

MOTIVATION FOR GOOD CITIZENSHIP

Every person in this room, young or old, occupies a position of leadership, whether he realizes it or not. Your accomplishments place you in this position. People look to you for guidance. This responsibility will not vanish regardless of how long you look the other way.

We live in an age of almost terrifyingly rapid change. In the two decades since the end of World War II -- in one generation -- we have seen the world's population increase by 54 percent and our own country's population by 47 percent. We have seen man build the capacity for destroying his world with all its millions. With no region left to explore on this planet, our own generation is exploring the great empty spaces around it and expects soon to explore the moon. Not inconceivably, our children or grandchildren may explore Venus or Mars.

This is a revolutionary age, whether we like it or not. The map of our own planet has been changing so fast that last month's Atlas is out of date. The colonial empires we once knew have all but vanished. In their place approximately 70 new nations have come into being. In these new countries, and in many older nations too, profound social changes are also taking place -- what has been called the "revolution of rising expectations." People long ill-fed and ill-housed are beginning to demand a share in the better life which a new technology makes possible. People silent for

centuries are making themselves heard.

Which road the new nations, and some of the older nations, take depends to a considerable extent on us. It depends on whether we in the United States can demonstrate that a free society can solve its pressing problems both democratically and efficiently.

The once relatively simple functions of government have necessarily grown and expanded into a bewildering and complex variety of activities. In the process the individual, whose integrity as a person is under constant assault, becomes increasingly detached and isolated from the political forces that govern his own affairs.

Albert Einstein was asked how he explained the outstanding progress achieved in the intricate and unfathomed world of physics and yet there appeared to be little progress in politics. He replied simply: "Physics is easier."

Thomas Jefferson first most clearly expressed the role of the American citizen. "He is jealous of his own integrity and independence, informed on matters of public concern, capable of exercising reasoned judgment in the light of this information."

Participation in political life first requires this identification with and sharing of some community of values. But it is this very relationship which is being eroded and chipped away by the growing complexity and specialization of modern life.

Too many of those who have the full rights and privileges of first-class citizenship have withdrawn from the responsibilities in the face of the growing complexity of government and the increasing distance between the individual citizen and the decision-making process.

There are far too many people -- some of them in positions of great influence -- who seem to believe that the individual as a positive force is obsolete in our complex society. Each individual must reaffirm his personal belief in his ability -- as one person -- to influence the course of history to some degree and in some manner.

Without being critical of our space effort, it is not unfair to state that the venture is primarily one aimed at increased national prestige. For our purpose, it is also valid to ask whether the United States will gain as much in international respect from a successful moon voyage as would be ours through an eradication of some of the more pressing human problems of the age.

Appropriate recognition would come if we met with realistic action the problems of slum clearance and low health standards, educational opportunities, adequate housing, the tragedy of juvenile delinquency, and the climbing crime rate.

It is never easy to see through a glass darkly. Two variables are involved in trying to play the role of Janus, the two-faced Roman god who looked both back and forward -- outward circumstance and internal alteration.

The future is past, in the sense that what has been determines what will be.

Many have wondered how it was that Americans, so prone to be "realistic," should nevertheless have launched and maintained the most idealistic form of government ever attempted on this earth. The explanation is not obscure. It was the deeply religious faith of most of the early colonists, long before the Revolution, that inspired them to base their society squarely on Christian principles.

Each year on George Washington's birthday, his Farewell Address is read aloud to the Congress. Included is the passage which says, "Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion."

Upon that caution depends the future of this republic. Fortunately, many of its citizens are well aware that collective material wealth will not indefinitely accumulate, if individual spiritual strength decays.

It is increasingly argued that there are no absolute values; that people create their own standards and that these alter as circumstances change. It is a development sharply symbolized by the saying "God is dead," even while every depreciating dollar bill continues to bear the inscription "In God we Trust."

I suggest we might consider in every city, town and village, the formation of study groups in churches, schools, service clubs, YMCA, and other organizations. The groups should really study and discuss: first, the problems of their own communities -- schools, jobs, housing, crime; and

then move on to more complicated matters like international trade, foreign aid or United Nations bonds. They should get the facts, analyze the different possible courses of action and intelligently support -- or intelligently oppose -- community, state, and national programs.

This is in the best American tradition. Indeed, it is one of the things about us that impresses foreign visitors. They mention the frank criticism by Americans in all walks of life of abuses or unhealthy situations.

But our responsibility is not limited to analysis and criticism, however intelligent, nor to supporting or opposing through the ballot box. It is also our responsibility to play an active part in improving our communities -- and responsibilities beyond our community and the nation. They reach out to the student in Nigeria, the farmer's wife in India, the rural school teacher in Chile, the leper in Viet-Nam.

In this world precariously balanced between autocracy and freedom, what each one of us does may tip the scales. It might well make the difference between defeat and victory. It is a challenging responsibility of free citizens -- a responsibility we are fortunate to have.

As Benjamin Franklin left Convention Hall when the final draft of the Constitution had been agreed upon, a citizen approached him and asked, "Dr. Franklin, what have you given us?" He replied, "We have given you a republic -- if you can keep it." He didn't say, if the President can keep it. He didn't say if the Congress can keep it. To that citizen, he said, "If you

can keep it."

A well-known football coach placed over the door of his team's dressing room this motto: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."

It is not sufficient that we of today just preserve the great heritage that has been ours, but we should so nurture and improve upon it that we leave it to future generations richer in advantages and opportunities and freedom than have been ours to receive.