

The original documents are located in Box D31, folder “Dedication, Hope College Cultural Center, Holland, MI, October 23, 1971” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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REMARKS BY REP. GERALD R. FORD
MINORITY LEADER, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
AT THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW HOPE COLLEGE CULTURAL CENTER
10 A.M. SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1971

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

I am delighted to be here at this auspicious moment in the history of Hope College, one of the finest educational institutions of its kind in the country.

Today we are dedicating the new Hope College Cultural Center. And we all know that politics is not a science but an art -- so I suppose that explains why I, a member of Congress, was invited to be the principal speaker at your dedication ceremony.

This is a great occasion for Hope College and everyone who is devoted to this school. It is a great occasion not only because this new building is truly magnificent. It is a dramatic and significant moment in the life of this college and this community because of what this new cultural center represents. It is, let me say, a monument to all of the great men who have shared their thoughts with the rest of the world in speech and writing.

You may remember that the British essayist, Matthew Arnold, defined culture as "acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world."

This is what your new cultural center offers you--a greatly expanded opportunity to become acquainted with the best in literature, art and music, "the best that has been known and said in the world."

We also treasure this dedication time because it comes to us as the culmination of a great effort, the effort by which students, church and some private individuals collectively made this fine new building possible. It was a seemingly impossible goal--but it was reached and we here today can glory in the wonder of it.

It was a glorious undertaking and a glorious achievement. And no small part of that glory is the manner in which it makes evident to all of us the strength of the private Christian college.

If we need anything in America today we need the private Christian college and college cultural centers that are Christ-oriented.

When I was asked to help dedicate this fine new building, I pondered what I would say. And in that instant my mind was flooded with thoughts of the great works

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of art, music and literature which have been inspired by Christ and his teachings-- the superb paintings that hang in museums in this country and Europe, the monumental musical compositions which sprang from deep religious feeling, and the great writings rooted in religion.

What is the most glorious book of all if it is not the Bible? What paintings can compare with the Last Supper? What musical works can be classed with Handel's "Messiah?"

The greatest artists have been drawn to God and in God they have found their inspiration. For as the Bible says: "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation."

There is in fact no literature more great nor music more glorious than the Psalms. And so it is that men "make a joyful noise unto God" as they paint, sculpt, or write words and music in His honor.

So it is most fitting that the private Christian college should build cultural centers and dedicate them to the greater glory of God.

If we need anything in America today we need the private Christian college and the truths that it teaches, the basic wisdom it imparts to young minds, and the muscle it provides to the national character.

This is an age in which all of us, and collectively our national character, are being subjected to the most severe of tests.

I speak not only of the trauma which is Vietnam. I speak of the fantastic paradox of the times in which we live.

We are living in the most advanced of eras, both technologically and in terms of social progress, and yet this is an age stained by unrestrained savagery, widespread violence, official corruption and revolting licentiousness. It is an age which has produced marvels in medicine and in space exploration--and also fiendish war devices capable of destroying all of mankind.

In every age, in every time and in every clime there are doomsday sayers who run about predicting the end of the world or the fall of a nation. The world has not ended but many nations have fallen. And in nearly every case the fall was preceded by a decline in morals and basic values.

Is America in a period of moral decline that precedes the fall?

Fortunately there recently seems to have occurred a swing away from what was generally recognized as an abandonment of inhibitions and an overall decline in morals.

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What we must always remember is that some values may change but certain truths are immutable.

We live today in an age when New Barbarians seek to destroy truth and decency.

But there are truths that are not debatable--the truths that are laid down in the Ten Commandments--the truths that gave rise to codes of ethics among civilized peoples--the truths that cause men to speak of integrity, honor and virtue.

When men abandon these truths, they lose all sense of value. They live a life in death. Their lives are a waste, and they carry hell around with them in their hearts.

St. Thomas Aquinas said: "Three things are necessary for the salvation of man. To know what he ought to believe; to know what he ought to desire; and to know what he ought to do."

Today America is shaken by doubts about the meaning of education, about the ideals of the college generation, and indeed about the stability of American society.

College students, adults over 30, all of us who still engage in the use of reason should look at our lives and at America as a nation and ask ourselves: What are we? Where are we going? Where do we want to go? And what is the best way to get there."

As individuals and as a nation we must have a sense of purpose.

We are living in the midst of revolution in America today, but it is not the traditional struggle between capitalism and communism. It is many revolutions. It is the eruption of change and its varying impact on the minds of all Americans.

This country doesn't need a new political revolution. It needs to build on the old one, the revolution in which the early American colonists fought so bravely.

We need a return to moral values. This should be our answer to the crushing materialism that is robbing our lives of meaning.

Consider what good radicals could accomplish if they would mobilize an army to clean up and repair slum dwellings instead of exhorting others to an assault upon the citadel of reason itself: the college and the university.

American college students today are among the most privileged and fortunate individuals in the world.

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And here at Hope College they are doubly blessed because they receive a college education rooted in moral values and the steadfast belief that man is only a little lower than the angels.

Hope College is a fine institution because it prepares its students to live a life which recognizes that love of family is of paramount importance, that marital fidelity is a necessary foundation for happiness, and that nothing is more precious than the integrity of the individual.

These are some of the truths that America has lost in the whirl of this atomic age, the fear of imminent nuclear annihilation, the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure and the throwing off of reason and restraint.

I spoke earlier of America's moral decline. I spoke, too, of a swing away from irresponsibility and a return to moral values.

I see a strengthening of morality in this country--not in the narrow sense but in terms of new toughness of character both in Americans as individuals and in the United States as a nation.

There is such an entity as national character and Christian character. It is a composite of all the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals who make up a nation and the Church of Christ.

I will never forget the words that the late President Dwight D. Eisenhower uttered in an interview with a White House correspondent three years before he died. Said Ike:

"I still have tremendous confidence and belief in my country. No matter what we try to do in the world there is only one place from which you can do it--a firm, sound base. That firm, sound base is the strength of the United States. And, the United States' strength is not just its military might. Indeed, it's not just its economic might. It's also its moral might."

And then Ike added: "I'd like to think we live by such words as decency and fairness, and the realization that each of us is a member of the proudest nation in the world--and then act that way."

There is a lesson to be found in the words of Dwight D. Eisenhower--the lesson we find woven throughout the fabric of our nation. That lesson is that our nation will be strong if we live the good life, the moral life, the decent life--and are proud of it.

As Ike said, "Be a member of the proudest nation in the world--and then act that way."

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What does all this have to do with Hope College's new cultural center?
There is a definite, a most profound connection.

I have been speaking about the desire that every American become a decent strong human being.

The great essayist Thomas Carlyle once said: "The great law of culture is: Let each become all that he was created capable of being."

This your cultural center will help young men and women to do--to become all that they are capable of becoming.

And if they become all that they were created capable of being they will help to build this nation, they will help to make it strong, they will add to its moral character.

I feel certain that all those who feed on the truths to be found in this cultural center will go forth into their communities and build on the old revolution--make America a nation which unmistakably stands for justice and decency and reason, for equality and opportunity and hope.

I believe all of you here agree with that great philosopher Plutarch who counseled: "Perseverance is more prevailing than violence; and many things which cannot be overcome when they are taken together, yield themselves up when taken little by little."

So let us, each one of us, use this cultural center to light a candle in the world, the candle of knowledge and understanding, so that together we will make a great light and illumine the universe for ourselves and for all men.

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