

# *Christianity—Repression or Liberation?*

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It is a great honor to be on this beautiful campus, which is new by the standards of universities throughout the world, on this special occasion. It is to your great credit that you seek each week to reexamine your spiritual values and their importance in your lives.

I have chosen to speak to you today on the subject of “Christianity—repression or liberation?”

For the past decade, students have been doing what they have been doing for centuries, examining and challenging their values. During the past ten years, it has been done, however, with greater fervor. Repression and liberation have been dominant themes, both religiously and politically. Many have felt that their campuses were too repressive and sought to take over the government of the university, even though they contributed very little to its building and maintenance costs. Some have misunderstood what liberation means. Henry Ward Beecher said, “There is no liberty to men whose passions are stronger than their religious beliefs: there is no liberty to men in whom ignorance predominates over knowledge. There is no liberty to men who know not how to govern themselves.”

Saying essentially the same thing was Henry Brooks Adams, who said, “Absolute

liberty is absence of restraint. Responsibility is restraint and therefore the ideally free individual is responsible to himself.” Therefore, I wish to speak of repression and liberation in terms of the individual.

Too many, in the past few years, have been intent upon seeking and claiming rights, rather than respecting them. They have ignored the fact that with every right there is a duty. Mohandas Gandhi was quick to say, “I am a lover of my own liberty and so I would do nothing to restrict yours.”

You young people at this University should all have frontiers, but to pursue those frontiers, you must exercise restraint. Liberation is, in the words of David Lloyd George, “not merely a privilege to be conferred. It is a habit to be acquired.”

Harry Emerson Fosdick, speaking of your generation, said:

*Many of them are brought up to think that goodness means repression. All through their matur-*

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ing youth, they keep coming upon new powers, new passions, new ambitions, and they are told that these must be repressed. At first they docilely accept the negative idea. They try to be good by saying "no" to their surging life, and some day they grow so utterly weary of this same negative repressive goodness that they can tolerate it no longer and they start out to be free, wild and self-indulgent, only to find the road, not to freedom, but to slavery, with habits that bind them and diseases that curse them and blasted reputations that ruin them. Would not Jesus say to them, some such thing as this, "You have made a bad mistake. Goodness is not mainly repression. It is finding your real self and then having it set free. It is positively living for those things which alone are worth living for. It is expression. The effulgence of life into its full power and its abundant fruitage. I come that ye might have life and that ye might have it abundantly." That is real Christianity as it is the spirit of Jesus. Some Christians carry their religion on their backs. It is a packet of beliefs and practices they must bear. At times it grows heavy and they would be willing to lay it down, but that would mean a break with old traditions, so they shoulder it again. But real Christians do not carry their religion, their religion carries them. It is not weight, it is wings. It lifts them up. It sees them over hard places. It makes the universe seem friendly, life purposeful, hope real, sacrifice worthwhile. It sets them free from fear, futility, discouragement and sin—the great enslavers of men's souls. You can know a real Christian when you see him by his buoyancy.

It was Alexis de Tocqueville who said, "Christianity is the companion of liberty and all its conflicts. The cradle of its infancy and the divine source of its claims."

Among those who are having difficulty finding their appropriate degree of liberation in the world are women. Eliza R. Snow, in 1872 made a timeless statement on this subject. She said:

*The status of women is one of the questions of the day. Some are so conservative that they oppose every change until they are compelled to accept it. They refuse to concede that woman is entitled to the enjoyment of any rights, other than those which the whims, fancies or justice, as the case may be, of men, may choose to grant her. Others again not only recognize that woman's status should be improved, but are so radical in their extreme theories that they would set her in antagonism to man, assume for her a separate and opposing existence, and to show how entirely independent she should be, would make her adopt the more reprehensible phases of character which men present, and which should be shunned or improved by them instead of being copied by women. We are all our own self-destruct mechanism.*

Helen Keller was born with many repressive handicaps. She was, as a young child, almost as if she were a wild beast, unreasoning, ruled only by her passions. Until her teacher could get her to begin to learn, to listen, no progress could be made. Richard L. Evans said:

*Those who break windows to let in fresh air, do not love fresh air, as much as the sound of tinkling glass. Freedom which Christianity affords is a freedom to soar above the sordid, the mundane. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)*

The great energizer of the true Christian, the battery which generates the starter of our inner strengthening motors, is prayer. Dr. Alexis Carrel, celebrated physician, examined the effect of prayer from a physiological standpoint. Said he:

*Prayer is not only worship, it is also an invisible emanation of man's worshipping spirit, the most*

*powerful form of energy that one can generate. The influence of prayer on the human mind and body is as demonstrable as that of secreting glands. Its results can be measured in terms of increased physical buoyancy, great intellectual vigor, moral stamina and a deeper understanding of the realities underlying human relationships. If you make a habit of sincere prayer, your life will be very noticeably and profoundly altered. Prayer stamps with its indelible mark our actions and demeanor, a tranquility of bearing. A facial and bodily repose are observed in those whose inner lives are thus enriched. Within the depths of consciousness, a flame kindles, a man sees himself. He discovers his selfishness, his silly pride his fears, his greed, his moral obligation, intellectual humility. Thus begins the journey of the soul towards the realm of grace.*

There are in the scriptures a few especially choice statements of man's duty. May I suggest three:

*If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. [James 1:26–27]*

*What doth the the lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? [Micah 6:8]*

*Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. [Ecclesiastes 12:13]*

From beyond the pages of the Bible, from the pen of Bonaventure comes the suggestion, "The best perfection of a religious man is to do common things in a perfect manner." The simple tragedy is that, with a loss of faith in religion, people often lose faith in themselves.

It has been my great blessing to know three perfect women. I speak of my wife, my

mother, and my mother-in-law. I would like to tell you of my mother-in-law. Many a man seeks to disparage his wife's mother (Lord Rulles said the penalty for bigamy was having two mothers-in-law); I seek to venerate mine. Her name was Elizabeth Hamilton Wright. She was a twin, born into a family of fourteen children. Because she was gifted in dealing with children, she was taken out of school after the third grade and given the necessary task of tending the younger children. It used to pull my heartstrings out to watch her laboriously write a letter. But she was liberated and fully emancipated, because she had graduated *summa cum laude* in spirituality. She knew things beyond the understanding of those of us who were merely trained. She knew them by the Spirit of God. She was the humblest of the humble, the wisest of the wise, because she was simple enough to be able to accept a complete belief in God. She knew that the best religion is humanity and the best divine service is to love thy neighbor as thyself. She literally loved her neighbors beyond her love for herself. It is my belief that her daughter, Ruth, surpasses even her mother.

One wise man, Johann Kaspar Lavater, has said, "All belief that does not render us more happy, more free, more loving, more active, more calm, is, I fear, an erroneous and superstitious belief."

The subject of our discussion today, "Christianity—Repression or Liberation?" would seem also in a measure to apply to governments. A shrewd observer, Niccolo Machiavelli, declared:

*And as the strict observance of religious worship is the cause why states rise to eminence, so contempt for religion brings ruin on them. For where the fear of God is wanting, destruction is sure to follow, or else it must be sustained by the fear felt for their prince, who may thus supply the want of religion in his subjects. Whence it arises that the kingdoms that depend only on the virtue of a mortal, have a*

*short duration. It is seldom that the virtue of the father survives the son.*

Being thoughtful students, you are all aware of the cynical statement of Karl Marx, "Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature. The feeling of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of unspiritual conditions. It is the opium of the people." Rather than being like a drug, these gifts of the Spirit work differently. They do not excite; they calm. They do not hallucinate; they strengthen. They do not weaken, but make more powerful. They are not mere escape hatches from responsibilities, but instruments of insight into what life really means. The spiritually liberating life proves itself by moral responsibility, by an awareness of human fallibility, yet reserves, indeed teaches, the ultimate majesty and meaning of life. It is that which spans our horizons, our feelings, our senses, rather than limiting and inhibiting them. It is the learning of the vast difference between saying prayers and praying. Our prayers, like lightning, go into the unseen, and the responses that we receive give us the safest course that can be found.

This great unique University, maintained in a large measure by the tithing of those who are not affluent but are faithful, by the widow's mite, is founded and maintained on the premise that pure Christianity is not repressive, but is the most liberating to the human soul of all of the forces at work in the world.

Your great President, for whom I have such great respect, when he talks to you about the standards of how you look, is trying to tell you that how you look will affect how you think and act. He looks to the future. He wishes that when you walk down the street, that when you sit in councils, that when you speak, people will marvel and say that you are truly a liberated person—free of groveling, debasing, and confining, feelings, thoughts, and passions being merchandised in the finite world. We hope it will be said of you with awe and respect, "This person has so much wisdom and grace, he or she has found the ultimate of all truths—the redeeming power of Christ."

We hope that you will reach for the finite. I pray that you will, in addition to the great teachers at this University, be under the personal tutelage of the Savior. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.