

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES ON DRUG ABUSE

So much hope has been placed on the youth of today. This hope found its expression in words when one year ago Pope Paul VI said to the youth of the Philippines:

"Today is your hour. You are the advancing vanguard of your country. Your responsibility as intellectuals is supreme for the future of your nation. We understand your aspiration to involve yourselves more actively in the life of your people. We know that your dynamism, hand in hand with your special sensitivity, has helped your elders to gain a better grasp of the problems that must be solved. The youth of the Philippines, like that of all Asia, is on the march."

However, it is sad that such a hopeful picture of our youth is being dimmed by the alarming rise of drug abuse in this country. In the Greater Manila area, a recent report showed that already thousands of young people are drug addicts. And the plague is fast spreading in the provinces.

What makes our young people take to drugs?

Among the many reasons, we can mention the following:

Ignorance. The innocent youth, not fully conscious of the pernicious effects of drugs abuse are being victimized by the greed and malice of dope pushers and syndicates, who are motivated by filthy gain and the malicious design to destroy the moral fibre of our youth. This is aggravated by the fact that many of those who are in charge of the guidance of the youth, like parents, teachers and pastors are themselves not quite aware of the dangers of drug abuse.

Idleness and Curiosity. Lack of creative activity among many of our young people can lead them to take to drugs for the thrill.

"Barkada". This phenomenon oftentimes offers the climate for enticement to drug experimentations.

Spirit of rebellion. For some this is a way of expressing their opposition to the "establishment".

It would seem however that all these causes are but symptoms of a deeper malaise, namely, **the disillusionment of our youth with society.** The phenomenal advances achieved by science and technology in recent times have placed man on the threshold as it were of a better world. And yet, the very instruments of progress are being used to frustrate the yearning for human liberation. There is still an undue imbalance of wealth. Justice is still compartmentalized. Violence still prevails.

This feeling of discouragement is leading our youth to opt out from what they think is the squalor of reality. Drugs provide them with this escape.

So, what is wrong with escape through drugs?

From the standpoint of Christian teaching, man is made to the image and likeness of God. Now, God is Love, and therefore Community — the Trinitarian Community: the Father pours Himself in Love to the Son, and the Son responds in total Love to the Father, this Love being the Holy Spirit. If man then is to be true to this image of God in himself, he must likewise give himself to community. He must give himself in love to his fellowmen, which he will hardly be able to do if his mind, the likeness of God in him, is weakened by drug abuse.

Furthermore, the youth is a nation's greatest wealth. They are the repository of our national hope. Sixty percent of our population is below 25. The development and future of this nation is obviously in their hands. So, we can ill afford to allow this most vital sector of our society to be corrupted by the abuse of drugs.

In the drive to stamp out drug abuse we should mobilize all sectors of society. We call upon parents to be ever more vigilant and to acquaint themselves with the perils of drugs as to better protect their children.

We favor the inclusion of proper "drug education" in our schools.

We support the move now initiated in Congress for more effective laws on narcotics and heavier penalties on drug traffickers.

We appeal to the law-enforcing agencies, especially the Bureau of Customs and the NBI to intensify the drive against dope smugglers and pushers.

On our part We pledge ourselves together with our brother priest and religious that in the proclamation of the Good News we shall lay more emphasis on those human and Christian values which will enhance in the eyes of our youth their dignity as sons of God.

Finally, we invite our youth to build with us that just society that they and we all are searching for.

So we echo once more the questions posed by our Holy Father to the youth of our country:

"Do you know in which direction to go? Have you a clear picture of the goals you are aiming at? Are you dedicated to the search for true values? Does your wish to serve your brothers manifest itself in practical choices that prepare you to promote effectively the progress of the many? Are you convinced that one can only be truly free to the extent that one is responsible?"

Given on this 28th day of January in the year of Our Lord 1972 in Baguio City.

For the Catholic Bishop Conference
of the Philippines:

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