

[4-21-1980]

I am deeply grateful to the United Way of America for the great honor of the 1980 Alexis de Tocqueville Award. I accept it as an invitation to keep trying, even harder, to achieve the great ideal of voluntarism that it represents.

Voluntarism is, indeed, the subject of my remarks this evening. I make this choice, not only because it relates to the Award, but even more so because it relates to the inner spirit and life of the United Way of America. While I am conscious of speaking in Canada, what I say mainly is in the context of my own country that I know best. Yet, much that I say is equally applicable to this great country of Canada. We are not just friends and neighbors here. There is no other country on earth where we feel more at home.

(Address given by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, on the occasion of the United Way of America Alexis de Tocqueville Award, Toronto, Canada, April 21, 1980)

One of the most perceptive tourists ever to visit America made his trip to our shores about 150 years ago (1831). His name was Alexis de Tocqueville. On his return, he wrote two books, with a five year interval between them, although they bear the same title: Democracy in America.

De Tocqueville had many acute observations about America in these books, but I take for my theme today, something he says in Chapter Five of Book II, something that has proved to be one of the most important realities that makes America what it is, a country unique in all the world. A century and a half have enriched the central reality he describes, so that it is even more important today than it was then. But first, let us hear from de Tocqueville in his own words:

"Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainment, to found

seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner, they found hospitals, prisons and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association." (Vol. II, Chapter 5, P. 114, Vintage Books)

What de Tocqueville was describing, today we call voluntarism. I doubt that even he could have imagined to what extent this impulse was to build the America we know, in the next century and a half. All of the early institutions of higher education are the result of voluntarism. All of our churches, most of our hospitals, all of our businesses, all of our labor unions, all of our newspapers, radio and television stations, all of our clubs, all of our professional associations, all of our political parties, all of our opera, symphonies, and ballet companies, all of our entertainment, movies, and theater, all of our athletic teams, professional and amateur, all of our transport system, all of our artistic endeavors, in a word, almost the total fabric of our society was initiated, developed, and maintained by voluntary activity in the private sector. We even have, at least for the moment, a voluntary Armed Forces. The voluntary

support for all of this in gifts last year totaled about \$39 billion. No one could possibly calculate the monetary value of the volunteered services involved.

If you wish to see how unique this makes America, visit a Communist or Socialist society, Russia, China, or Czechoslovakia. There the society is grey, monochromatic, not multi-colored. If you read a paper, it is government issue, so is radio and television. If you do business, you do it with a government entity. Olympic athletes are government employees, so are all transport services. If you join a club, it is government sponsored and supported. To the extent that churches are allowed, so are they. All higher education, admissions, curriculum, professional and administrative appointments, are made by the government. Clubs, associations (to use de Tocqueville's word) hotels, entertainment, hospitals, artistic and cultural activities are an arm of the government. So are, especially, political parties of which there is only one. A famous Yugoslavian sculptor who was on our faculty for a decade before his death, Ivan Mestrovic, used to say that elections were free in his native land and that one had three choices, Joseph, or Broz, or Tito, all being the same person.

We take voluntarism so much for granted in America that its importance is really not appreciated until we compare our way of life to that in countries where everything is of the state, by the state, and for the state -- even citizens and their rights.

One might make the point more forcefully here if I were to put to you an interesting question. Suppose that tomorrow the most expensive multibillion dollar endeavor in our land, the federal government, were to suddenly be inactivated. What would be the effect, the impact on your life? I suspect it would be enormously less than if all voluntary associations were suddenly eliminated.

May I make of myself a guinea pig for the moment, to test this hypothesis. I was born in a private hospital and grew up with private medical care, in a private home, not a government apartment. I was supported by money earned by my father who worked for a private concern, the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. I attended private school for twenty-three years: parochial elementary and high schools, and three private universities. I was a Boy Scout, swam during the icy Syracuse Winters at the YMCA, went to Summer scout camp, played on a neighborhood football team. For spending money, I had my own private enterprise: mowing lawns in the Summer and shoveling ashes from furnaces in the Winter. I went to a church founded and supported voluntarily (thanks to the First Amendment -- an act of genius to launch voluntarism in the religious realm), joined a private religious order, was ordained a priest, taught and administered in a private university. Because I took the vow of poverty, all of my income goes to private causes, $\frac{1}{4}$ to the Order and $\frac{3}{4}$ to the University. I belong to a variety of voluntary professional organizations and clubs. I have served the government in a multiplicity of roles from Commissioner

to Chaplain, to Ambassador, and am still serving as Chairman of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, without pay, because it seems more fitting to volunteer my services. Take the voluntary element out of this one life, and there is practically nothing left. De Tocqueville was right when he said later in Chapter Five: "What political power could ever carry on the vast multitude of lesser undertakings which American citizens perform every day?" (P. 116) All of you have had similar experiences in your own lives. All our lives, as presently lived, are inconceivable without the large involvement of voluntary associations, voluntary gifts, and voluntary services.

If you agree with me that all of this voluntarism is good for America and Americans, may I then suggest to you that in our day we are facing a counter movement that strikes at the heart of what has made America great and unique. Despite our history of voluntarism, despite our unique record of doing by and for ourselves what needs doing, I sense that today there is a tendency to say, "Let the government do it." I say in all earnestness that when the government does it, the doing is almost always more costly, less free, more complicated and generally less productive and effective for America and Americans.

Hannah Arendt once made a study of revolutions during the past 200 years that were aimed at human liberation. She judged that only one of them had been successful in liberating the energies and

productivity of the vast majority of its people and in showing promise of steady progress towards reaching its highest goals. The one successful revolution took place in the United States. It was successful, Arendt says, because of two prior conditions: first, it could build on the historic traditions of the Anglo-Saxon peoples, pragmatic, modest, distrustful of individual authorities, but still respectful of authority and law; and, second, the success was based on a vast proliferation of voluntary associations. Now to the extent that we say, "Let the government do it," we are bartering away our freedom, that hard won liberation from royal authority and unjust laws.

All this may seem to be overstated, so allow me to be more explicit. Before World War II, the federal involvement in higher education was minimal, less than \$50 million a year. After the war, when we were tripling in three decades what we had achieved in three centuries of higher education, the federal government became our largest benefactor. In general, this seemed to all of us to be a good development. We needed government loans for academic buildings, we needed large research grants in science and technology. We needed scholarship help for the ever growing number of students who otherwise would be unable, financially, to attend our universities. We needed medical grants, capitation assistance, library subsidies. When all of this had grown to over \$80 billion a year, suddenly a wide variety of authorities with special interests began to descend

upon our campuses. They were not members of the three branches of government, Judicial, Executive, or Legislative, but a new breed called regulators.

They were regulating health, environment, women's rights, minority rights, Osha, Erisa, employment beyond the age of 65, Title IX applied to athletics, IRS looking at unrelated income, and a whole spate of generally good causes that are single-mindedly concerned with a particular issue and unrelated to the common good of the whole endeavor. It has been jokingly said that the three biggest lies in American life today are: "I'll call you back tomorrow." "I gave at the office." And, "I'm from the government. I'm here to help you."

A few weeks ago, we had an officers meeting at the University. It was long and difficult. Afterwards, it occurred to me that two-thirds of our time was taken up with problems involving federal intervention into the academic life of the University. This would have been unthinkable as recently as ten years ago. The question arises: How did we get ourselves involved in such a tangle? Does it say something to us about voluntarism?

I suspect that the real problem has to do most fundamentally with freedom, and the conduct of those most important institutions that freedom has founded, maintained, and cherished in our land. One can understand how we accepted the beneficence of the federal government when we needed it to fulfill our mission, but we did so without serious thought about maintaining that freedom which makes our institutions so important in the land of the free.

I believe that at this point we must reassess our situation. It may be that we cannot accept the largesse of the federal government if it means the end of those free institutions that are at the heart of what makes America unique and great among the nations of the world. Or, if the help is really essential, possibly regulation, this fourth form of government, not established by the Constitution, free ranging, and practically responsible to no one, not even the President, should be reined in by those three forms of government that are established by the Constitution, that are themselves mutually checked and balanced.

I would not want you to get the impression that I am completely and irrevocably opposed to any kind of regulation whatever. In a society as complicated as ours, some regulation is necessary for the common good, such as in essential food and drug regulations, highway or airport safety, or factors bearing on real equality of opportunity, for example. It is only when regulations are blind to all except a single issue unrelated to the common good, when regulations proliferate to Orwellian dimensions, even before 1984, that I begin to sense disaster and send up danger signals, as I am now doing. I would remind you that regulations are related to law and one of the four essentials for a just law, according to Aquinas, is that it promote the common good. Also it must be rational, not arbitrary.

Even in the present confused situation, let us not underestimate the continuing creative value of voluntarism. I give you as a case study, something that has happened in the past several

months, a classic example of the private and public sectors of our country cooperating for the common good, both national and international. In this case, their mutual roles are synergistic, not destructive.

Towards the latter half of last October, it suddenly became apparent that almost one-half of the Cambodian population, the educated and professional half, had been brutally exterminated by the Khmer Rouge, the Pol Pot regime, and that the other half was in proximate danger of dying from starvation, disease, and the usual ravages of war. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim was about to announce a relief plan, Phnom Penh was about to open up a bit, and thousands of refugees were crossing over the Western Kampuchean Border to Thailand. Contrary to a previous order of the Thai government, these later refugees were to be helped, not driven back this time to death and destruction.

At this time, there were more than thirty voluntary organizations, religious and secular, plus several national and international public organizations, interested in staving off this new holocaust. We summoned them all to the Board Room of the Overseas Development Council on October 25. In two hours, all agreed to act as one. We approved a letter to President Carter and Secretary Waldheim. Then we all went to the White House where President Carter granted our seven requests for government action and pledged over \$60 million for Cambodian relief and rehabilitation.

A few days later, representing all of these agencies, I went to the United Nations with Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, where we met with Secretary Waldheim and, together with other nations, pledged a total of more than \$200 million to activate our efforts.

Then Mrs. Carter went to visit the refugee camps on the Thai-Kampuchean border. On her return, we had another all-day meeting at the White House, opened by the President and continued with a report from the First Lady. At this November 13 meeting, we formalized our cooperation under the aegis of the American Council for Voluntary Agencies, established a Cambodian and Thai Border Committee, a Crisis Center in Washington to coordinate information and fund raising, put a representative in the headquarters of UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and another in the office of the United States Ambassador-at-large to coordinate all national refugee and relief efforts. This gave us hourly coordination.

On January 29, we had a third White House meeting of the group to establish a National Committee for Cambodian Relief, again with Mrs. Carter's presence and cooperation.

In the two months between the November and January meetings, we had raised \$30 million, multiplied fifteen times the medical people in the field, reached our quota of 30,000 tons of food delivered in Phnom Phen and Thailand, began rehabilitation efforts and surmounted innumerable roadblocks to progress in the area of distribution.

Much remains to be done, especially from next June's planting until late Fall's harvest, but the impending disaster has been averted, the path ahead clarified, and realistic goals established. All this was done in the best American tradition of voluntary leadership and cooperation between public and private, national and international organizations. I truly believe that absent the voluntary effort in the private sector, much of what happened in the public sector would not have been possible. There was no unseemly rivalry, no reaching for publicity or acclaim, just generous and wholehearted cooperation in a good and just cause. No matter that the victims were mainly Buddhist, the effort was mainly Christian and Jewish. No matter that the victims were governed by various Communist factions backed by the USSR and our most recent political enemy, North Vietnam, they were suffering and dying human beings who desperately needed help, so we gave it.

This case study is, I believe, a true paradigm of the kind of beneficent, creative, and voluntary activity that de Tocqueville had in mind, not only in building America, but reaching beyond our shores, "to the antipodes," as he put it.

There is a spirit here that needs to be rediscovered, cleansed of over-regulation, and reinvigorated in modern America. This spirit is the antithesis of the attitude: "Let the government do it." This spirit transcends the meddling of excessive and irrational federal regulations and nit-picking bureaucrats who pile up mountains of meaningless reports. This spirit surmounts the selfish single-issue

zealots, unmindful of the common good of the nation and the world. This spirit springs from free citizens who prize and use their freedom to touch humanity in its basic needs and anguishes, by dedicated service, freely given. Voluntarism, in its variegated manifestations, is America uniquely at its best.

Rather than antagonism, interference, and confrontation of the kind so eloquently denounced by Derek Bok in a recent Public Interest article, "The Federal Government and the University," great American voluntary associations, be they hospitals, social agencies, churches, or universities, should be welcomed by our government into a symbiotic relationship that recognizes the great service voluntarism provides for America and Americans in a way that governments never can. Who would seriously trade the rich texture of our society for the grey monochromatic boredom of most Socialist societies? Who would seriously want to badger into extinction the rich array of voluntary activities that concern themselves with everything from battered children to loving care of the dying?

I began by citing de Tocqueville. May I conclude by sharing with you another of his prescient observations that occurs just before Chapter V of his Democracy in America:

"It would be unjust to suppose that the patriotism and the zeal that every American displays for the welfare of his fellow citizens are wholly insincere. Although private interest directs the greater part of human actions in the United States as well as

elsewhere, it does not regulate them all. I must say that I have often seen Americans make great and real sacrifices to the public welfare; and I have noticed a hundred instances in which they hardly ever failed to lend faithful support to one another. The free institutions which the inhabitants of the United States possess, and the political rights of which they make so much use, remind every citizen, and in a thousand ways, that he lives in society. They every instant impress upon his mind the notion that it is the duty as well as the interest of men to make themselves useful to their fellow creatures; and as he sees no particular ground of animosity to them, since he is never either their master or their slave, his heart readily leans to the side of kindness. Men attend to the interests of the public, first by necessity, afterwards by choice; what was intentional becomes an instinct, and by dint of working for the good of one's fellow citizens, the habit and the taste for serving them are at length acquired." (P. 112, Vol. II)

I would like to conclude by observing that one of the most important roles of higher education today is not just to educate students to academic excellence and professional competence, but to give them as well the vision and the practice of serving the

nation's needs, which in de Tocqueville's words is "working for the good of one's fellow citizens." May the beauty and dedication of voluntarism in America never wither or die, for if it does, America, the land of the free, will die with it.

Independent Sector

1. Freedom from Constraints
Do what needs doing - speak - if not taken
2. Pluralism = America - many alternatives
no lock step
3. Environment for Innovation
gov't - none
4. Home for non-majoritarian ideas
dare to diff - try smtg new
5. Individual initiative
not impersonality of large orgs.
6. Opportunity for participation - public
7. Instrument for Community -
concern for others -
8. Grassroots vitality - no gov. by distant bureaucracy
9. Monitoring Gov't - keep them honest.