

PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS — WAY TO PEACE

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Human dignity is best understood when it is associated with the term "rights." Man possesses rights because of his moral dignity as a human person. Animals are not persons, hence, they have no rights. Rights are inalienable, that is, they cannot be taken away by another even by the Government.

Chief among the rights are-1) The right to life. 2) The right to liberty. 3) The right to the pursuit of happiness. Let us elaborate them.

1) *The right to life*—We should do our utmost to respect and defend the right to life. Life begins with the conception of the child. Therefore, abortion, that is, the premature ejection of the baby, is criminal. And yet, there are many abortionists in the Philippines. There are doctors, who, to make money, practice this immoral action. We must fight abortion by all means. We must safeguard life in its inception.

Adults have a right to life. On them largely depend the stability or and the future of the State or of the nation. Yet, in some nations, particularly, in the Philippines, the right to life is a mockery. For any trifling reason, life is taken away or destroyed. This happens especially during the electoral campaign. Our elections are always bloody. Leaders and candidates in their disputes make use of deadly weapons, with the result, that in every election, hundreds are either wounded or killed.

Religious freedom is one of the most noble rights of man. But, what is religious freedom? Religious freedom means freedom from coercion. No one has the right to force his neighbour to accept or follow his own belief. But, religious freedom must be reasonable.

Through Tradition and Revelation, we know that Christ has founded a Church, the Catholic Church. It is our duty to seek and

embrace it, once found. Were we free to follow any religion or Church, it would have been futile for Christ to establish His Church. The power He has given to His Vicar on earth to bind or loose, would have been useless. Religion is the best safeguard of human rights, and of Christian civilization.

The Hon. Henry Wallace, Vice-President of the U.S.A., in an important speech delivered on May 8, 1942, said—"The idea of freedom derived from the Bible with its extraordinary emphasis on the dignity of the individual democracy, is the *only* true biblical expression of Christianity. Not only does the democratic way of thought spring from evangelical consideration, but, it cannot survive without it." To keep faith in the forward march of humanity, to have faith in the dignity of the person, in human rights and justice, are essentially spiritual values. To have faith in freedom and fraternity, we need a heroic inspiration which strengthens and vivifies reason and which none but Jesus Christ of Nazareth has brought to the world.

Human rights are greatly emphasized by the Declaration of American Independence. "We hold these truths to be self evident" says the Declaration "that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among them are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights Governments becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to abolish it and to substitute it with another Government." In the framing of the Declaration of the American Republic, Jefferson and others who had read Cardinal Bellarmine and Fr. Suarez—the influence of these great theologians of the 16th century is clearly noticeable in the documents. The same scholastic ideas were later engraved in the federal and state constitutions of America. These constitutions served as patterns to other constitutions — among them the Constitution of the Philippines — and were more or less copied by the United Nations on the formulation of the Bill of Rights.

Pope Paul VI, in declaring a year of peace—the year 1969—thought it wise and practical to bring to our minds and to our heart—the right to life, to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness. For true peace is based on respect for life, for liberty, and for the pursuit of happiness. Lasting and enduring peace is enshrined on justice and charity.