

Return to Fr. Higgins

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE MOST REVEREND BERNARD J. SHEIL,
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF CHICAGO, OVER THE AMERICAN BROADCASTING
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A most disheartening aspect of our civilization is the steadily declining regard for human dignity. Each day brings fresh evidence of this. Think of the starvation and destitution which are the daily companions of most men in the world. Think of the vast hidden areas where men are told what to do, what to say, and even what to think; where men are mere dumb instruments of totalitarian power.

Today there is a conspiracy to degrade the human being. It is not alone the communists who have entered into this conspiracy; it is every man in this world who denies to another human being what God Himself has granted to all men: personal liberty; the right to full justice; and a very sacred dignity.

We Americans swear by this dignity which is so outraged today. But, I fear, we have succumbed to the spirit of the times. We, too, have embarked on a campaign of dehumanizing man. We stand before the world as champions of human liberty and justice. Yet, we often fumble, because we evidently are not convinced that justice and liberty are really worth all the trouble they have recently caused. Our actions have sometimes almost guaranteed injustice for the very people we were most concerned about.

We need not go beyond our own borders to find this same practical indifference to human dignity. Even in this land dedicated to human equality, we still treat minority groups with, at best, thinly veiled contempt. Again, an important number of

us consider labor as just another item in the over-all cost of industry. The best proof of this inhuman attitude toward labor is the Taft-Hartley legislation.

Here is a bill which purports to be the response of Congress to the popular will. Such a defense is at best naive. The bill is so restrictive in nature that it will unquestionably force labor back to that unhappy status it occupied fifty years ago. The alleged interest in preserving the freedom of the individual worker is merely a mask covering a death-blow at all unionism. This law is an open invitation to industrial civil war; it represents a return to that economic barbarism from which we are barely emerging. To those who plead they are hereby defending free enterprise, we can only say: "You cannot preserve free enterprise, unless you also preserve free labor."

But, let us ask why such a law is offered to us at this time. The reason is that even here where human dignity is officially prized, we do not know what it is. To discover what it is, we must turn again to the age-old answer: all men are created by God, the same God, Who is Father to all. This is the meaning of human equality: that all men have come as creatures from the hand of God; and all men are the objects of His redeeming love. This is the foundation of that human brotherhood and dignity, which are the beginning of all human relations. These are old truths, but they are new, with the novelty of something that has never been really tried.

When Christ told us to love one another, He was proposing the only terms on which we could make this world worthy of the

sons of God. Because we have ignored these fundamental laws of life, we stand on the brink of disaster. If we really lived up to our ideals of Christianity and of patriotism, we could in time solve the problems now baffling us. We have a race problem, a social problem, an industrial problem; we have a Taft-Hartley bill, because we do not really love one another. And I insist that no lasting answer to our difficulties will ever be found until we start with the love of God, which leads to the love of man for man.

Let no one tell me this is an impractical principle of life. Just look at the world today: the fruit of years of subjection to the so-called "practical" men. We are united by bonds of love and brotherhood and are responsible for our treatment of each other.

In the past years, labor and management have been more and more animated by this spirit of responsibility and mutual respect. Time after time, under the terms of the Wagner Act, they have proved conclusively that they can arrive at mutually beneficial solutions. More and more they realize that they are natural partners in our economic system. Therefore, labor and management do not need restrictive legislation to regulate their affairs. Such legislation would only destroy the advances they have already freely made.

Employers and employees are increasingly cooperating for the welfare of the nation. But there remains a vast amount to be done. It behooves the rest of us to join labor and capital in the work of social and economic betterment. We have tried bickering with