THIS GATHERING OF LEADERS interested in the promotion of those truths which are identified with a better way of life deserves the highest commendation. This particular meeting in Limburg calls to mind two outstanding contributions which have recently been made by Germans in the field of human rights—one national in scope and the other international.

This old city is today host to an intergroup study and discussion of basic values which man has come to recognize as human rights. Last February a small group of German scholars and leaders, meeting in Wiesbaden, agreed on a series of conferences to be held throughout Hesse on the "Impact of Moral Values in the Field of Human Rights." This modest beginning has led to a series of such meetings, of which this session is the fourteenth. You are to be congratulated on the leadership and the interest you are showing in this valuable contribution to human understanding.

A second significant emphasis is also associated with Limburg. Here, six months ago, in this political and ecclesiastical center, was held an international assembly of representatives from many European countries, including Germany, to evaluate and resolve issues related to human rights. Of fundamental importance were the resolutions adopted supporting the stability and the protection of family life. So, Germans, in a local way and with the peoples of other nations, are concerning themselves with those rights which are essential to the welfare of society.

LOOKING OVER YOUR PROGRAM and discussing it with some of the conference members warrant my making a few observations on the significance of the rights of man as viewed in the history of Europe. May I recall the names of but two of the many figures well known to every student of human rights: the 13th century Thomas Aquinas and Robert Bellarmine of the 16th century. The works of these distinguished critics reveal principles basic to democratic thinking. Aquinas is renowned for his many sage pronouncements, not the least of which was that "Nature made all men equal in liberty, though not in their natural perfections."

Again, Aquinas, referring to the rights of people, declared that "...the making of a law belongs to the whole people...and a government established without the consent of the people is unjust and can be deposed by them." Bellarmine emphasized that "All men are equal, not in wisdom or grace, but in the essence and nature of mankind," and further he warned, "Let government remember that it presides over men who are of the same nature as those who govern."

These fundamental principles, and many equally profound and challenging, were in the minds of our ancestors, who preceded the Western culture of today in Europe and elsewhere in the world. It is well to recall the contributions of history, but it is of greater consequence to interpret them and to translate them into the practical responsibilities of our own day. Let us use this wisdom of the past for the benefit of our fellow men, especially in these parlous present times when the rights and dignity of man are being so malevolently challenged in all too many parts of the world.

THIS BRINGS ME to another major consideration, namely, the emphasis on responsibility along with the recognition of a right. In our examination of the impact of rights in our lives, we must be ever aware of the obligation to protect and to support them, even, if necessary, at great personal sacrifice and in the subordination of other less important values.

Such rights as respect for the dignity of the individual man, his right to freedom of thought, speech and religion, the stability of family life and economic freedom, with all their manifold implications, the right of democratic self-governance and the right to share human rights with other peoples; all these, and countless others, are not to be looked upon as the exclusive possessions of any one man or group of men. Moreover, there must be the spirit and the courage to defend and to extend these rights so that our way of life, the Western way of life, will be ensured.

In closing these all too brief remarks on so far-reaching and vitally important a subject, may I reiterate that it is well to remember that human rights do not owe their origin to any government or to any institution or to any man. They are endowed in man by God and they are manifested in the external natural law. But they do owe their continued existence and development to the alert and never faltering protection afforded to them by man, by government and by institutions. That attitude and that doctrine spell success and happiness for all peoples, even as default in such attitude spells failure and doom for all that we hold dear.

To you, the members of this conference, may I venture the hope that your consideration of human rights may be the basis of a vigorous and enlightened zeal for the continuous application of these values in your daily lives. +END