

# Newman Conference Report : Liberation of Self and Society

The Christian Conference Centre at Tatamagouche, N.S. was the scene of a meeting of over 130 Catholic University students August 27-31 last. Students from all over Canada came to work, play, pray together and to discuss mutual concerns. The theme of the Newman Conference this year was "Liberation". The following is the statement prepared by the students at the conclusion of the National Conference.

## Preamble

As we begin to face the complex reality of the world we experience fear, anger, guilt, powerlessness and alienation. Even in the midst of this we can still find a place to begin. We find hope in this beginning.

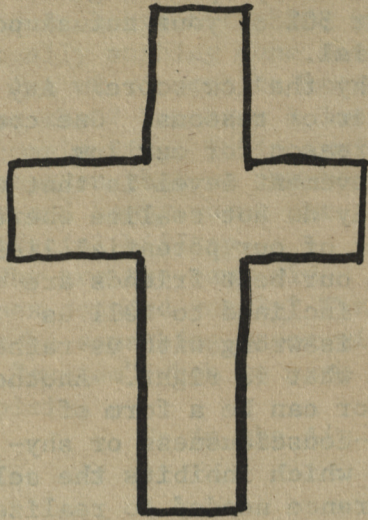
## Personal Liberation

During these days many of us have experienced isolation, and for this we can be grateful because it is deeply felt by our generation. However, none of us are so isolated that there are no connections between ourselves, our world and our God. Personal liberation surely lies in rediscovering and reestablishing the connections and relationships.

## Theology

We affirm the fact that faith is basic to our Christian actions for liberation. Faith implies conscious action which continually keeps us in touch with the reality of our world, a world riddled by infjustice and sinfulness. Liberation calls us to participate with Christ as Sons of the Living God. Every liberation, every act which frees man from personal and structural oppression is an act which brings the Kingdom of God closer to fulfilment. Liberation implies that we are subjects and creators. Christ the Liberator moves us beyond our personal limitations and calls us to risk leaving behind the comforts of now as we unite ourselves with our brothers and sisters to create a new man and a new world free from infjustice and oppression.

We, as Christians looking for a way to liberate ourselves and others, should recognise the Church as a potential liberating force. This potential of Church as liberator is often ignored.



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We are the Church and are therefore responsible for challenging and helping to make the institution of the Church a more liberating force.

## Socio-political Aspect

As Christians, we realize that there are social and political structures which manipulate and oppress ourselves and others. We find ourselves confused by our inability to understand the complexities of factual data about these structures that make us feel so powerless. We feel called upon by our Christian commitment to inform ourselves and others on social-political issues. We particularly feel called upon to develop the capacity to recognize, identify and analyze the dynamics of those structures. We must search for new models based on contemporary principles of social justice and we need to commit ourselves to change. In order to accomplish this we affirm the

necessity of support communities to achieve the goal.

## The University

Our universities are reflections of the economic system of which they are a part. The educational system, because it is a reflection of the values of capitalism (and specifically of competition), does not help us to become critical of our society, but tries to prepare us to be uncritical members of the status quo. In this way, students are oppressed.

We are oppressors too, for as university people we are in a separate reality, often uncaring about the broader reality of our university, our church, our community and our world. We are isolated from the most pressing problems of our society, not attempting, and often unable, to become critically aware.

We have a great deal to give. As Christian people we see a responsibility to learn how to analyze our situation within the univer-

sity. We become aware of the problems of the broader community by engaging in action. This we think is where hope lies.

## Editor's Comment:

Ed's Comment: It is indeed refreshing to see such a statement from a church, which, too often in centuries past, has been complacent in the face of oppression and alienation. In fact, it has been an agent of these forces, itself. To profess that the methods used in the inquisition and the conversion of the Indians is to the glory of a God representing love & justice is itself a heresy.

But perhaps none of an affront to the God they profess to believe in are the beautiful cathedrals built by, and at the expense of, people living in grand poverty, and the indulgence of popes in power politics, indeed, the existence of men with absolute (divine?) powers in a church which claims to believe in the Community of Man.

Fortunately, for the first time since the days of the Roman Empire, The R.Catholic church is beginning to understand what is truly meant by the term "Christian". It does not simply mean to claim a belief in Christ as the Saviour of Humanity, but to act as an agent of salvation (with more than words) in opposition to oppression and alienation throughout the world.

The priests of South America in particular are becoming true representatives of Christ. They work with the people to eradicate the oppression of American (and Canadian) corporation, and to end repressive dictatorships. They are sharing their wider book-learning and greater knowledge with the people. They are working with and through the starving masses, sharing their salvation, their tears and occasional laughs, yes, even their prison terms.

The church is still, in too many ways, complacent, status quo, overbearing, and underinvolved (our own background deserves much examination).

It is to be hoped that these tendencies will become the exception rather than the rule. Too often in the past the church has reacted to opportunities to become a true agent of Christ by shrinking from them into reactionary paths, by becoming an agent of the status quo and thus of oppression.