

AN ADDRESS

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen of the 21st International Sunday School Convention:

I must confess to you at the outset that I am attending this Sunday School Convention after much less pressure than I attended Sunday School in my youth. I was born an Episcopalian, and I am a Presbyterian by marriage.

Yet I look back on my beginnings with infinite satisfaction because I believe that without the weekly trek to Sunday School I would have been denied today the great inner joys of life. While I should have learned much more there, my attendance record was very good. One year I received the gold award. Frankly, they should have awarded it to my Mother. None of us quite escapes the teachings received at Mother's knee. We all remember the home and the neighborhood of our child life. Indelibly stamped in our character is the influence of religion. It touches us before we learn the hard facts of life. It remains with us as the greatest moral bulwark of our experience.

The world today vitally needs conferences devoted to religious education. In my opinion no conference is more important, for the world must rest on the solid foundation of religion. Our trouble has been that portions of the world have not rested on such foundation and, in their zeal to extend their violent ideologies, have attempted to destroy our own. You remember the parable which is apropos of our present situation:

"He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.

"But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 7: 48 and 49.

(Over)

While our way of life remains on the foundation rock of religion, there has been an increasing tendency for other ways of life to rest on an entirely different concept. And so today the clear problem posed before mankind is this: Can the peoples of this earth live in world brotherhood? If they cannot, then the teachings and accomplishments of the last two thousand years will be for naught. Our civilization will disappear in a series of atomic explosions.

Never in the annals of time has the matter been reduced to such terrifying simplicity. It is a choice between God and Mammon.

To put it in the language of our day, we must accept and practice the teachings of the Nazarene - or else!

Before this generation, there was still time left from the arduous duties of life for experiments with doubts, for gropings for solutions. The pulpit sometimes could lose itself in the subtle points of theology; and numerous denominations could afford to engage in stimulating debate with each other on which best implemented the credo of one faith.

We could and we did, as nations, go to war. History at one point was merely a record of one war after another. At one point a nation was recorded as losing this war but perhaps it would win the next. While civilization lowers its standard of living in one decade of mutual destruction, it sometimes raises the standard in the next decade of mutual cooperation. It appears today that we must either live in brotherhood or we do not live. The atomic bomb takes care of that.

What we must do is gird our heritage with all of our spiritual strength. We in America have a great heritage. On first thought one of the most remarkable things about our heritage is that it begins in the community - in the towns and the cities. Old or new, small or large, each

of our towns has its individual character. Even the names of our towns - English and French - Spanish and Indian - towns named for lords and dukes and earls - for soldiers, saints and sinners, tell of the American heritage. Here the opportunities and challenges of democratic citizenship begin - to foster religious training, provide general education, choose honest, responsible government, and adjust economic and social differences. As a community goes, so goes the nation. The country of honest, responsible, progressive, religious Communities cannot fail to be a strong, just, Godfearing Nation. That is what our heritage is based upon.

Christianity and our democracy are synonymous. Without applying Christian ideals to democracy there would be no democracy.

Today we are in a great critical period of human history. Our enemy, whether inside or outside our frontiers, is the enemy of democracy. And the enemy of democracy is the avowed enemy of Christianity.

And so the great task before us now is the most extraordinary challenge to evangelism since the days of Paul of Tarsus. It is the task of making world brotherhood a reality.

To meet this test we must have strength and well-being as individuals, and as a Nation. As a Nation we must have sufficient military strength to command the continued respect of our brother nations. While our national strength has grown through the years, the needs have multiplied many-fold.

We must guard zealously our democratic inheritance at home. We cannot take it for granted. We must cherish and enhance it. We must struggle for it. To successfully share our democracy with the rest of the world, we need to be strong economically and spiritually at home. We must have the heroism of the brave hearts that created this Republic; of the pioneers who extended our boundaries.

Men and women gave their lives to conceive and defend our great heritage.

The American way of life was born by the clashing of army against army -- amidst death by the bow and arrow, and swamp fever, and the perils of the wilderness, and all the other hardships incident to the settling of a new country.

Today our fields and forests, our wells and mines, our scientific developments, have contributed to making this country the most prosperous and powerful nation in the world.

As we face the future we must build a generation of young Americans alert to our traditions, conscious of our world responsibilities--aware of the great gap between our scientific and our social development--aware that we must find a way to live in peace with the rest of the world.

It is for us to take up this task in a happy spirit of devout dedication. The teachings of Christianity and democracy should become a part of our everyday life. By Christianity I mean no one particular creed. I mean all creeds.

The statistics are shocking ---

Fifty percent of our people belong to no church; in one large city, sixty-eight percent of our children and youths have no contact with religion; three-fourths of them do not know the Ten Commandments, and two-thirds of that number never heard of them,

The future should find every Sunday school teacher a prophet with a mission. We must remember that every step in human progress since the crucifix supplanted the sceptre in Rome, received its ideological impetus from religion.

We have not and we cannot separate the teachings of Christianity from the fundamentals of our form of government.

The words and the spirit of Holy Scripture breathe through every document that has made our Nation great.

Loyalty and patriotism to country receive a strength and permanence that come only from God.

The ominous trends and tendencies which I have mentioned can be changed by men and women of good will, motivated by strong religious faith, who have love of country in their hearts.

In this hour of great need, we must not fail.

History has no record to equal the role of help and succor this Nation is now playing to all the world.

It is my feeling that this attitude of being our brother's keeper came to us in the principles taught us in Sunday school, and we are now merely implementing them. Teach a nation true Christianity, and its statesmen will translate that faith into the words of the Four Freedoms, they will conceive an Atlantic Charter, they will create a United Nations Organization, they will exercise tireless patience to maintain an enduring peace for peoples everywhere.

Good causes need the right kind of leadership and support. All too frequently a good movement fails because its leadership has fallen into wrong hands. Upon the Church rests the responsibility to furnish leaders, and the support of its membership, in causes for the common good -- social, political or economic.

I know that the religious leaders of our glorious country will meet the challenge in the future, as they have in the past -- and that the home, the

church, the school will help make our America a better and brighter place in which to live, and that they will do their part to spread our blessings throughout the world.

Let us build for the future on the rock of religion.