

Address by
His Eminence, Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle
Seventh Annual National Wanderer Forum
St. Paul, Minnesota
June 18, 1971

The theme of your forum this year is: "I came that they may have life". My task is hopefully to sound a note which will initiate a rich and harmonious unfolding of this theme.

The words of our theme are taken from the Gospel of St. John, chapter 10, verse 10. Our Lord is presenting the parable of the sheepfold. These words complete this parable and lead on to the parable of the Good Shepherd, which is recorded in the verses immediately following.

In the parable of the sheepfold, Jesus compares Himself to the gate by which the true shepherd of the flock enters, when he comes to lead the sheep out to pasture. Thieves and bandits do not come into the sheepfold by the gate, but sneak in another way, for they come to steal, to kill, and to destroy. By contrast, Our Lord says: "I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly. He then goes on to say: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep".

We might think it strange that Jesus compares Himself both to the gate of the sheepfold and to the shepherd of the flock. But this mixture of metaphors is useful, for it makes us stop and think. Jesus is the way, the only mediator between God and mankind. Only through Jesus can we enter into divine life. At the same time, Jesus knows each of us personally, as the shepherd calls his sheep by name; Jesus leads us by His teaching and example,

as the shepherd leads his flock by walking before it; and Jesus gives up His own life for us, as the shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

When Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly", He is certainly referring to the life of grace, by which we are permitted to become adopted children of God, and so given the chance to share in eternal life with Him. One might ask, then, what these words of Our Lord have to do with the anti-life movement of our age. This anti-life movement, whose various aspects are being considered at this Forum, is directed, after all, against human, bodily life. What relationship is there between supernatural life and the natural, bodily life of man?

Some of those who propound the so-called "new morality" in regard to sexual conduct and innocent life are suggesting that Christian love permits and even requires us to join in movements that are against human, bodily life. A few years ago we were told that contraception is compatible with holiness and perhaps even necessary for it; now we are being told that love of neighbor in a pluralistic society requires us to permit our neighbors to carry out their conscientious desires to kill their unwanted babies before birth.

Yet the teaching of the Catholic Church, based upon sacred scripture, clearly links human, bodily life with the salvation God promises to mankind. Death entered into the world by sin. Christ laid down His human, bodily life for us. His resurrection was a triumph over both sin and death. The Chosen People were promised both long life and abundant offspring as a reward for fulfilling God's law. We are promised resurrection of the body and life everlasting for accepting Christ with faith and love.

A living creature is more perfect than one without life, for life adds something to the materials of which the living creature is made. Thus living beings are more like God, who is all perfect, than lifeless creatures are. Even by nature, human beings live more fully than other living beings do, for we can understand and plan, we can decide and act, we can use natural things and design artificial things, thus imitating God's wisdom, His creation, His Providence, and His governance of the universe.

The words "healthy" and "holy", and also the word "Catholic," are all derived from one ancient root, the meaning of which was perfect, complete, whole. To be healthy is to be whole in human life; to be holy is to be whole in divine life; to be Catholic is to be whole in Christian life, which transforms humanity by uniting it with divinity.

As St. Thomas Aquinas says, grace does not destroy or replace human nature, but fulfills and perfects it, since the greater whole preserves and adds to the lesser one. Sin leads to death and sanctity to everlasting life; Christ came that we may have life and have it more abundantly. That is, He came that we might receive life in its greatest wholeness, a wholeness that includes, preserves, transforms, and enriches our natural life with the supernatural life of grace.

There are many indications that some of our fellow Catholics have forgotten the place within the economy of grace which the Church always has recognized for human nature, the place within Christian life reserved for

human, bodily life. One such indication was the negative reaction set off by two of the encyclicals published by our present Holy Father, Pope Paul VI.

One of the encyclicals to which I am referring is Humanae vitae, which dealt with the sanctity of the beginning of human, bodily life. Humanae vitae was attacked for its so-called "biologism."

The other unpopular encyclical was Mysterium fidei, the encyclical on the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This encyclical was rejected by those who have trouble swallowing the idea that the living Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, is placed upon our tongues and is consumed by us. A spiritual presence would be acceptable; they do not mind saying that the meaning of bread and wine is changed by consecration. But they reject the simple truth we learned as children -- the same truth taught by Christ Himself -- that we receive not bread and wine but the body and blood of Christ, whose very flesh is indeed our meat and whose very blood is indeed our drink.

The sacramental abundance of the flesh and blood of Christ, the world-wide spread of His bodily humanity -- is just too much for a culture which increasingly regards the abundance of life as an evil. Today a man who has himself sterilized is praised. A woman who avoids pregnancy for no better reason than that she wishes to retain her girlish figure is admired. A physician who performs thousands of abortions is made into a synthetic folk-hero. But -- as you may have seen on television a few weeks ago -- a couple who are blessed with the birth of quintuplets receive hate-mail and are treated as a horrible example by groups whose ideal is zero population growth.

Our culture is sick. It is polluted by a sick hatred of human bodily life. Our good flesh which was created by our good God is more and more regarded as an evil unworthy of us.

The Gnostics of the early days of Christianity hated and feared the flesh much as many in our culture now do. Some Gnostics thought that human bodily life is so evil a thing that good people should commit suicide in order to free the soul for a better life apart from its bodily prison. Some Gnostics also approved of sensual excesses, on the theory that since the evil of bodily life is inevitable, one might as well enjoy it.

Christians, while holding for the immortality of the soul, also fought very strongly for the dignity of the body and for the sanctity of human bodily life. Christians also placed a very high value upon chastity, and they did not define this virtue in solely spiritual and moral terms. The orthodox Christian position seemed paradoxical to the Gnostics.

But we see today that this paradoxical situation continues. We who hold that the soul is immortal reject abortion and suicide. Those who hold that man's life ends at death are the proponents of "termination of pregnancy." We who hold the primacy of the spiritual reject certain practices as "sins against nature." Those who reduce the spiritual to completely experiential dimensions embrace these practices as means of cultivating and expressing interpersonal love.

Two Christian dogmas are directly relevant to this paradox: the two dogmas concerning resurrection. Christ rose from the dead. He lives

a bodily life now. We too shall rise from the dead. We too shall live bodily lives forever.

We may notice in passing that the definition of the dogma most recently defined -- the dogma of the Assumption of Our Lady -- is peculiarly relevant to our age precisely because this definition once again placed the seal of infallibility upon the faith of Christians that the human body is not just a disposable package for the person, but is an essential part of the integral person.

Those who think that death is the end of us, think they understand what it is to die. We know that death happens to a person who suffers it, and that this happening is a loss to the self of one of its ways of being. But after death the self will remain, deprived of its bodily life. What exactly this means to the self we do not know. However, universal human instinct suggests that death is not a benefit to the self, but is a fearsome loss. And, as I mentioned earlier, Christian faith likewise teaches that this loss is somehow a penalty, mysteriously connected with human sinfulness, for death came into the world, St. Paul says, by Adam's sin.

Those who think death is the end of us, and who therefore think they understand it, also think that they understand life. For if death is merely the cessation of organic functions, then life is nothing more than the continuation of such functions. They say such functions are valuable only if they have some use to conscious subjects. They think the tiny embryo, who

is not yet self-conscious, and the senile old person, who has ceased to be self-conscious, might just as well be vegetables.

We who know that death is not the end of us, and who therefore know that we do not understand it, also know that we do not understand life. Our human bodily life is not merely a matter of organic functioning. It is included within the larger reality of the self.

We are not spirits using bodies. We are rational animals. As animals, we are organisms, living bodies. I am, to be specific, this body you see, this body you hear talking to you now. Of course, I am not merely this body. I am not restricted to the extent that a non-personal body is. But I am my body and I shall be so, after the Last Judgment, forever.

We should not think of our souls as if they were hidden away within our bodies, as parts within the whole. Rather, we should think of our bodies as within our souls, but in a mysterious way. That is why our souls can survive the dissolution of our bodies, but also why death is a loss to the self, a loss to be made good by the resurrection of the body.

I have emphasized these points because they are basic to understanding our theme: "I came that they may have life." Of course, as we said earlier, the life of which Christ spoke is not merely human bodily life. The life of which He spoke is primarily divine life. But it is divine-life-become-human -- and thus bodily -- it is life like unto that of Jesus Himself, the Word made flesh, who is the life, as well as the way and the truth.

God's gift to us of His own divine-life-become-human should not be imagined as something contained within our souls. No, divine life takes

our souls within itself, as our souls take our bodies within themselves. Divine life is bigger than we are, as we are bigger than our bodies. In God, St. Paul says, we live and move and have our being.

Thus human, bodily life shares in divinity. The flesh is sacred. It will be glorious. One day Our Lord will embrace each of us as brother or sister; our Blessed Mother will clasp each of us to her motherly breast and kiss us sweetly as her very dear child.

Another aspect of the theme of our Forum is related to a saying of one of the Greek Sophists, a saying I never forgot from the time I studied philosophy in the seminary -- "Man is the measure of all things." The saying seems to mean that things are in reality as man thinks them to be and wishes them to be. That probably was the intended meaning, for -- if I am not mistaken -- the same Greek Sophist also doubted the existence of God. It seems reasonable enough to suppose that if there were no God, then the meaning and value of things could come only from the mind of man.

Yet the saying that man is the measure of all things could take on a quite different and true meaning if it were put in the context of our faith.

God gives meaning and value to everything -- He creates all things and sees them to be good. But He creates other bodily creatures for man, and allows man to name them. Thus everything in our world other than man has a lesser value, and its precise value is measured by God according to its relation to man. Man thus is a standard or measure applied to God by other things, and the material world is created to specifications that are

human, not as man-made but as divinely planned for man's good. We might notice in passing that this understanding of the relationship between man and his natural home could be a point of departure for a genuinely Christian consideration of ecological problems so much of concern today.

If all else in nature is valued for its relation to human persons, then human persons themselves cannot be considered as if they had a definite measurable value. The one thing that cannot be measured is the measure by which all else is measured.

Human persons, then, do not have a strictly measurable value. Every single human person is priceless. This pricelessness is the basic meaning of the word "dignity" when it is applied to the human person. Dignity is worth beyond price, value beyond measure. This dignity belongs to man by nature. It is man's natural share in God's infinity, inasmuch as man is naturally a creature created in God's image.

We say that all human persons should be treated as equals. If we are governed by measurable facts, this ideal is obviously not only false but even absurd. However, our aspiration for human equality does not depend upon measurable facts. It depends upon an appreciation of human dignity. We are all equal because we are all priceless. We are all equal because we are all somehow infinite, and so we are all equally beyond measurable values.

Unfortunately, many today speak of the dignity of the person but ignore what the word "dignity" means. Also, they frequently ignore or deny that we are bodies, that our personhood includes within itself our bodily life.

But, as we have just been reflecting, the dignity of a person cannot be reduced to a quality of experience in a self-conscious subject. Man's dignity is his natural share in infinity. Human bodily life is included within the person. Therefore, human bodily life shares in the person's dignity. Bodily life is priceless because we are living bodies and we are somehow infinite.

Add to the dignity that belongs to man by nature the dignity that comes to us by God's adoption of us as sons, who may share in His life and whom He invites to share with His Son, Our Lord, in divine life forever.

An infinity of an infinitely higher order has been added by divine grace to man's natural dignity. And God has destined our human bodies to share in His eternal glory. How suitable are the words of Christ: "I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly."

By these words, as we recalled before, Christ contrasted Himself to the thieves who come to the sheepfold to steal, to kill, and to destroy. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is pro-life. The bandits or thieves are anti-life -- they steal faith, they kill hope, and they destroy love. As aspects of divine life, faith and hope and love are in themselves immune from attack. But as divine life in us is subject to the fragility of our human, bodily life, faith and hope and love can be attacked, and they are being attacked today.

The thieves steal faith, for instance, by denying the Church's infallibility, or at least in making an inquiry into it that amounts to a denial. Such a denial eventually makes faith impossible, not only because infallibility

is a guarantee without which a reasonable person cannot believe, but also because one who claims that dogmatic expressions of faith must be subjected to reconsideration implicitly believes that he knows what these expressions mean well enough to criticize the formulae of any one age as inadequate to a new and different age. Anyone who knew so much would be unable to believe, for there would remain for him no mystery beyond his comprehension.

Those who reject infallibility probably would deny that they are rejecting mystery altogether. After all, even the greatest of minds must hesitate to make the claim that it understands God as well as God understands Himself. Those who reject infallibility would say that they believe the mysteries of faith, but they cannot be bound to the unchanging validity of historically conditioned dogmatic formulae expressing these mysteries. Ultimately, they would tell us, they believe in Christ, but they cannot permit their faith in Him to be bound by a certain set of propositions.

Here, once again, is an example of the Gnostic fear of our bodily condition and dislike of the flesh. For us bodily creatures, a truth that we do not understand can be indicated definitely only if it is marked out by a determinate physical reality, by an unchangeable set of words, which must be retained in any legitimate development of doctrine. Moreover, Christ is not only true God, but also the Incarnate Word of God. He revealed to us the inner secrets of divine life not by some sort of purely spiritual communication, but by very human words and deeds -- that is, by definite bits of bodily behavior,

which, having been done, can never be undone. Early Christians wrote the Gospels to record these precious words and deeds, for they rightly saw in them an irreplaceable privileged access to divine truth. Those who despise the flesh cannot accept the literal truth of Jesus' assertion: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

That is why today's Gnostics rejected the mystery of faith as they attacked Mysterium fidei. No wonder they proceeded to reject the pricelessness of new human life and to attack Humanae vitae. Now they are reaching the heart of the matter as they begin to publish their "inquiries" into infallibility.

The thieves also kill hope by denying the reality of serious sin and by calling into question the very possibility of eternal damnation. No one can hope if there is nothing awful to fear. If we are already saved so that we cannot be lost, why concern ourselves with irrelevant topics such as death, judgment, heaven, and hell?

The denial in our day of the reality of serious sin has many aspects. But two of them deserve attention here.

One is that, like the Gnostics of old, many in our time have proceeded from one extreme in which the body was viewed as evil to the opposite extreme of libertinism, which also fails to respect the body as integral to the self, and as a temple of the Holy Ghost.

Another aspect of the current denial of serious sin arises from the fact that our bodily life is a life of moments, one after another. Sins which occur in a moment, or in a brief period of time, especially sins of weakness,

seem to many people not to be of very great importance. Yet we live our lives in time, and in momentary choices we can accept God's grace and merit eternal life or we can refuse God's grace and deserve eternal death.

The killing of hope leads to an odd ambivalence. On the one hand, we are told that as men who have come of age we are beyond the need for such a God-appointed teacher as Pope Paul VI. Presumably we need only consult our own infallible consciences to know what is right and to do it. On the other hand, we are told that heroism cannot be expected of the average person. And so we can forget ideals Christians have always hitherto striven for. In other words, the thieves are telling us both that we are so good we do not need God's grace and also that God will overlook our sins because we are so bad we cannot help but commit them. This is combined presumption and despair, pretending to be Christian hope.

The thieves also are destroying charity. Charity is the inner principle that unifies and vivifies the Church, the visible body of Christ on earth. The thieves destroy the unity of the Church by schismatic attacks upon her law and her order, by heretical attacks upon her doctrine, including even her infallibly defined doctrine, and by arbitrary misappropriation of her liturgy, which is constantly adapted to the purpose of providing gratifying experiences for groups of enthusiasts. They forget that the liturgy belongs to the whole Christian family. That is the reason why the liturgy may, and even must, be renewed from time to time by proper authority, but should never be abused

by arbitrary adaptations lacking proper authorization. The liturgy also exists not so much to provide religious experience as to assimilate our human, bodily lives into the life and death and resurrection of Christ.

The thieves also can be expected to continue their attack upon the Holy Eucharist, which is Christ's continuing bodily presence in this world. The Blessed Sacrament is the pro-life force in the world, because Jesus is life -- divine life -- and because His human bodily life permits us to share in His divine life, so that our human bodily lives are assumed within His divinity,

Moreover, while true Christians can always be counted upon to reject everything contrary to integral and authentic human dignity, the thieves may be expected to advocate contraception, to approve abortion, to be "open-minded" about euthanasia, to be complacent about pornography and other forms of prostitution -- in all of which the human body is treated as if it were a mere object or appliance or utensil.

Basically, Christians have always understood sexuality correctly. Only living beings can be sexual; some organisms are sexual while others are not. An organism that is not sexual reproduces from each individual by itself. A sexual organism can reproduce only by first uniting with another individual, the same in kind but opposite in sex.

Thus the meaning of human sexuality is that a man and a woman can start a new person only by first becoming one flesh. The gift of life is based upon the gift of love.

Those who label a Christian approach to sexuality as "biologism" show something about themselves. The difficulty is really in the minds of those who do not see that our bodies are really included within our personal selves.

Of course, there is more to human sexuality than bodily love and bodily reproduction, because the human persons of the man, of the woman, and of the child -- all of them are more than mere bodies. The unity of man and wife should be complete personal unity, a unity of the whole of their lives, in order to give the gift of complete human life, which is not bodily life alone. Thus parenthood is a creative promise that demands faithfulness, of the parents to the child, and, therefore, of the parents to one another.

And so the thieves, who go about attacking the indissolubility of marriage and telling children that the Church has always been wrong in believing that the Bible means what it says about fornication, at the same time promote a false sort of sex education. I do not mean to imply that truly Christian education in sexuality and chastity is impossible or unnecessary. The sort of sex education I am criticizing is that based upon the assumption that the body is an object, a mechanism with mechanical needs and reactions, and that one merely needs to learn how to satisfy the body's needs and to avoid the consequences of its reactions.

Such sex miseducation takes masturbation for granted as normal, takes fornication for granted as loving, and takes contraception and even

abortion for granted as necessary. The dignity of the human body is ignored. The role assigned to intelligence is to control the results of sexual activities by techniques, rather than to integrate bodily sexuality into the wholeness of the person by chastity.

Our Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, in a recent instruction said:

"The hour is now striking on the clock of history which demands great courage from all the Church's children, and in a very special way the courage of truth. Let your yes be yes, and your no, no -- words Christ enjoined on his disciples of all ages."

The thieves who come to steal and kill and destroy may appear at times to be succeeding. As we watch the successes of the pro-abortion movement, as we watch the spread of sexual depravity, as we watch the intensification of violence in our society, as we watch reports of war atrocities -- as we note so many ominous signs of the times, even we who have faith are tempted to lose heart. If Christ is present in the world, bodily present, and if He did indeed come that we might have life, and have it more abundantly, how can we explain the power and the attraction of death, which is evident throughout our culture, a culture that is trying to make us despise human bodily life, and to hate and to fear its proliferation?

The answer, of course, is simple. As our faith tells us, things are not as they seem. The Holy Eucharist seems a little bread, a few swallows

of wine. But it is not; it is the living Christ. The Church seems a crumbling institution, racked by dissent within and tormented by powerful enemies without. But it is not what it seems; it is the Kingdom of God, already begun and destined to last forever.

The dignity of man is under assault from every side; by any human expectation the destruction of human dignity is assured. But here too things are not as they seem. For nothing can take away the dignity man enjoys by nature, and only man himself can forgo by sin the dignity he enjoys by grace. We are created in the image of God, a little less than the angels, but crowned with glory and honor, and set over the works of God's hands. We are destined for glory; we shall not be dead forever.

Jesus Christ came that we might have life. We have it and will have it more abundantly. Though evil seems about to triumph over us, we are certain it cannot do so. For though we are wanderers -- pilgrims and wayfarers -- in a darkened world during a time of confusion, our faith promises a victory that overcomes the world, our hope is in the Light who cannot be overcome, and our love has already tasted joy.