

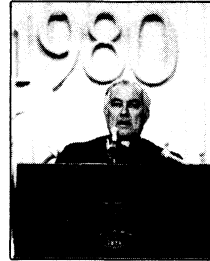
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The Reverend
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President of the University
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Commencement Address

One of the most perceptive tourists ever to visit America made his trip to our shores about 150 years ago, in 1831. His name was Alexis De Tocqueville, and on his return to France, he wrote two books, with a five-year interval between them, although both books bear the same title, *Democracy in America*. De Tocqueville had many acute observations about our country. A century and a half since he wrote those books, the central reality that he describes has become even more important in the life of our nation. I can't think of any reality more important in our nation's life today.

First, let me give you De Tocqueville's words: "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They not only have commercial and manufacturing companies in which everyone takes part, but associations of a thousand other kinds—religious, moral, serious or futile, general or restricted, autonomous or limited, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainment, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, even to send missionaries to the antipodes. And in this manner they found hospitals, and prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by encouragement of a great example, Americans 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 a voluntary association."

What De Tocqueville was describing, we call voluntarism. I doubt that even *he* could have imagined how voluntarism helped the building of America, as we know it, in the last century and a half. All of the early institutions of higher education, including this one, are the results of voluntary action. All of our churches, most of our hospitals, all of our businesses, our labor unions, our newspapers, radio and television stations, all of our clubs, our professional associations, our political parties, all of our operas, symphonies and ballet companies, all of our entertainment, all of our athletic teams—professional and amateur—all of our trans-

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port systems, our artistic endeavors...in a word, almost the whole total fabric of our society was initiated, developed and is today maintained by voluntary activity of the private sector.

Volunteer support in gifts last year alone exceeded \$39 billion. That is \$7 billion more than the year before. And no one could possibly calculate the monetary value of all of the voluntary services involved in all of these organizations, including your own Board of Trustees. If you would wish to see how unique this makes America, visit a communist or a socialist society—Russia or China or Czechoslovakia, for example. There the society is gray, monochromatic, not multi-colored. If you read a paper, it is government-issued. So is radio and television. If you do business, you do it with a government entity. Olympic athletes are government employees and so are all transport services. If you join a club, it is a government-sponsored and supported club. All higher education—admissions, curriculum, professional and administrative appointments—all are made by the government. We take voluntarism so much for granted in America that its importance is not really appreciated until we compare our way of life to that of countries where everything is “of-the-state,” “by-the-state,” and “for-the-state.”

I may perhaps make the point more forcefully if I put to you an interesting question. Suppose that tomorrow morning the most expensive multi-billion dollar endeavor in our land, namely the federal government, were suddenly to be inactivated. What would be the effect? The impact on your personal life? I would suspect that it would be enormously less of an impact than if all voluntary associations were suddenly disengaged tomorrow morning. May I make 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 and not a government apartment. I was supported by money earned by my father who worked for a private concern, the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company in Syracuse, New York. I attended private schools—parochial, elementary and high schools—and three private universities here and abroad. I was a Boy Scout. I swam during the icy Syracuse winters at the YMCA. 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. I joined a private religious order, was ordained a priest, and taught and administered in a private university. Because I took the vow of poverty, all of my income goes to private causes, one-fourth to the Order and three-fourths to the university. I have served the government in a multiplicity of roles—from commissioner to chaplain to ambassador and, at the moment, chairman of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy.

All of these tasks I do without pay because it seems more fitting in our country to volunteer one's services. Take the volunteer associations and activities out of just one life and there is practically nothing left. De Tocqueville was right when he said, “What political power could ever carry on the vast multitude of lesser undertakings which American citizens perform for themselves every day?”

All our lives as we presently live them are impossible without the enormous involvement of voluntary associations, voluntary gifts that make them possible, and voluntary services that carry them out. If you agree with me that all of this voluntarism is good for America and for us Americans, may I suggest to you that in our day we are facing

the beginning of a counter-movement that strikes at the very heart of what has made America great and unique among the nations of the world.

“Despite our history of voluntarism...I sense that today, there is a tendency to say ‘Let the government do it.’ And I say to you...that when the government does it, the doing is almost always more costly...less free...more complicated, and generally less productive and effective.”

To the extent that we say, “Let the government do it,” we are bartering away our human freedom. This may seem overstated; allow me to be more explicit. Before World War II, the government's 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 in America, 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 and library subsidies.

When all of this had grown to over \$80 billion a year, suddenly a wide variety of authorities with very special interests began to descend upon our campuses. They were not members of the three branches of government—the judicial, the executive, or the legislative. They were a new breed called regulators. They were regulating health, environment, women's rights, minority rights, OSHA, ORESA, employment beyond the age of 65, Title IX applied to athletics, IRS looking for unrelated income, and a whole spate of generally good causes. But they were single-minded in their concern with a particular issue, and unrelated to the common good of the whole institution.

It has been said jokingly that the three biggest lies in American life today are: “I'll call you back tomorrow,” “I gave at the office,” or thirdly, “I'm from the government and I'm here to help you.”

A few weeks ago we had an officers' meeting at our university. It was long and difficult and complicated. And after it was over, it occurred to me that two-thirds of our time had been taken up with problems involved with federal intervention into the academic life of the institution. We hadn't spent those hours making a better university or planning for better higher education. We had spent them fending off what we looked upon as interference in what we were doing. The question arises, “How did we get ourselves involved in such a tangle?” Does it say anything to us about, perhaps, our lack of total enthusiasm about voluntarism, and our voluntary associations? I suspect that the real problem most fundamentally has to do with freedom and the conduct of those most important institutions freedom has founded and maintained and cherished in our land, such as this university.

One can understand how we accepted the beneficence of the federal government when we needed it to fulfill our mission in the 1950s and 60s and 70s. But we did so without very much serious thought about maintaining that freedom which makes our institutions so very important and central, especially our education institutions 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 very heart of what makes America great and unique among all the nations of the world. Or if the help is really essential, possibly regulation—this fourth form of government today, not established by the constitution, free-ranging, practically responsible to no one, not even the President—perhaps this new form of government regulation should be reined in by the other three forms of government that are established by the Constitution, and 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. I am not. In a society as complicated as ours, we do need some regulation, because it is necessary to achieve the common good. That is the purpose of all government and of all law. It is needed in such things as essential food and drug regulations, in highway and airport safety, or in factors bearing on equality of opportunity for all of our citizens. It is only when regulations are blind to all except the single issue involved in being regulated, it is only when they are blind to the common good, and it is only when regulations proliferate to Orwellian dimensions—then I begin to sense disaster and to send up danger signals as I am now doing.

Regulations are fundamentally related to the achievement of laws, and one of the four essentials for just law—according to Aquinas—is that it promote the common good. Any regulation that is not concerned with the common good, with the kinds of checks and balances, tradeoffs that guarantee the common good in a democracy, any regulation that goes blindly toward one goal unrelated to the common good, is a bad regulation, and it is not part of what I would call rational law. Even in the present confused situation, let us not underestimate the continuing and the deep value of voluntary activity. Let me give you a quick case study of something that happened in the past several months that I think is a classic example of the private and the public sectors of our country cooperating for the common good, both national and international. In this case, the mutual roles of public and private are synergistic, not destructive of one another.

Last October it suddenly became apparent that almost one half of the Cambodian population—the educated and the 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 other ravages of war. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim was about to announce a relief plan. Phnom Penh was about to open up a bit for relief, and thousands of refugees were crossing over the western border to Thailand. Contrary to a previous order of the Thai government, these later refugees were to be helped, not driven back this time, as 40,000 had been to sure death and destruction.

At this time, there were more than 30 voluntary associations, both religious and secular, plus several national and international public organizations, that were interested in staying off this new holocaust of the Cambodian people. We (and I speak now as the Chairman of the Overseas Development Council) summoned all of these organizations to the board room of ODC on October 25th of last year. In two hours we all agreed to act as one. We approved a letter to President Carter and to Secretary Waldheim, then we all went over to the White House and we met the President in the Cabinet Room. We made seven requests to our government, which had said ten days previously that there were only 2,800 tons of food for all of Cambodia next year, despite the fact that we were selling 25 million tons at that time to the Russians. President Carter listened

very carefully, because we told him we represented 150 million Americans who believed in something. He granted our seven requests immediately.

A few days later, representing all of these agencies, I went to the United Nations with the then-Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and we met with Secretary Waldheim and, together with a few dozen other nations of the world, we pledged a total of more than \$200 million to activate our efforts. Part of this \$200 million was \$110 million from our country that the President had promised us when he made this agreement.

Then Mrs. Carter went to visit the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodia border, and on her return we had another all-day meeting at the White House. It was opened up by the President and it was continued with a report from the First Lady on her visit. On this November the 13th meeting, two weeks after the first one, we formalized all of our commitments. We established a crisis center in Washington to coordinate all of the fund-raising and information gathering. We put a representative in the headquarters of UNICEF, the international Red Cross, and another in the offices of our Ambassador-at-Large to coordinate all national refugee and relief efforts. This gave us an hourly coordination among everyone working in the field. At the end of January we had one last meeting at the White House where we set up a national committee. And that committee in a matter of four months raised, privately, \$45 million for Cambodian relief.

I tell you this because I think young people today feel a kind of hopelessness. The problems are so massive, so global, that you feel you really can't do anything. But here was a case where a group of private citizens really turned around a very bad situation. Much remains to be done. But the impending disaster, the threat of holocaust, was averted. Our path ahead to keep on averting it was clarified, and we established realistic goals and are meeting those goals.

All of this was done in the best American tradition of voluntary leadership and cooperation between the public and the private sector, between national and international organizations. I truly believe that with the absence of voluntary effort in the private sector, much of what happened in the public sector simply would not have been possible. There was no unseemly rivalry in all of this. There was no reaching for publicity or acclaim. There was just generous and wholehearted cooperation in what was a good and a just cause.

No matter that the victims were mostly Buddhists and that those who were helping them were mainly Christian and Jewish. No matter that the victims were governed by communist factions, the USSR and North Vietnam. We were looking at suffering people—dying human beings—and they desperately needed help. This case study, I believe, is a true paradigm of the kind of beneficent, creative, and voluntary activity that De Tocqueville had in mind when he described the building of the nation of America. It reached, as he put it, to the antipodes, beyond our shores . . . half way around the world.

Here, ladies and gentlemen, is a spirit that needs to be rediscovered, cleansed of over-regulation, and re-invigorated in modern America. All of you have to be a part of it. This spirit is the antithesis of "Let the government do it." This spirit transcends the meddling of excessive and irrational federal regulation, and nitpicking bureaucrats who pile up mountains of meaningless reports. This spirit surmounts the selfish, single-issue zealots who are unmindful

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of the common good of this nation. This spirit springs from free citizens who prize and who use their freedom to touch humanity and its basic needs and anguishes. They touch it by dedicated service, freely given. Voluntarism in its many, many faceted manifestations in our land is, I believe, America uniquely at its best.

Dear graduates, in conclusion I'd like to give you a quick picture of a person who is a great volunteer, because I think one picture is worth a thousand words. This is a picture of one of my heroes who I suggest might also be one of yours, Dr. Albert Schweitzer. When Dr. Schweitzer was your age he had three brilliant careers open to him. He was a concert organist; he was a great budding Protestant theologian, one of the best in Europe; and he was, as well, a brilliant young doctor.

He gave up all that and left Europe, his homeland, and went to a little place on a turgid river in French Equatorial Africa called Lambarené. There he spent the rest of his life bringing medical care to an area that hadn't seen a doctor, ever. He was gentle and good with his people, and a great adversary to all the diseases that beset that part of the world. He still played the organ at night. He brought a little organ encased in tin with him, and even though the various insects of that part of the world made his organ less good, he kept on playing it. That brought him consolation in the evenings. He also spent hours at the end of the day

writing long sheets of theology. It was less excellent because he was out of touch with the great libraries and the great developments of the world. But at the same time he was more in touch with his career of medicine, because he was in touch with the people where they ached and pained and where they died sudden and precipitous deaths. He cared for them. He cared for every living thing. And he cared for that little village of Lambarené and all the villages surrounding it. He became a symbol of what it is to give one's life for others less fortunate.

One day, Dr. Schweitzer was called back to Europe to talk to a graduating class like this, and he said to them something that sank into their souls, as I hope it sinks into yours.

He said, "My dear young men and women, you are enormously blessed with a great education, with competence, and you have the title of a great university after your name. I don't know where you're going to go in life. I don't know what you're going to do. But I must tell you one thing on which I would stake my life. Wherever you go, whatever you do, unless you block out at least a small part of your life to give to others less fortunate than yourselves, you will not really be happy."

My greatest wish and prayer for you this morning is that all of the members of this class may have happy lives. God bless and keep you!



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