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THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH TO THE PRESERVATION OF
FREEDOM

(Draft of Speech Prepared at the Request of the

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National Defense

September 6, 1950



Though we have but recently emerged from the most extensive war in history, we are not at peace, but stand on the brink of another and greater world conflict. In imagination we vaguely see the maelstrom swirling by us. We are not in the midst of it, but our feet are in the waters. It is not a dynastic struggle like the old wars or a quarrel between two powers over some conflict of interest. It is not primarily a political strife. It is not, as yet, a contest of military force. It is a great spiritual struggle for the minds of men.

We know dimly what is at stake - all the things we have treasured as civilisation. Here is our Free world, and over against it, hostile and minatory, is the world of totalitarian communism. In between are vast masses of humanity, hundreds and hundreds of millions of people, in Europe and Asia and even here in the Americas, who will some day decide where they belong.

Our world is a world of freedom under law; the Soviet world is a world of despotism in which the human being as such has no reason for existence except to serve the will of the State as embodied in a little oligarchy of self-chosen leaders. One world acknowledges nothing higher than economic determinism; the other world - our world - believes in God. Mankind can not permanently remain in this dual existence, any more than the United States could stand half-slave and half free. One or the other kind of life will prevail on this planet.



I have been asked to discuss with you today the contribution of the Christian Church to the preservation of freedom. That is a very large and difficult subject, because it has so many angles and ramifications. Yet it is an appropriate subject, for it is what the Church stands for, and even the Church itself as an institution, which is at the vortex of the conflict. Totalitarianism as developed by Hitler and the Nazis, was able to take over, remodel or destroy everything but the Church. The leaders of capital succumbed, the labor unions succumbed, the political parties succumbed, the universities succumbed, but the Church - Protestant and Catholic - did not succumb, to Hitler. The new red fascism of communism has swept aside everything else in the areas which it rules, but it has not succeeded in destroying religion, even in Russia. Yet, the Church is under attack in every Communist satellite country - Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany. They are trying to make the people cease believing in God. They are imprisoning and executing clergymen. They are preventing the religious instruction of youth. Where the institutions of the Church are too strong to be destroyed outright, they are restricted and perverted and repressed. Everything connected with religion is hateful to communism. And with good reason. Until the spiritual forces that lead men to believe in God and in eternal laws of righteousness, and in the inherent worth of each human soul, until these forces, I say, are destroyed, no victory for communism can be final, and the leaders of communism are well aware of that fact. That they will finally succeed in this destruction I do not believe. It is more likely that the negative attitude of the Soviet system toward religion, will be the rock on which it splits. But in the meantime there is this desperate struggle going on, and we must ask ourselves, what is to be

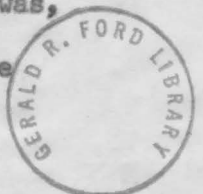


our part in it as loyal adherents of the Christian Church.

Religion and Vitality

I want to begin by pointing out to you a fact of human history that is too little realized. That fact is the close connection between religion and vitality. The law of history seems to be that the vitality which any large group of people, such as a nation, reveals, is more or less commensurate with the religiousness of that group. There are two conditions. The religion of the group must be intensely held; second it must be of a high grade or quality. If any people is very religious, and their religion is of a high quality (at least relatively to their neighbors) then you may expect that people to show a high level of achievement along whatever lines may be appropriate to their genius and environment. The vitality will be there, and it will blossom in many possible forms - it may be physical endurance and prowess, or military or artistic or literary or political achievement or in the deep thinking of philosophy; or in exploration or commerce. But the vitality, which may manifest itself in any of so many modes of achievement, connects itself with a vigorous religious consciousness of a high order.

It is often said that modern civilization is based on the achievements of three ancient peoples - the Hebrews, from whom derive our religious and moral concepts, the Greeks to whom we are indebted for their philosophy, their mathematics their aesthetics and their immortal literature, and the Romans from whom have come, in direct descent, our law and political organization and military science. Now every one of these peoples was, at the time of its flowering, an intensely religious people, and the



religion of the Greeks and Romans, while pagan by our standards, was of a very high order compared with that of other peoples. The Hebrews, of course are the most conspicuous representatives of this law of human life. Starting as a Bedouin people undistinguishable from their Semitic neighbors except for certain religious concepts which began to dominate their life, they have endured through some three thousand years. Their kinsmen have been lost in the sands of history as have their various contemporaries. But this people has maintained its group and cultural and other identity through more difficulties and vicissitudes than we can well imagine, and done so without the support of a common home territory, without a political organization, and without a common language. But they have retained their religious earnestness, and the level of their religion has been far superior to that of most of the world. The vitality of this group has been amazing. It has been demonstrated not only in their physical survival (which is amazing), but in their emotional energy, in their diversified intellectual achievements and in all the manifold contributions which they have made and are making to the life of the world, and especially that of every nation, where like our own, they choose to settle.

It would be very interesting to follow this thesis of the connection between religion and vitality through history, to note for example, that when at any time a people has taken a jump forward in its religious life, there has been immediately an efflorescence of vital achievement. Take Scotland, for example. It was a poor country, small and with a barren soil and few inhabitants. It was very backward, its chief function apparently being to furnish soldiers of fortune/^{to the French Kings} when indeed



it was not purely barbarian. Then came John Knox and his compeers. Religious life in Scotland suddenly rose to a new level both of quality and intensity. Then Scotland began to furnish scholars and statesmen and soldiers and captains of industry and inventors and preachers and writers and bankers and poets and all kinds of leaders to the English-speaking world, and has been doing it ever since. The vitality of the Scottish people is not to be attributed to the scenery of the country, or to the oatmeal the people eat; it is due to the Kirk and all that the Kirk stands for in the hearts of Scotchmen.

We have abundant evidence of this connection between religion and vitality in the history of the American people. Our first settlers were many of them religious migrants, who came here because of the depth of their religious consciousness. Not only Puritans in New England and Quakers in Pennsylvania, but Catholics in Maryland and Huguenots in South Carolina. One way and another they were people of intense religious convictions and their religion was of a high order of quality. No wonder they laid the foundations of an amazing civilization after they had cleared the wilderness and quelled the savages, and branched out into every kind of undertaking possible to adventurous colonials.

Everywhere they built churches along with their homes. Here in Virginia we have, down by Hampton Roads, the recently uncovered foundation stones of the church built in 1609 or 1610, the first English speaking church on this continent. And as the pioneers went west the church went with them in the person of the itinerant preacher, who soon had a log cabin to preach in.



The se things are ingrained in our people . Here is the
lifespring of the vitality which hitherto we have had in this country.
Ill betide us if in our pride of achievement we ignore and neglect it,
forgetting, as the Bible puts it, "the pit whence ye were digged."

It seems to some observers, nevertheless that this is
exactly what we are in danger of doing. An American church leader
had this to say recently, and his address was quoted impressively in a
metropolitan paper:

The materialism of our generation has prepared for the
destruction of our most powerful motive force. The best
remaining forces in America today are those provided by the
faith of our fathers.

The founding fathers and their offspring were, as a
people, utterly convinced that they came to these shores
because God led them here for purposes of spiritual import.
They were far from being saints; they had their weaknesses
and their faults and their bitter prejudices, but with all
their mistakes they had the one quality that is most
necessary to the upbuilding and preservation of a nation.

This was a belief that they were a part of God's plan.
They were people who believed in the inspiration of the Bible and
took care to read it and search it daily for the answers to their
problems. They prayed with the utter simplicity of faith and
knew that God would see them through their seemingly unsur-
mountable difficulties. He did.

Churches were filled. Grace was said at every meal.
Family prayer was regular routine and men gave proportionately
far more freely of their substance for work of missions throughout
the world.

Then came prosperity; faith in self was substituted for
trust in God, and worship of the intellectual Golden Calf
was set up, whereby man trusted in his own mind. Education,
not God, was to save the world ...



Untold damage has been done to the American Christian character, and even though our fabulously rich universities turn out doctors of philosophy annually by the mile, we are at present in a state of bewilderment as we stand on the brink of the most barbaric adventure in race suicide in history.

The momentum we have been coasting on, given us by our forefathers through their faith, has almost run out and the new age of salvation by brains has become the greatest hoax of our time."

It is for us to search our minds and our own lives and the society in which we live, to find out whether the charge of Bishop Pardue, whom I have just been quoting, can be sustained or dismissed. Is it true that we are coasting on the strength of the piety of our forebears and that the momentum is running out? There is such a thing as living on inherited capital, and letting that dwindle away without doing anything to rebuild it. Can it be that that is what we are doing today? If so, the outlook for us in the struggle with communism for a free world, is not promising. For communism itself has many of the aspects of a religion, not a very high-grade one, to be sure, but one capable of touching its adherents with an extreme fanaticism, leading to enthusiasm for sacrifice and martyrdom. An American communist leader told an American religious leader that his group were going to win out against the Church, because its members worked harder for the cause and gave a larger proportion of their income to it than the church members did to their cause.

However, the point I am making here is that genuine religion is the spring of personal and group vitality. Why should it not be so? Religion is man in contact with God, and God is the Lord and Giver of Life.

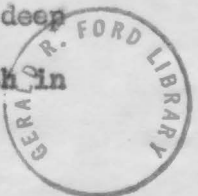


If in our struggle with communism for the minds of men, we depend wholly on politics, economics, science and warfare, and ignore the springs of life, we need not expect any permanent good to come out of our efforts. If on the other hand we employ these things as tools of the Spirit, we shall win and the world will be set forward in paths of brotherhood and peace and freedom.

Religion and Freedom

The first point I am making today, then, is that the vitality which alone can make the free way of life vigorous and effective, is only to be found where there is an intensity of religious life and where the concepts around which that intensity gathers are themselves of a high order, morally and intellectually.

The second great fact that I wish to emphasize is that it is in the areas of the world which are influenced by the distinctly Christian tradition, that freedom finds its congenial climate. There is, in other words, a very close connection between the freedom which we Americans enjoy, and which we are now called upon to defend, and the religious background of our history. It is not an accident that we love freedom and insist on the freedom of the individual. It is a product of our history, and that history is to no small degree religious history. As President Truman put it, standing by the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington last Armistice day, "We have created here a government dedicated to the dignity and the freedom of man. It is a Government whose creed is derived from the Word of God, and its roots are deep in our spiritual foundations. Our democracy is an expression of faith in



the spirit of man, and it is a declaration of faith in man as created by God. On these spiritual foundations we have established a creed of self-government, more precious to us than life itself."

Sometimes we talk and think of freedom as if it were merely a political device, without grasping the fact that fundamentally it is something spiritual and religious. All the great ethnic religions - Judaism, Mohammedanism and Christianity - and to some extent others, according to their points of view, emphasize the fact that each man is a spiritual being, that he is of importance and worth as an individual soul. Communism denies this, and right here the issues join. To communism a man is of no importance in himself; he is a creature of materialistic economic determinism. He has no rights, and his life has no meaning, except as part of the State. Nor are there any criteria of right and wrong: right is simply what authority determines to be of value to the state; wrong is simply what the same authority decides is against the interests of the state. Lies, slavery, imprisonment, murder, anything is right that serves the state.

All this, both our ideas of right and wrong and our idea of the worth and rights and dignity of each individual derive from a growing apprehension of the Christian outlook on life and the world, which itself derives from the outlook of Moses and the prophets and psalmists of Judaism. Although through the Christian centuries the truth has often been obscured, growingly there has been realized the human implications of the Gospel of Christ. Every man, says that Gospel, is of infinite worth, of such worth that Christ died for him.



King, lord or legislature are limited in what they can do to the individual because the individual is a creation of God and redeemed by Christ himself at infinite cost. That is why we have the writ of habeas corpus, while in communist countries the police can come to your door in the middle of the night and take you away to disappear, unheard of for ever afterwards, because of some real or alleged deviation from the supposed interests of the state.

Our modern emphasis on freedom derives from such utterances as Luther's saying, in his work On the Liberty of the Christian Man:

Every man, because of his faith, is a free lord of all things, subject to none; every man because of his love, is in bondage, a servant of all;

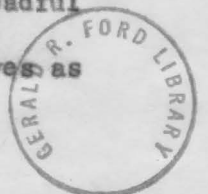
or John Milton's

Give me liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all other liberties;

or Thomas Jefferson's

All men are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.

It took our spiritual forbears a thousand years to win through to these conceptions. Our freedom has been dearly bought, at the price of blood sweat and tears, through battles and wars and spiritual agonies almost as bitter. We ourselves got it cheaply - we inherited it. The sacrifices were made by those who lived and struggled before us. Yet I am proud to say that when tests have come - twice in our generation - we too have not as a people shrunk from harsh struggles and the last complete measures of devotion, in order to preserve this heritage. And I am proud that even now, in this difficult period, our warfare in Korea - dreadful as it is - is for the preservation of freedom, not only for ourselves as



we see the threat approaching, but for all the little countries of the world.

Religion and Institutions of Freedom

It has not always been an easy thing even for peoples who have a thirst for freedom and cherish the freedom that they have, to enshrine this treasure in practical political institutions. It is easy to drift over into discord and anarchy while each man or group asserts his rights over against those of other persons and other groups. We have before us in the world today in Indonesia and other parts of the world, the pathetic spectacle of peoples who have attained some measure of freedom and now do not know how to use it in ways of order and peace and growth. Under such conditions there is only too grave a possibility that they may lose the freedom they have, because their political immaturity is such that they can not enshrine their freedom in stable institutions, and may yet become a prey to communism or some other form of tyranny.

To a very considerable degree we of this country and the peoples of other democratic countries, have solved these difficulties. Our freedom is secured by a Constitution and a Bill of Rights, by a generally accepted tradition of majority rule, by a two-party system, by a habit of voluntary cooperation in emergencies for public needs, by our acceptance of authority without tyranny, by the immense number of honest public-spirited citizens who at the ballot-box and elsewhere are willing to put national welfare over that of party, class, commercial group, race group, or religious faction, by our wide system of public education, by our unfettered press and a great corps of journalists



whose function it is to give the public the facts without undue fear or favor, and by many other favorable factors of our common life.

Now I call you to notice that these institutions in the pattern of successful democracy are closely connected with the influence of the Christian Church in its many forms. I do not want to overstate this point, but it is true that through religion and the church there have come into our American way of life not only vitality, and our underlying sense of the dignity of the individual, but also many of the actual patterns of democracy by which these things have been translated into political facts.

It was a group of religious migrants, the Pilgrim Fathers, who in their cabin on the Mayflower ratified a pact which expressed the momentous determination that when they should reach the new land, theirs should be "a government of laws and not of men", which is the quintessence of democracy; and then, out of their local church government, which was established on a majority-rule basis, they evolved the idea that these governing laws should be those for which the people themselves voted. They established along with the church-meeting, the town-meeting, which is the archetype of democracy and set a pattern which went from New England throughout the country. Down in Virginia, Thomas Jafferson is said to have reached some of his conclusions about the dependability of the people to govern themselves by observing the democratic self-government of some local Baptist Churches. The Church life of the people not only gave ideas and inspiration but actual practice and education in self-government. As one historian says:



The ideal of self-government was brought to America by the pilgrims; the separation of Church and State was derived from the Baptists; the right of free speech was the development of the right of conscience, established by Roger Williams and William Penn; the equality spoken of in the Declaration of Independence was an outgrowth of the equality practiced by the Quakers. Democracy was envisaged in religious terms long before it assumed a political terminology.

It is a very striking thing to observe the stability of our democratic institutions. We sometimes are spoken of as a "young" country and sometimes speak of ourselves so, but the fact is that, next to Great Britain, we have the oldest government on earth. We have weathered many storms; we are meeting more and may expect to do so in the future, for tranquility is not an attribute of human life. Moreover we are threatened in our freedoms, not only by the outside world of communism, but by some internal factors as well. I believe however in the future of America and I believe that it will be greater than the past. But for the future as for the past we must recognize the importance to us of the Christian Church and all that for which it stands.

Religion and Our International Policy

The fact is that religious influences have very thoroughly permeated American life, and are more or less completely responsible for a great many things that we do not ordinarily think of as connected with religion at all. We have what we call "our way of life"; we take certain attitudes because we think they are "right"; we have a more or less unconscious standard of "decent" or "civilized" behavior for men and nations. We take all this for granted so completely, even people who are personally irreligious, that we hardly dream that our attitudes



are simply an echo of the teachings of the Christian Church. They are not simple, normal human reactions: they are highly conditioned responses, as the psychologist would say, and in fact they add up to something new and hopeful in the history of the world.

Think how calmly the American people have taken the often—expressed ideal of our foreign policy: that we want simply peace, with mutual good-will and cooperation among all nations. Always before in human history any nation with the colossal power which the United States had at the end of the war, would have staked out the gains which it wished to make and now had the power to take. We did not ask for a foot of territory, but gave up our suzerainty over the Philippines. We promptly proceeded to tax ourselves to keep the Germans and the Japanese, who had attacked us, from starving. We asked no trade concessions from any part of the world, and no unique advantages for ourselves that we were not willing others should have. (Parenthetically, I believe that is what has buffaloes the Russians; they assumed that Russia, the United States and Great Britain, the three powerful groups to emerge among the victors, would calmly divide up control of the desirable parts of the world. To them it was the only natural thing to happen. The United Nations organization was just to be a kind of gesture to the small nations. The Russians have been so astounded at our policy, and at our willingness to take the United Nations seriously and make it work, that they find the whole situation incomprehensible, and still do not think we mean it but must be playing some very deep game.)



Think of the startling degree of welcome which President Truman's "Point Four" Program has elicited from the Nation. It is a very amazing thing for us to propose to export our money, our machinery and our technical skill to needy and backward countries, and perhaps put them in a position where they may some day be commercially independent of us and perhaps even compete with our own products.

From the point of view of all recorded history, which knows nations as purely selfish units, and not with enlightened selfishness at that, Point Four and similar programs are breath-taking. But not so to Americans. Why? Because we are more or less used to this kind of thing. "Point Four" is nothing but an extension on a national, governmental scale, of what the Foreign Missions of American churches have been doing in all the backward parts of the world for a hundred years. We have had not only evangelistic missionaries, but agricultural missionaries and medical missionaries and industrial missionaries and educational missionaries, whose work has been generously supported out of church collections. Now we are thinking of doing this on a great scale with the resources of the Nation's Government and the Nation's big business behind it. But it was the churches which showed us how, and led us to see that this kind of thing, like all good and generous Christian giving, brings back a blessing on the giver too, sometimes a blessing so pronounced that a cynic could call the whole procedure selfish!

Let us not belittle the part which the Church has played in giving us our freedom and showing us how to use it. Let us see ^{to it} that the spiritual momentum involved does not run down. That is something we can all contribute to the world's freedom, right here in our own home towns.



At the same time let us beware of the grim struggle that is going on in the world, for the soul of mankind. A few weeks ago, on August 28th, to be exact, the radio station at Leningrad in Russia announced that the Soviet Society for Political and Scientific Research, had decided to launch an intense struggle against what it called the "medieval Christian outlook". Anti-religious films are to be distributed. Twenty-nine million pamphlets are to be circulated. The chairman said: "The struggle against the gospel and Christian legend must be conducted ruthlessly and with all the means at the disposal of communism."

Against the propaganda, which will reach almost one half of the population of the world, we must pit our lives, our prayers, our gifts and the loyalty of our hearts to the cause of Christian freedom.

