



## The Necessity of a Moral or Religious Sense in the Formation of Good Citizens

Religion in Its Broadest and Most Comprehensive Sense, Including Moral Training, Is Only Solid Basis of Society —It Is the Fostering Mother of Charity Which Is Guardian of Civility and Good Breeding.

By HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL GIBBONS.

**I** HOLD that religion is the only solid basis of society. If the social edifice rests not on this eternal and immutable foundation it will soon crumble to pieces. It would be as vain to establish society without religion as to erect a palace in the air or on shifting sands or to hope to reap a crop from seed scattered on the ocean's surface. Religion is to society what cement is to the building; it makes all parts compact and coherent. "He who destroys religion," says Plato, "overthrows the foundations of human society."

Religion is the bond that unites man with his Creator. It is a virtue by which due honor and worship are paid to God. It embraces all those fundamental truths that involve God's sovereignty over us and our entire dependence on Him. I employ religion here in its broadest and most comprehensive sense as embodying the existence of God, His infinite power and knowledge, His providence over us, the recognition of a divine law, the moral freedom and responsibility of man, the distinction between good and evil, the duty of rendering our homage to God and justice and charity to our neighbor and finally the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments.

This implies a moral training, so that when I speak of the necessity of religion for good citizenship I have in mind too the moral training which true religion imparts.

The social body is composed of individuals who have constant relations with one another; and the very life and preservation of society demand that the members of the community discharge toward one another various and complex duties.

What is needed for good citizenship? What does society require of your rulers and magistrates? What does it require of you? It demands of your rulers that they dispense justice with an even hand. It demands of you that you be loyal to your country, zealous in her defence, faithful in the observance of her laws, conscientious in the payment of imposts and taxes for her maintenance and support. It demands that you be scrupulous in observing your oaths and vows, just in the fulfilment of your contracts and obligations, honest in your dealings and truthful in your promises. It demands that you honor and respect your lawful superiors and that you be courteous to your equals, condescending to your inferiors, faithful to your friends, magnanimous to your enemies and merciful to the poor and the oppressed. It demands of the married couple conjugal fidelity, of parents provident vigilance, of children filial love. In a word, it demands that you "render to all men their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor"; and that you "render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's."

How can these virtues be practised without sufficient motives? These motives must be strong and powerful, because you have passions and self-interest to overcome. They must be universal, because they are binding on all members of society. They must be permanent, because they apply to all times and places.

What motives, religion apart, are forcible enough to compel legislators, rulers and magistrates to be equitable and impartial in their decisions? What guarantee have we that they will not be biassed by prejudice and self-interest? Will a thirst for fame and a desire for public approbation prove a sufficient incentive for them to do right? How often has not this very love of glory and esteem impelled them to trample on the rights and liberties of the many in order to win the approbation of a few sycophants, just as Roboam oppressed his subjects that he might be admired and praised by his young courtiers, and as Alexander enslaved nations to receive the applause of the fickle Athenians.

What principles without religion are binding enough to exact of you that obedience which you owe to society and to the laws of your country? Is it the dread of civil punishment? But the civil power takes cognizance only of overt acts. It has no jurisdiction over

the heart, which is the seat of rebellion, the secret council chamber where dark schemes are concocted. The civil power cannot enter the hidden recesses of the soul and quell the tumults raging there. It cannot invade the domestic circle to expel the intemperance and lewdness that enervate and debauch both body and mind. It cannot suppress those base calumnies, whispered in the dark, which poison the social atmosphere with their foul breath and breed hatred, resentment and death. You might as well expect to preserve a tree from decay by lopping off a few withered branches while allowing the worms to gnaw at the roots as to preserve the social tree from moral corruption by preventing some external crimes while leaving the heart to be wormeaten by vice.

Besides, if you are so disposed, can you not in many instances escape the meshes of the law by resorting to gifts, bribes and ingenious frauds?

If the civil sword, even with the aid of religion, can scarcely restrain public disorders, how futile would be the attempt to do so without the cooperation of moral and religious influence!

Still less do you fear the judgment that posterity may pronounce on your conduct. For if you believe neither in God nor in a life to come, the condemnation of after ages will not disquiet you, the censures of future generations will not disturb your ashes reposing in the tomb.

Nor can you suppose the emoluments of office an adequate incentive to induce you to be an upright and law abiding member of society. The emoluments of office are reserved for the privileged few; the great bulk of society will always be consigned to private life.

Do not imagine, because you happen to be a man of irreproachable private life, integrity of character and incorruptible justice, that your fellow citizens will seek you out, as the Romans sought Cincinnatus at the plough, that they will cordially embrace you, force you from your cherished seclusion and bestow upon you some office of trust and distinction.

"The office should seek the man and not the man the office" is a beautiful but Utopian maxim, a maxim so antiquated as to deserve a place in the cabinet of national curiosities. The most successful office holder usually has been and usually will be the most industrious office seeker, and his chances of success are not always improved by a delicate sense of honor and an inflexible adherence to principle.

The esteem of your fellow men will not be sufficient inducement to make you a virtuous citizen, for the great mass of virtues, even of those virtues that influence the well being of society, are practised in private and are hidden from the eyes of men, like the root that gives life and bloom to the tree or the gentle dew from heaven which silently sheds its blessing on the labors of the husbandman.

Nor should you be surprised if your good actions instead of winning the applause of your fellow citizens will sometimes even draw upon you their suspicion, their jealousy, their odium and their calumny. The wisdom and integrity of Aristides were such that the Athenians called him "The Just," yet they condemned him to exile. On the day on which the people were to vote upon the question of his banishment an illiterate burgher, who did not know him personally, requested him to write the name of Aristides upon his ballot. "Has that man done you any injury?" asked Aristides. "No," answered the other, "nor do I even know him. But I am tired of hearing him everywhere called 'The Just.'"

The case of the Founder of the Christian religion is still more familiar to the reader. Who was so great a benefactor to society as He? He went about doing good to all men. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and walking to the lame and strength to the paralyzed limb and comfort to the afflicted, and even life to the dead. He promulgated the most sublime and beneficent laws that were ever given to man. He invariably inculcated respect for ruling powers and obedience to their authority, and yet He was branded as a seditious man, an enemy of Cæsar, and He was put to death by

the very people whom He had sought to deliver from spiritual bondage.

But perhaps you will say that a natural sense of justice, independently of religion, can exercise sufficient influence in inducing you to practise the duties of an upright citizen. But to discard religion and yet profess to believe in natural justice is self-contradictory. It is grasping at the shadow and rejecting the substance. It is unconsciously clothing oneself in the garment of religion while rejecting its spirit, "having, indeed, an appearance of godliness, but denying the power thereof." If you seriously reflect you will discover that natural justice has no solid foundation unless it rests on religion. Natural justice may sound well in theory, but it is a feeble barrier against the encroachments of vice.

Tell me, what becomes of your natural love of justice, or what influence does it exert on your conduct, when it stands in the way of your personal interests, pleasures and ambition?

It is swept away like a mud bank before a torrent because it has not the strong wall of religion to support it.

Would your love of justice lead you to give a righteous decision against a friend and in favor of a stranger, though you were persuaded that such a decision would convert your friend into a lifelong enemy? Would it prompt you to disgorge ill gotten wealth, and thus to fall in a single day from affluence into poverty?

Would your natural sense of duty inspire you with patience and resignation if you were defrauded of your property by the treachery of a friend? Would a mere natural sense of duty or propriety restrain a Joseph or a Susanna from defiling his or her conscience and violating the sacred laws of marriage? Would a natural love of truth and honor compel a guilty man to avow his secret crime that he might vindicate the innocent falsely accused? Such acts of patience, justice and truth are not uncommon in the Christian dispensation; but they would have been deemed prodigies of virtue in pagan times.

There are many that consider mental culture a panacea for every moral disorder. "Let knowledge," they say, "be diffused over the land. Social order and morality will follow in its track."

The experience of other nations, as well as that of our own, shows it to be a very great illusion to suppose that intellectual development is sufficient of itself to make us virtuous men, or that the moral status of a people is to be estimated by the widespread diffusion of purely secular knowledge.

When the Roman Empire had reached the highest degree of mental culture it was sunk in the lowest depths of vice and corruption. The Persian Empire, according to the testimony of Plato, perished on account of the vicious education of the princes. While their minds were filled with knowledge they were guided by no religious influences. The voice of conscience was drowned amid the more eager and captivating cries of passion, and they grew up monsters of lust, rapine and oppression, governed by no law save the instincts of their brutal nature.

It does not appear that vice recedes in the United States in proportion as public education advances. Statistics, I fear, would go far to prove the contrary to be the fact. The newspapers published in our largest cities are every day filled with startling accounts of deep laid schemes of burglary, bank defalcations, premeditated murders and acts of refined licentiousness. These enormities are perpetrated for the most part not by unlettered criminals but by individuals of consummate address and skill; they betray a well disciplined mind, uncontrolled by morality and religion. How true are the words of Kempis: "Sublime words make not a man holy and just, but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God."

If neither the vengeance of the civil power nor the hope of emoluments nor the esteem of our fellowmen nor the natural love of justice nor the influence of education and culture, nor all these motives combined, can suffice to maintain peace and order in society, where shall we find an adequate in-

centive to exact of us a loyal obedience to the laws of the country? This incentive is found only in religious principles. Religion, I maintain, is the only sure and solid basis of society. Convince me of the existence of a Divine Legislator, the Supreme Source of all law, by whom "Kings reign, and lawgivers decree just things," convince me of the truth of the Apostolic declaration "there is no power but from God, and that those that are ordained of God, and that, therefore, he who resisted the power resisted the ordinance of God"; convince me that there is a Providence who seeth my thoughts as well as my actions, that there is an incorruptible Judge, who cannot be bought with bribes or blinded by deceit, who has no respect of persons, who will render to every man according to his works, who will punish transgressions and reward virtue in the life to come, convince me that I am endowed with free will and the power of observing or of violating the laws of the country; and then you place before me a monitor, who impels me to virtue without regard to earthly emoluments or human applause, and who restrains me from vice without regard to civil penalties; you set before my conscience a living witness, who pursues me in darkness and in light, and in the sanctuary of home, as well as in the arena of public life.

Religion teaches me that we are all children of the same Father, brothers and sisters of the same Redeemer, and consequently members of the same family. It teaches me the brotherhood of humanity.

Religion, therefore, is the fostering mother of charity, and charity is the guardian of civility and good breeding, and good breeding is one of the essential elements of the well being of society. Worldly politeness, devoid of religion, is cold, formal and heartless; it soon degenerates into hollow ceremony. Good breeding, inspired by religion and charity, inculcates a constant self-denial. It is sincere and unaffected, it has the ring of the genuine coin, it passes current everywhere, and it is easily distinguished from the counterfeit. A stranger who would feel oppressed by the rigid mannerism which rules in the salons of Paris would be charmed by the quiet dignity and genial warmth with which he would be received by the simple and religious people of the Tyroese mountains.

The Christian religion is all pervading. It influences the master and the servant, the rich and the poor. It admonishes the master to be kind and humane to his servant by reminding him that he also has a Master in Heaven who has no respect of persons. It admonishes the servant to be docile and obedient to his master; "not serving to the eye as it were pleasing to men, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

It reminds him that true dignity is compatible with the most menial offices and is forfeited only by the bondage of sin.

It charges the rich not to be high minded nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who "giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy." It counsels the poor to bear privations with resignation, by setting before them the life of Him who, in the words of the Apostle, "being rich, became poor for your sake that, through His poverty, you might be rich."

In a word religion is anterior to society and more enduring than governments; it is the focus of all social virtues, the basis of public morals, the most powerful instrument in the hands of the legislator; it is stronger than self-interest, more awe inspiring than civil threats, more universal than honor, more active than love of country—the surest guarantee that rulers can have of the fidelity of their subjects and that subjects can have of the justice of their rulers; it is the curb of the mighty, the defence of the weak, the consolation of the afflicted, the covenant of God with man; and in the language of Homer, it is "the golden chain that suspends the earth from the throne of the eternal."

Every philosopher and statesman

Continued on Fifth Page.