

**ST. THOMAS MORE SOCIETY
LUNCHEON
3 APRIL 1990**

A FEW YEARS AGO OUR NATION CELEBRATED THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES. THROUGHOUT THE NATION THE EVENT WAS GREETED WITH A GREAT DEAL OF FANFARE AND PATRIOTIC CELEBRATION. CONSTITUTIONS HISTORICALLY LAST ABOUT TWENTY YEARS. OURS HAS PERDURED FOR OVER 200 YEARS. BUT BY NO MEANS IS IT FREE OF TENSIONS.

A NOTABLE CHARACTERISTIC IN THE 80'S HAS BEEN THE INCREASING VISIBILITY OF RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS AND THEMES IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE UNITED STATES. "RELIGION AND POLITICS", ONCE THOUGHT TO BE TOPICS NEVER JOINED IN POLITE CONVERSATION OR PUBLIC DEBATE, HAVE BECOME PART OF OUR DAILY DISCOURSE AT EVERY LEVEL OF SOCIETY.

IN ONE SENSE THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE IS NEITHER NEW NOR SURPRISING. FROM THE INAUGURAL ADDRESSES OF WASHINGTON AND LINCOLN, TO THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS DAILY DISHED UP TO US, AMERICANS AFFIRM IN DIVERSE WAYS THAT RELIGIOUS CONVICTION IS WOVEN THROUGH OUR NATIONAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE. IN OUR CONSTITUTION, AS WELL AS IN OUR COURTS AND LEGISLATURES, WE HAVE SET FORTH THE DISESTABLISHMENT PRINCIPLE TO GOVERN RELATIONS BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE. THE PURPOSE OF THIS PRINCIPLE HAS BEEN TO DISTINGUISH KEY ELEMENTS IN OUR HERITAGE, NOT TO SILENCE OR SUPPRESS

RELIGIOUS WITNESS OR INFLUENCE. INDEED, SUCH SUPPRESSION OF RELIGION WOULD VIOLATE AN EQUALLY IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF OUR HERITAGE - THE FREE EXERCISE OF RELIGION. THESE CONSTITUTIONAL PRECEPTS SERVE A USEFUL FUNCTION IN KEEPING THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY FREE TO SPEAK AND ACT WITHOUT THE NEED FOR GOVERNMENT ENDORSEMENT OR THE FEAR OF RETALIATION.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN OUR PUBLIC LIFE HAS BEEN VISIBLE AND CONSTANT. BUT THE PAST FEW YEARS HAVE BROUGHT A NEW EDGE TO THIS TOPIC. MANY REASONS ARE OFFERED TO EXPLAIN THE PREDOMINANCE OF RELIGIOUS THEMES TODAY. IN MY VIEW, A PRIMARY FEATURE IS THE CENTRALITY OF MORAL QUESTIONS FOR A BROAD RANGE OF PUBLIC POLICY CHOICES WHICH WE FACE AS A NATION. FROM MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY TO MILITARY TECHNOLOGY, FROM ECONOMIC POLICY TO FOREIGN POLICY, THE CHOICES BEFORE THE COUNTRY ARE LADEN WITH MORAL CONTENT. WHAT SHOULD WE DO AS A CIVILIZED NATION? THE MORAL DIMENSION ARISES FROM THE HUMAN SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHOICES, THE POSSIBILITY OF EITHER ENHANCING HUMAN DIGNITY OR ERODING IT BY THE POLICIES WE PURSUE AS A PEOPLE. PRECISELY BECAUSE THE MORAL CONTENT OF PUBLIC CHOICE IS SO CENTRAL TODAY, THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES ARE INEVITABLY DRAWN MORE DEEPLY INTO THE PUBLIC LIFE OF THE NATION. THESE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES POSSESS LONG AND SYSTEMATICALLY DEVELOPED MORAL TRADITIONS WHICH SERVE AS A CRUCIAL RESOURCE IN SHAPING THE MORAL VISION NEEDED FOR OUR FUTURE.

IT IS APPROPRIATE IN THIS CONTEXT TO OFFER SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE POLITICAL ORDER. CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT JESUS' COMMAND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR SHOULD EXTEND BEYOND INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIP, TO INFUSE AND TRANSFORM, TO BE THE LEAVEN FOR ALL HUMAN RELATIONS FROM THE FAMILY TO THE ENTIRE HUMAN COMMUNITY. JESUS CAME TO "BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO CAPTIVES, NEW SIGHT TO THE BLIND AND TO SET THE DOWNTRODDEN FREE." (LUKE 4:18) HE CALLED US TO FEED THE HUNGRY, CLOTHE THE NAKED, CARE FOR THE SICK AND AFFLICTED AND TO COMFORT THE VICTIMS OF INJUSTICE. (MATT. 25) HIS EXAMPLE AND WORDS REQUIRE INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF CHARITY AND CONCERN FROM EACH OF US. YET, THEY ALSO REQUIRE UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION ON A BROADER SCALE IN PURSUIT OF PEACE AND IN OPPOSITION TO POVERTY, RACISM, HUNGER AND INJUSTICE. SUCH ACTION NECESSARILY INVOLVES THE INSTITUTIONS AND STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY, THE ECONOMY AND POLITICS.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS ITSELF AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVE, AND IS REQUIRED BY THE GOSPEL AND ITS LONG TRADITION TO PROMOTE AND DEFEND HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS. SHE WOULD NOT BE TRUE TO HER EXISTENCE IF SHE DID OTHERWISE. SHE WOULD BE A "LIE" IN OUR MIDST. IN HIS ENCYCLICAL, REDEMPTOR HOMINIS, POPE JOHN PAUL II DECLARES THAT THE CHURCH "MUST BE AWARE OF THE THREATS TO (HUMANITY) AND OF

ALL THAT SEEMS TO OPPOSE THE ENDEAVOR 'TO MAKE HUMAN LIFE EVER MORE HUMAN' AND MAKE EVERY ELEMENT OF LIFE CORRESPOND TO HUMANITY'S TRUE DIGNITY---IN A WORD (THE CHURCH) MUST BE AWARE OF ALL THAT IS OPPOSED TO THAT PROCESS." THIS VIEW OF THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY AND MISSION REQUIRES IT TO RELATE POSITIVELY TO THE POLITICAL ORDER, SINCE SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND THE DENIAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS CAN OFTEN BE REMEDIED ONLY THROUGH GOVERNMENTAL ACTION. IN TODAY'S WORLD, CONCERN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT NECESSARILY REQUIRES PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS AND NOT SIT IDLY BY.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RIGHTS INCLUDES TWO COMPLEMENTARY PASTORAL ACTIONS: THE AFFIRMATION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE DENUNCIATION AND CONDEMNATION OF VIOLATIONS OF TRUE RIGHTS. IN ADDITION, IT IS THE CHURCH'S ROLE AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF SECULAR ISSUES, TO KEEP ALIVE THE VALUES OF THE GOSPEL AS A NORM FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE, AND TO POINT OUT THE DEMANDS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH FOR A JUST TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY. SUCH A MINISTRY ON THE PART OF EVERY INDIVIDUAL AS WELL AS THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHURCH INEVITABLY INVOLVES POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES AND TOUCHES UPON PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

THERE IS AN ARRAY OF ISSUES THAT MUST INVOLVE ALL OF US IF MORAL DECISIONS IN A CIVILIZED SOCIETY WILL BE MADE. ABORTION, INFANTICIDE, EUTHANASIA, ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT, CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, CIVIL RIGHTS, RACISM, THE ECONOMY, PUBLIC EDUCATION, FAMILY LIFE, FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, HOUSING, HUMAN RIGHTS, THE HOMELESS, THE EVER INCREASING GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR, THE AIDS EPIDEMIC, THE CONSTANT IMMIGRATION OF PEOPLE, REFUGEE POLICY, MASS MEDIA, THE EVOLVING DRAMA OF THE EASTERN BLOC COUNTRIES, AND MANY MORE.

CAN WE, SHOULD WE AS CATHOLICS, JUST SIMPLY SET IDLY BY? I BELIEVE NOT! I KNOW WE MUST NOT! THE CHURCH HAS A PROPER ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, FLOWING FROM ITS GOSPEL MANDATE AND ITS RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON. EACH OF YOU, INDEED ALL OF US, MUST BECOME INVOLVED AND CONTRIBUTE TO A RENEWED POLITICAL VITALITY IN OUR COUNTRY, BOTH IN TERMS OF OUR CONTRIBUTION AS CITIZENS AND HOLDING ACCOUNTABLE THOSE WHO SEEK AND HOLD PUBLIC OFFICE.

I PRAY THAT YOU AND ALL CHRISTIANS WILL PROVIDE COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP IN PROMOTING A SPIRIT OF RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT. MAY YOU FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS IN GIVING SPECIAL CONCERN FOR THE POOR AND MAY ALL YOUR ACTIONS BE JUDGED BY A DEEP LOVE OF GOD AND NEIGHBOR.

Most Reverend Charles V. Grahmann, D.D.