

Reflections

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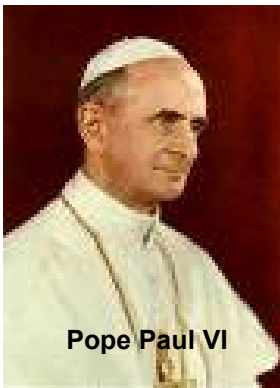
ORDERED LIBERTY

Liberty is the cornerstone of American political philosophy and the principle value of our national life. The commitment to its attendant freedoms guides societal values as disparate as legislative and judicial decision-making, foreign policy, and the struggle for individual civil rights. The Founding Fathers' drive to preserve liberty gave rise to such revolutionary concepts as governmental separation of powers; a prohibition on the state's interference with the free exercise of religious practice; the equality of all citizens under the law; and the ability to express without retribution one's opposition to elected representatives. The exercise of their freedoms has led Americans to achieve tremendous advances in science, technology, economics, and civil affairs, making this nation the world's leader in political, military and economic terms. Liberty truly has blessed America, which our nation largely has utilized with admirable intentions and for significant material results.

But nature dictates that freedom will be destroyed if not exercised responsibly. When liberty is mistaken for license, and free reign granted to passion, the evil constraints of oppression and injustice result. The very foundations of democracy are put at risk, for a people who cannot control their appetites in private life are unlikely to exercise responsible self-government in public life

Every society requires order. In a nation based on the consent of the governed, order must flow from individuals freely obeying the imperatives of an inner set of standards, from adherence to norms that apply to all people. Freedom must be rooted for its existence in a moral culture that produces an ordered liberty, a liberty of self-mastery, self-discipline, self-governance. Lord Acton, the 19th century, Catholic, English historian wrote: "Liberty is not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought."

God created us with a purpose, defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as, "to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him." Liberty has been awarded us to fulfill that purpose. In the encyclical *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Paul VI stated: "[A]uthentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain 'under the control of his own decisions,' so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him." Our soul seeks God through the free exercise of our will. If it were otherwise, and we lacked the ability to so willingly choose, the revelations of God, the teachings of Jesus Christ about the virtuous life, would lack meaning. We are free to choose ways to pursue good; we are not free from restraint on our passions and actions.



Pope Paul VI

We live in a time of significant moral conflict. America is a pluralistic society founded on a unifying principle - the Judeo-Christian belief in a Supreme Being who created all men in His image and likeness, equal in dignity and endowed with certain inalienable rights. This common base has provided Americans with a consensual understanding of the nature and dignity of man. It has sustained our national belief in the transcendent worth of every individual, an orthodoxy that illuminates our civil life.

Today, this foundation is being eroded. Intolerance of Judeo-Christian beliefs has eradicated from our public sphere and discourse all mention of God, let alone humble acknowledgement of our dependence on Him. Legislative and judicial decisions prioritize human life, deeming some – often the weakest and most vulnerable in our society -- unworthy to continue. Even a substantial number of Catholic politicians are following the popular secular agenda, disregarding the teachings of their Faith when they make political decisions. Our common moral values, that necessary precursor to a vibrant democracy, are being eliminated. Without these shared inner principles, it is not possible to assume that people will execute their public duties for the good of society. As then-Cardinal Ratzinger wrote:

"When nothing can be taken for granted, everything becomes possible, and nothing is impossible any longer. Now there is no value capable of sustaining man, and there are no inviolable norms. All that counts is man's ego and the present moment."

As Catholic Americans, blessed with unprecedented freedom and opportunity and guided by the Church's moral teachings, we have an awesome responsibility -- to keep God relevant in our public and private lives, and to build a consciousness of God's beneficent shaping of our nation's affairs. The Knights of Columbus can have a substantial catalytic effect on the nation's Catholic population and on the nation as a whole by stoutly promoting the teachings of our Church in relation to public affairs. As individuals, we can begin by leading our lives as exemplars of Christianity, fulfilling our purpose to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him, so that we can spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

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