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AN ADDRESS

BY

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At Closing Dinner

of

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

CATHOLIC YOUTH WORK

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7:00 P.M.

I am honored to be included as a participant in your Youth Apostolate.

At a time when the major portion of our own generation is preoccupied with the tremendous task of salvaging and rejuvenating the heritage of our culture, it is heartening and gratifying to know that organizations like yours are concerned with problems of the future generations to which that heritage must be transmitted.

I commend you for that concern. For, with you, I am convinced that the perpetuation of our democratic liberties and spiritual freedom depends largely upon the sound indoctrination of our youth with a consciousness of the worth of our American ideals.

Today there is every evidence of failure to recognize the necessity of adequately providing for American youth as a distinct segment of our society.

The American family has become institutionalized. Many homes have become boarding houses, more or less, where parents and children meet only at meals - in the more fortunate homes three times a day.

Family unity and solidarity seem to have disintegrated. Under the influence of parental indifference and diverse outside attractions, we have to a certain extent lost our leadership and control over our children.

Most parents still demand the primary right and obligation to educate. But many dodge their responsibilities in this regard by blaming the schools and educators for the youth failure.

Recreation and entertainment for the family, and also education itself is often not planned or chosen with a view to religious and moral training. It is a hit or miss selection, depending largely on the vagaries of chance.

And while the youth of America suffer from a lack of careful planning, the characteristic adult reaction appears to be a baseless condemnation of "the younger generation."

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It is indeed fortunate that there are men and women like yourselves. I would be trespassing upon a province outside my domain if I should presume to tell you the problems of youth and the answers to those problems.

You know both the problem and the solution better than I do.

But, as we lawyers say, there should be a "meeting of the minds" on fundamentals. I agree most heartily with the objective of your Conference as expressed by His Excellency, Archbishop Richard J. Cushing, when he said:

"In the contacts, discussions and experiences of this national conference a unity of purpose and a coordination of efforts will be the common goal."

The Federal Government can do but little of the real work that is necessary. Though the problem is nation-wide, the final solution must be found in the cities and communities of America. My hope is to continue to draw the attention of public-spirited citizens and civic groups, as well as State, county and city officials, to the gravity of the problem. The job must be done by working conferences - by committees - and by individuals in the communities all over our great land. We must create juvenile opportunity.

It is vital, I believe, that children be recognized for their own importance. Their position as responsible citizens in their adult life depends on the love and respect we show them now.

Such recognition can be augmented by adequate ~~problems~~ ^{programs} to promote their educational, social, economic, and moral welfare.

These programs must be free from the taint of state paternalism, and their advantages must be furnished to our youth without jeopardizing or usurping the functions of either the home, or the school, or the church.

The traditional institutions of American family and community life - the home, the church, and the school - must be preserved and fostered as

dynamic influences in the lives of our children.

The home lies at the very foundation of effective American citizenship. Parents are still the most important influence in the lives of their children. Through them, children should experience spiritual guidance, affection and security - indispensable elements in child growth.

Sound corrective programs in the field of child welfare and juvenile delinquency are to be commended. But we must have a vigorous, positive program of preventive work designed to eliminate the causes which make correction necessary.

We must do all we can to reform the more than 100,000 juveniles who were convicted of crime last year. We must use all of the techniques and facilities available to bring them back into the fold of good citizenship.

Statistics show, however, that 52 percent of these 100,000 will, in their adult life, become inmates of Federal or State prisons. Of those who committed two offenses in their youth, 61 percent find themselves in prison during their adult years. Third time offenders in youth, statistics show, in 75 out of 100 cases, end up in the penitentiary.

Our job in the Department of Justice is to apprehend and prosecute the bankrobber of today. My purpose, likewise, is to lend our good offices and efforts to the prevention of bank robberies by our citizens of tomorrow.

In this effort I ask your continued help - you and the leaders of all of our churches throughout America can do much to strengthen and expand our youth services into a real, continuous, active, positive program of opportunity for youngsters everywhere - a program based on a fundamental recognition of God and of our responsibility to our fellow man.

Each of these ideals must be converted into action, to make it possible for our youth to sustain the added responsibilities of American citizenship

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which the new atomic age has made their lot.

Considerable has been done to achieve many of these worthy objectives.

I wish to pay tribute to the tremendous contribution which the Catholic Church has made to the youth of America through these endeavors.

Before a recent gathering of men and women similar to this, I stated that we must be concerned with the problem of meeting the basic human needs, spiritual as well as physical. The Church must play a major role in solving that problem.

In no phase of our activities is this more true than in our dealings with our youth.

All of the marvelous advances in social and psychiatric science - the multiplication of playgrounds and substitutes for broken homes will not help our children if we fail to give them the spiritual and moral training so necessary to help them withstand the rigors of adult life.

All the child welfare agencies and youth movements in the world will not produce a generation of **character** without the spiritual discipline of the Ten Commandments.

Yet a recent survey of some 50,000 school children in one of our largest cities revealed the startling facts that three-fourths of them did not know the Ten Commandments, and nearly two-thirds of that number had never heard of them!

A mid-depression survey disclosed that 68 percent of our children and youths had either no contact with religion or only nominal church connections.

Statistics released a few years ago, in April of 1943, by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, representing twenty-two major Protestant denominations, revealed a sum total of only 67 million church affiliations among all our people, or roughly, one-half of the population.

Again, in 1943, the International Sunday School Association estimated that more than 25 million, over one-half, of our children were outside of the influence of the church, the Sunday school, and religious classes.

In view of this mass of evidence, the clear inference is that one out of two of our American people, and at least two out of three of our children, are outside the orbit of the effective operation of the moral law, and the salutary influence of religion.

It is imperative that our people and our children return to God and walk in His ways.

Otherwise, our civilization will become a soulless culture, devoid of spirit, and the hope which mankind has reposed in it will be vain.

Recently, our press and educational journals have been filled with articles expressing grave concern over the infiltration of a communist-youth organization into our schools and colleges. American Youth for Democracy made no inroads in any church-sponsored schools, Catholic or otherwise. Need we ask why?

The answer is easy - American Youth for Democracy caused dissention on some American campuses because it followed the lead of the communist line, of capitalizing on any problem, imaginary or otherwise, that would attract the impetuosity of youth. It was controlled by the Young Communist League. It picked the victims carefully. It dared not attempt to enter those colleges where truly positive American programs of dynamic action were sponsored by American youths. The idealism and enthusiasm of American youngsters would not permit it. But where programs offer no hope of solving the individual youth problem - but only serve as frothy, platonic time killers - it is not surprising that some youth turned to the false prophets.

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We must have programs of youth, by youth and for youth which channel their enthusiasm and strength into constructive American civil life. America needs it -- and youth must have it. It is the surest antidote to communism, fascism and totalitarianism. Such programs bring more democracy to America -- more of the good life to every American.

The recent Harvard Report on General Education in A Free Society asserted that "it is important to limit the idea of the good citizen expressly by the ideals of the good man." The vast majority of you here are teachers and exemplars of goodness in both its natural and supernatural senses.

By inculcating the "ideals of the good man" in your charges -- by continuing to impress upon them the moral and spiritual values which you hold sacred -- and by integrating those ideals and values with our democratic principles, you will add the most beneficial leaven to the bread which is so vital today to the sustenance of our American youth.