which re-

spects the conscience of man, which stresses the loyalty of man to the state through citizenship and which permits economic cooperation among groups and which will make man a better American citizen. Through these means the dignity of man will be appreciated and the citizen of these United States will be more proud than ever before to say, "I am an American."

# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Seventeenth Year—1946

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

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

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454