

LEADERSHIP FOR THE HOUR

AN ADDRESS BY

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All leadership today, whether the leadership of the humblest home, the most thriving business, or the greatest nation, faces formidable problems. There are the ceaseless daily cares. Perhaps half of mankind is not sure of its livelihood from day to day. The multiplicity of exciting things distracts and enfeebles the mind. There is a general crumbling of moral standards all over the world, a softness, a corruption, a degeneracy, to which all men, but especially the younger generation are poignantly exposed. In this connection let those among us who are without sin cast the first stone at those whom the world self-righteously accuses. Atheism, materialism and relativism are rampant everywhere, and for many souls there is nothing to live for save to grasp more and more things, to seek more and more power, to indulge in greater and greater pleasure, even more fanciful and bizarre.

In the social realm there is the problem of justice and freedom. Leaders are faced with the crucial question: Can society be free and just at the same time? Where must the emphasis lie? Just where must the line be drawn between justice and freedom? How may the two be ideally harmonized?

In the realm of internal politics nations, especially the newer ones, are faced with the problem of stability. The requisite institutions which guarantee stability are lacking. Everything must be improvised and every now and then upheavals interrupt the continuity of political existence. And then the leaders are never secure.

In many countries good intentions, the best intentions, are nullified by the phenomenon of the population explosion and the phenomenon of rising expectations, both phenomena being wedded to each other and compounding each other. Indeed, in some cases the question is not how to arrest the population growth but, as it were, how to reduce the population itself to one-half or one-third or even one-fourth so as to achieve a tolerable balance between the population level and the variety and intensity of the people's wants.

On the world plane there is the problem of peace and international order. Wars rage and tensions smolder in many places. Has the United Nations fulfilled its promise? Must it be supplemented by regional or bilateral or multilateral arrangements? Leadership here daily asks itself the question: What measures must be taken – in the political, economic,

psychological and military fields – to make it clear that aggression will not pay and to punish it if it should be attempted? Those who have not shouldered these responsibilities have no idea how leaders at times are absolutely crushed by them. That is why all this armchair advising and lecturing that is going on is so empty, so irresponsible.

The unimaginable new weapons of mass destruction have opened up a new dimension of terror. For more than two decades the highest statesmanship of the world has been engaged in developing a wholly new order in international relations to contain this menace. The hotline between Moscow and Washington, which was activated, as President Johnson said in his State of the Union address two weeks ago, so dramatically and so fruitfully for the first time last June, only symbolizes this new world. For hundreds of other devices, both nationally and internationally, and both diplomatically and technologically, have been perfected to constitute the new order.

China alone staggers the imagination. The phrase “China and the world” can be said of no other people than the Chinese. China is the world’s greatest long-range problem. And with respect to China we are all in the same boat -- Americans, Russians, Indians, Europeans, Asians, Middle Easterners, Africans. The world’s greatest leadership, not only outside China but in China itself, will wrestle for years and decades and perhaps generations to come with the tremendous problem of how China may adjust to the world and the world to China. This is generically unlike the problem of how, for instance, Germany, or even Russia, may adjust to the world.

The leadership of the West, both political and intellectual, may not wish, or may not be able, to raise the disturbing problem -- or it may raise it half heartedly and unauthentically -- whether Western civilization can recollect itself into some effective unity, above all nationalism and all particularism, in the face of the wholesale assault upon its fundamental value from all sides, both within and without. But whether or not it knows how to raise this problem, it is starkly posed before it.

Consider further the problem of leisure. If the late General Sarnof was right, the average American early in the twenty-first century will not have to work more than two hours a day to be able to support a high standard of living. What will you do then in the remaining twenty-two hours? What do you do when you need not do anything? So far as the quality of life and character is concerned, nothing will tax the intellectual and spiritual leadership of the land more than the problem of leisure.

In the realm of the spirit the greatest problem in the salvaging of man, the salvaging of reason, the salvaging of the highest and most creative spirit, nay the salvaging of history itself, to the end that history be not erased and forgotten, neither arbitrarily chopped up into bits and pieces. For what is facing man today on the deepest plane is the possibility of the technical and scientific, of the impersonal and subhuman, of the dark and elemental, over-shadowing for good the liberal and free, the human and humane, the reasonable, the spiritual, the fullness of being, in universities and other institutions of intellectual culture. The leadership of the world faces no problem more radical and more challenging than this one.



Every leader in every walk of life has his own burden of problems. Some leaders face staggering challenges, some are marked for milder trials, but all ask themselves two questions, whether or not they actually articulate them: Am I adequate for my tasks, and what must I do to become more effective?

Know your facts fully. Assemble and marshal them in all their concreteness.

Never blink the truth. Be open to the many sidedness of the truth.

Steep yourself in the firsthand experience of the field of your authority, for nothing replaces personal, direct absorption in the phenomena.

Keep the machine, the instrument, in its subordinate place – always the slave, never the master.

Be ever on top of multiplicity – never allow it to overwhelm you.

Therefore ever concentrate on the essential, letting everything else quietly take its relative place.

Questions of justice strew the path of every leader – justice between ideas, justice between points of views, justice between subordinates, justice between men, justice between peoples and nations, justice between cultures; in all this, seek, not sentimental justice, not romantic justice, not abstract justice, but the justice that is real and objective and demonstrably authentic.

Trust reason, seek orderly debate, consult, argue, listen. One gains the impression that people really do not listen, that they think they already know it all, and if they do listen, they either do it out of politeness, or they listen to wrong or to one-sided or to tendentious advice. This is all wrong.

Trust, and again I say, trust – despite the risks involved; but it is quite true, trust cannot exceed reasonable limits, although the limits are neither rigid nor given a priori. The trusted often go out of their way to prove that they were doubly worthy of the trust placed in them. Thus trust begets trustworthiness.

Without faith in himself, faith in his fellow men, and, for the Christian, faith in God, no leader can lead.

Nor can any leader lead who does not expose himself at least to as much danger as his friends. There is no leadership from positions of safety. This is the mark of faith and love – that you venture forth to the limit. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13). People follow such a man.

The end of all leadership is peace – that greatest of all prizes; again, not sentimental or romantic or false peace, but real peace, true peace, peace based on justice, freedom, genuineness, and man.

Compromise is important and at times inevitable. But a leader would not put it before his eyes in advance: it will come of itself under the compulsion of necessity. If you set it up as a principle, then you have abdicated it in advance. It is one thing to compromise under necessity; it is another thing to compromise and compromise and keep on compromising as a matter of principle because you are a compromiser. It is one thing to be flexible in advance – as though you are inviting necessity beforehand.

It is said that the rebellion of youth is natural and normal, that it has always existed, that it is often healthy in that it serves as the vehicle for the transition from the rut of the passing generation. This is all true and I find a great deal of health and promise in the rebellion of youth, and in some respects I am more rebellious than they are.

But there is also such a thing as an unhealthy rebellion. The spirit of the rebellion makes all the difference – I either rebel in the name of deeper, greater, truer being, or I rebel in order to destroy whatever being there is. In many instances today youth is being goaded, used, seized, exploited, against the fundamental values of the West and against those who stand for

them. This is radically different from ordinary healthy rebellion – the vehicle of transition. This is the upheaval of values, the utter transvaluation of them. This phenomenon, which requires wise and careful handling, need not frighten the leaders: let them only stand firm for what they believe. When will the leadership of the West wake up to the fact that it is today a question, not of an ordinary rebellion, but of a total and radical assault – welling up perhaps from sources beyond man – upon its fundamental tried and tested values?

Democracy – certainly, but the strengths of democracy, the truth of democracy, and not its shams and faults and abuses. For there is something above democracy – the true mind.

Above all – clarity of vision, steadiness of purpose. The confused cannot lead, the wobbly cannot lead, the uncertain cannot lead, the unsteady cannot lead. The underlying maxim of every leader is this: This is what I firmly believe, so help me God!

There is no perfection in history – there is only the best possible, and even this is invariably thwarted: by hindsight one always sees that things could in fact have been better. Therefore the real leader, knowing the perishing and corruption of all things, knowing his own human limitations, knowing above all his own death, is meek in his claims and quite modest in his aims.

It is always a question of alternatives. The leader can only choose the less messy of a number of more or less messy alternatives, accepting the guilt of the messiness involved. The leader always carries in his person the stigma of the imperfection of the world. He takes upon his shoulders the sins of mankind. That is why he is always a sort of lamb of God.

The ultimate dedication is to truth – truth in every sense of the term, but especially truth as the fullness of being. Let every leader then examine himself as to the object of his dedication. They speak of courage as a necessary ingredient in leadership, but just any courage, courage for any cause? The question is: courage about what, courage in the name of what? To the extent the dedication is to other than or less than the truth, the courage of the most courageous leader will gradually relent and wither away. The sense of untruth will eat at his heart and he will start giving in. The truth is that only the truth is worth living for, and he will display infinite courage who conceives his life a flame consuming itself at the altar of the truth.



This is all elementary and fairly simple. Christian leadership stresses in addition God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus Christ. Faith is the most important thing. Jesus virtually said nothing except these two words: “Believe me!” If we are impotent it is because we have no faith. We get entangled in ourselves – in our sins, in our weaknesses, in our fears, in our calculations – and our faith which was so stout and living recedes. Oh, if only we recapture our lost faith – we will then do miracles! The ultimate battle today is not in any worldly sphere – not with respect to economic and social justice, or political stability, or the progress of mankind, or international peace and concord, or helping the underdeveloped to stand on their feet, or the vitalization of education, or the coordination of the sciences, or the proper guidance of youth. These are all most important arenas, but the ultimate battleground is in none of them. “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (John 18:8). This is the ultimate question both today and always.

God works through those who have real living faith in him – he uses them mightily. People grumble and complain – scratch the surface, and you will find it is because they have no faith. They are then afraid – dead scared – and that is why they grumble and complain. It is one thing to be dissatisfied with yourself or with the state of the world in faith; it is totally another to be dissatisfied without faith. He who knows Jesus Christ is dissatisfied with the world and with himself because he is profoundly satisfied in Christ. He knows why he is dissatisfied – the others don’t. From his satisfaction he obtains the living means, in humility, of understanding and overcoming – if such be the will of God – all dissatisfaction. And if he does not succeed, that is not going to ruin his faith: he will try to see in his failure some hidden wisdom which may be withheld from him for the time being. He knows that underneath the failure there is a higher justice, “that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” (Psalm 51:4). And so he will praise God all the same, he will continue to love him and trust him, he will remain absolutely sure that this is his world and he knows what he is doing.

There is fear and there is a sense of shame. People are plain Intimidated – they are simply afraid to witness. The climate, they say, is not “congenial.” But pray tell me, when was it more “congenial?” Then people either are not sure of what they believe, or, for some reason, they are ashamed of it. One is afraid that in the end people really believe nothing, not even themselves – and here again we see that it is at bottom a question of faith. The unconvinced will never convince. This is the sad, sad tragedy today. There is no greater spiritual certainty

than what is in fact available, and yet people have weakened their hold on it. It is one thing not to want to offend, it is another thing to have nothing to offend with. It is one thing not to want to cast your pearls before dogs, it is another thing to have no pearls at all to cast even before dogs. We need men who know, men who believe, men who love, men who are not afraid. You in this country can provide such men. But you must rise above two besetting temptations – your political complexes and your creature comforts. Politics, in all its forms, is noble and necessary, but it could kill the soul, and if you win the whole world and lose your soul, you know you have won nothing. The lure of power and control which politics holds out could kill the soul. Rise up, then, to and stay at the level of the independent, free, creative, joyful, certain spirit. If need be, sacrifice everything for that. And as to these creature comforts, I beg you to use them without becoming their slaves. Teach us all how to use them without becoming ourselves their slaves. American must mean in fact – American can mean – much more than the highest standard of material well-being.

IV

Every leader today labors under a profound sense of guilt. The demands are so incessant and the uncertainties ahead so imponderable that he lives all the time with the crushing feeling that he is leaving many things undone and that he is frittering away his energies in trivialities. Parents are not sure how their children will turn out; university administrators cannot guarantee that a dark spirit will not suddenly sweep across the ranks of faculty and students alike; business leaders plan with confidence, but always with the debilitating feeling that something uncanny could suddenly turn up and upset all their planning; thinkers are bombarded from every side by a babel of tongues; scientists cannot keep up with what is happening in their narrowest fields, let alone in the domains adjacent; statesmen, in a world shrunk into the closest neighborhood, can hardly adjust to the multiplicity of events and the suddenness with which they may pop up everywhere. The result is the feeling that – as the Psalmist would put it – “all the foundations of the earth are out of course.” (Psalm 82:5). There is thus a sense of helplessness, of inadequacy, of fatalism, of giving up, of chucking up the sponge.

The challenge is simply too great. It is more than mortal man can bear. Man was not made to face so much. There is no correspondence between man’s capacity and the magnitude of the challenge. We simply cannot do justice to everything. Man is weighed today and found utterly wanting. And when we make a selection, or when a selection is forced upon us, we smart at what we left out. It haunts us the rest of our lives. Since injustice is inevitable, since

we cannot help disregarding many, many things, our conscience becomes stricken, and the soul wilts under the consciousness of guilt. We appear then to assume responsibility for the entire world. But since this is impossible, we either become callous, closing our eyes and just forgetting, and using certain manipulations of our body and mind to help us forget and not see, looking upon our anxiety as something pathological and treating it accordingly, we either do this, or we reach out for God. Blessed is the man then who listens to this: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30). I say not only blessed is he who listens to this, but who listens and acts and believes – and indeed persists in acting and believing, despite the devil and despite his sins. Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:1-5). What on account of my limitations I cannot attend to I trustingly live in His care. This is His world, not mine. Let him then worry about it. Sufficient unto the day the evil thereof. I will do my best, but my very best taken ten times over is still miserably deficient. Where is this God? Just there so that all I have to do to tap him is to use the trick of praying on my knees? No, he is in the fellowship of His saints. He is in the church. From within the church, the suffering and struggling church, the praying church, the church which is “earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3), the church of our fathers and ancestors, the church on the basis of whose hope our fathers slept in the Lord – from within the fellowship of the living, existing, struggling church – with all that this fellowship entails by way of responsibility and discipline and participation and identification and hard work and perpetual persecution by the world – I obtain the necessary illumination and strength. Just as only from within the community of the faithful was David able to say what he said, so from within the church I can repeat what David said with perfect understanding, and can say even more. God does not mock us, nor can we mock him. This given, struggling, hoping continuing church, out there in the world, right here in our midst, cannot be a joke. Oh how much everything clears up in our confused minds as soon as we see this simple point.

V

This overseeing, forgiving, upholding strengthening God is a necessity today even if he never revealed himself in the past. How can miserable man today cope with the immense complexities and burdens of his life without him? That is impossible. We only deceive ourselves when we proudly think we can carry on alone: we cannot! There are far worse wildernesses today than the wilderness of old. What about the wilderness of politics? What about the jungle of the international situation? What about the maze of the sciences? What about the infinite abundance of goods – all luring, beckoning, stimulating, exciting? What about those devastating forces unleashed of late in the dark recesses of the human heart? No, there is no dearth of jungles and wildernesses in the world today. The terror of them far exceeds the terror of the wilderness of old. And if it was a terrible sin then to go a-whoring after other gods, it is far more so in the wildernesses of our time.

Therefore thank God, God exists! Thank God we are gold: “I am the Lord thy God... Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:2-3). Thank God we are assured: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27). Thank God we are promised: “...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:20). We are delivered these things, we do not invent them, we are told them from the outside, we do not whisper them to ourselves in the dark, the living, existing independent church believes and confesses them, and those across the ages who heard them and believed them and understood them and therefore became themselves the people of God were not only granted victory over the devil and all his works, but were made to partake, each in his own way and each according to his own measure, of the creative life of God himself.

VI

My point is that there is no effective leadership without God, the real God, the living God, the non-sentimental God, the God of our fathers. Bewildered and overwhelmed by the challenges facing us, can we achieve the ecstatic position of God? Can we see things – all things: ourselves, others, and the world – from that perspective? And not only can we see them, but, having seen them, can we then gain the power, according to our office and according to our capacity, to do the will of God for ourselves and the world? I believe we

can, provided we believe and provided we repent. “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14-15). Without repentance, nothing is possible; with repentance, nothing is impossible. Without repentance, we shall only move, both in our personal and our national lives, from one mess to another; with repentance, we shall advance towards a goal, both in our personal lives and in the lives of the nations. And it is never too late to repent, even if we have fallen a million times, even if we have been captive to the evil one all our life. And whatever repentance means, it does not mean that we have become angels, never again to be tempted, never again to fall – although angels themselves are tempted and some have fallen. Repentance means that we are genuinely sorry for our sins, that we hate ourselves on account of them, that we acknowledge our utter dependence on God, and that there is no health in us save what he graciously imparts. Repentance is the cry of Paul in Romans 7: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Man’s victory is only God’s victory; he can do nothing more than, in absolute fear and trembling, thank him for it.

Leaders want to make sure that everything is perfect. That is a form of pride. To be sure, we should always do our best, but having done that, we should still say, “We are unprofitable servants.” (Luke 7:10). Leaders must therefore relax. If we are never happy until we have made sure the world is perfect, then I am afraid we shall never be happy. What a snare it is for leaders to want to go down in history as having achieved this and having achieved that! Leave all that to God. The whole point of true religion is to proclaim the possibility of happiness even amidst imperfection, to insist on the possibility of victory even in the teeth of defeat, to prove that where sin abounded grace did much more abound, to impart real freedom even under the most impossible conditions, to teach men to take the world after all with a certain sense of humor; and having done that, to demonstrate that it is only from the point of view of this happiness, this victory, this grace, this freedom, this sense of humor, that real, hopeful change can be brought about – a change not just from one state to another, both states being more or less on the same plane, but a change from one order of being to another. But, it is a happiness and victory and a grace and a freedom and a sense of hum of quite a different nature than that which the world knows or seeks or expects. It is under this mandate that the church carries on its work in the world quietly and unobtrusively. And the world never needed the point of true religion as it does today – or, more precisely, the world needs the point of true religion today as much as it did a thousand years ago and as much as it will a million years hence.

Leaders need the quiet and certainty of God; they need his distance and his detachment. We are not going to live twice, we have only one chance – but what a chance to know and be in God! I doubt not that others have their own way of making sure of God, of securing his distance and detachment, his stillness, his victory, his truth. But to me the way is Jesus Christ, whom I see everywhere in history, before he came, when he came, and after he came, whom I know very well in the church and in my own life, and who said of himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6).

VII

It is presumptuous to tell a man in a position of responsibility what to do – he alone is responsible. And yet we are always advising our leaders what to do and what not to do. The common phenomenon of advisors completely changing their minds when they become responsible leaders themselves, is most instructive. History is the product of responsible decision and not of advice, and when we become deciders ourselves we see what we never saw and feel what we never felt when we only advised. Advice could well be at times the expression of envy – our secret craving to be leaders ourselves. It is clear then that a primary virtue in this whole question of leadership is to have the utmost respect for those in position of responsibility – not to judge them too severely, rather to sympathize with and pray for them. This is the meaning of the Apostolic maxim that all authority ultimately derives from God.

And yet the leaders need fellowship: they need not be altogether lonely. Surely they alone finally come to a decision and take full responsibility for it, but it makes all the difference in the world for them if they took their decisions from within the warmth of a loving and loyal and trusting fellowship. The confidence of friends is most important to a lonely leader.

The endless electronic and other devices are wonderful and necessary – to order the data, to master the profusion of factors and things, to save labor, to save time in order to keep abreast of the breathless acceleration in the development of events. But they alone can never decide. There is nothing that replaces the quiet moment of loving fellowship in which the whole in its essential features is surveyed and considered and taken in. We are absolutely meant to be living members of one another. But there must be a transcendent principle of unity or else the fellowship will sooner or later break up: the fellows will develop such hardened egoisms that they will cease to be living and sustaining members of one another.

Leadership can hold out and leadership can magnificently lead through fellowship living under a transcendent principle. Because the transcendent principle in the case of non-Christian fellowship is not itself living, namely, because it is always some idea – the interest of the nation, the interest of the party, the interest of the revolution, the interest of this or that leader – and because the essence of this idea, as Augustine would say, is self-love, non-Christian fellowship, and therewith non-Christian leadership, will always sooner or later disintegrate. And Christian leadership itself will disintegrate to the extent it has been de-Christianized – living away from living closeness to Jesus Christ and his living body the church. When that happens there is no difference between Christian and non-Christian leadership.

In real Christian fellowship the transcendent principle of the ecclesia is Jesus Christ “which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive” (Acts 26:19), and the very essence of this principle is love. It is this living love, having overcome both death and self, which cements the Christian ecclesia into the most creative and enduring fellowship. For “charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” (I. Corinthians 13:8-10). And of course “that which is perfect” is always, by every count, in every respect, according to every measure, living love.

Let leaders, then, in every walk of life, seek the fellowship of living love, and they will receive such strength in their leadership, such power, such vision, such certainty, such grace, such simplicity of word and thought, that, if they are grateful enough they will then the rest of their lives sing praises to the Lord who made them.

You speak of leadership, you speak of effective leadership, you speak of Christian leadership, I sometimes have the uncanny feeling that this leadership can be had in the twinkling of an eye. For is it not written, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” (James 1:5-6). In the eye of faith I see this – I know it – to be absolutely true.

When I think of how much this great American owes Christ; when I call to mind how much he loved her and blessed her, when I contemplate the strength she has come to in men and mind and material: I say to myself, “Surely all this must be for some purpose.” And what can that purpose be but to lead in being and witnessing to the best she already knows and is.