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The Responsibility of Men in a free Society, 1951.

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THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEN IN A FREE SOCIETY

March 11, 1951

There is a prevalent fallacy among people that in a free society, men have fewer responsibilities than in an unfree society under tyranny or despotism, under a monarchy or a dictatorship. It is erroneously assumed that because a man is not subject to a superior authority in government which he cannot control, that because he is free to choose his representatives who administer his government and has a voice in the making of the laws of his country, therefore, he has fewer responsibilities; therefore, he is relieved of many onerous obligations which he would otherwise have. There are those who actually believe that a free man is one who can do anything that he wants to do, just so he does not break any law on the statute books for which he might be punished. Beyond that, he has no responsibility, no responsibility at all to his government or to his country or to the society in which he lives.

Nothing, of course, can be further from the truth. A free society imposes more responsibilities on a citizen than a unfree society, than an autocratic or feudal society. Because the sole duty of a subject, of an involuntary subject is to obey, and his obedience is not even a matter of choice, and therefore, is not a moral virtue, because failure to obey bring on condign punishment. The man who obeys under subjection and compulsion assumes no responsibility for his conduct and for the decisions which were made for him or for the government which makes those decisions. He is not a free agent. He, therefore, has no moral responsibilities.

The freer a man becomes, the more responsibilities he assumes. Maximum freedom, therefore, means maximum responsibility. If we had been consulted and had a voice in the making of the laws under which we live, we have a bounden, moral responsibility to those laws, to obey those laws. If we are free to elect our legislators, we share with them in the responsibility for the laws which they enact. If the government under which we live is truly ours - that is, it is not superimposed upon us - then we have very grave and manifold responsibilities to protect it, to preserve, to improve it. Then it is part of our life's career and our life's destiny, as is one's family

or one's business or one's profession, which is his own.

In a real sense, the most challenging and the most exacting form of government in the whole - the most challenging and the most ~~exacting~~ - is a democracy, even if the challenge is not peremptory by fiat or ukase or , and even if the exaction is not brought about by fear or punishment. Those who want to preserve a free society for themselves and their children are most exacting, not of others, of course, but of themselves, for a free society will never be better than its citizens are prepared to be.

I wish to draw your attention this morning to some of the responsibilities of men in a free society other than that of paying taxes or of keeping out of the way of the law. In the first place, in a free society a man must be prepared to do his own thinking. That's not easy. It's much easier to have other people do the thinking for you. In a free society a man must guard himself against being swayed by mass judgment and mass prejudice. Now, special interests in our day have perfected the dangerous art of propaganda whereby the mind of a man is attacked, literally attacked, where private judgment is undermined. Falsehoods and half-truths, highly charged with emotions, are continuously funneled into the minds of men and women today, daily, hourly - confounding them and confusing them, and rendering them incapable of clean, clear, independent thought. This is the gravest threat to free government today.

Now, it is not easy to guard one's self against this propaganda. It is not a simple matter to insulate one's self because it is so subtle and so pervasive and so persuasive. But that's exactly what a man in a free society must do. He must try to screen what he hears, what he reads. He must learn to analyze, to question, to check, to double check, to try to get at the facts. He must always ask himself, "Is this thing really so?"

Not everything that comes to us from the mouth of a news commentator on the radio or from a column in our newspaper or from an editorial in our press - not everything which emanates even from high authority in government, from the most highly placed circles in government, whether political or military, is disinterested truth always,

infallible truth or infallible judgment. We must learn to compare, and the best way to compare is to listen to the contrary viewpoint and then check. A free man must guard himself against jumping to conclusions on the basis of the first report, the first item which he reads, the first comment to which he listens. He must never become so opinionated as to be unwilling to change his belief and opinion when facts warrant it. A man in a free society who wants to be free and wants his society to remain free must continuously inform himself through self-education. A politically uninformed and immature people will not stay free for very long. He must avoid mass hysteria. He must think for himself, and that's a hard discipline. It takes years and years to train one's self into thinking for himself, and a college education is not always the way to do it. Frequently those who have had the advantages of college education are those who are most inclined to move in the mass and think in the mass and go along, as it were, and listen to the voice of their own prejudices rather than to the voice of truth.

And then a man in a free society has the responsibility not to be afraid to think for himself. Cowardice is the ruin of a free society. A man must not be afraid to differ. He must not be afraid to express a contrary opinion if it is an honest opinion and a responsible opinion. In a democracy the majority governs. In a democracy the majority must govern. There is no other technique for democracy, but the majority may be at times wrong. It is the moral duty of a free citizen to call attention to such wrongs, to advocate what he regards to be the right way and not to be deterred by criticism or abuse or intimidation. It is the duty of a free man to speak up responsibly, after having informed himself, to speak up and not by his silence or indifference or calculated prudence, to confirm the wrong, to perpetuate the evil.

All kinds of tyrants and despots and dictators and their lackies, the little fellows, the little dictators and the big dictators, the parochial despot and the provincial despot and the over-all despot in countries - they all count for their ultimate

success upon the ~~community~~ timidity, the submissiveness and the weakness for conformity on the part of most people. "Cry aloud, spare not. Lift up thy voice like a horn and declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sin," was the admonition given to the prophet.

A free man should not be afraid, if necessary at times, to stand alone. It is good to work with people. It is good to cooperate. The best results come through cooperativeness, but if once a free man is convinced that the majority is doing something which is wrong, which is hurtful to society, he must have the courage to abstract himself from the group and to stand alone.

And with it, comes a third responsibility for a man in a free society. That is to defend the intellectual freedom, independence of judgment, the right of expression of other people. This is even more difficult - a far more difficult responsibility. To suppress others is in ^{the} long run to suppress ourselves.

A free man is clearly not obligated to defend the freedom of those who patently use or advocate the use of force to destroy democracy. He is not obligated to defend those who reject the methods of peace and the procedures of democracy, and who conspire to undermine through their democratic immunities and opportunities our free institutions because this would prove the suicide of any free society. Force must be used at times against those ^{who} by force would destroy democracy. But, we must make doubly sure, we must make trebly sure of our ground before we move to suppress the freedom of any ~~six~~ citizen. It is so easy to let our prejudices and our dislike for the unlike run away with us. It is so easy to brand a man a Communist, for example, who does not happen at the moment to agree with a policy approved by the government or by the majority of the people, who disagreement may be grounded in profound patriotic devotion and loyalty to his country. It is so easy to brand a man a Communist who does not approve of our Korean policy, of our Chinese policy, of our Russian policy, or of our Truman doctrine.

We must make doubly sure why we want to suppress the freedom of expression of an individual and what it is that we want to suppress and whether the suppression ultimately will serve the best interests of our free society.

There is a fourth responsibility of men in a free society - to respect the institutions and customs of that society as long as they serve the best interests of such a society, and when they cease to do that, it is his responsibility to try to change them. Now, no change should be made lightly. Change is not necessarily progress. Very often change is retrogression, and therefore, no change should be made precipitately, lightly, without very sober and solemn and deliberate consideration, but no institution should be perpetuated in a free society and no law, simply because it is old and venerable. There is nothing static about a free society and a free government. There is no finality to any law or any institution. Governments are instituted to make secure human rights. Governments are the servants of men, not vice versa. That's the whole philosophy underlying our Declaration of Independence. And we should seek change when necessary, and progress through education and through informing the popular mind and will and through the democratic process, so that when the change is adopted, it will be of common consent and has the backing and the strength of common consent. We should not look for change in a democracy through violence or the dictatorship of a minority. Democracy is not only an end. It is also a means! And dictatorial means will never lead to a democratic end.

There is another responsibility of free men in a free society, and that is to take active part in government, to see to it that men of authority and ability and integrity are placed in position of authority to administer the government, to keep in touch with these men whom we chose to be our representatives. Merely to criticize what you don't approve of in government is not enough. It is not helpful. Helpful criticism is that which comes first as a result of study of what the situation is, how it can be corrected, and then by making our opinion and our judgment heard in those circles which are charged with the responsibility of running our country.

And there is still another responsibility of free men in a free society, and that is to defend their country even when they do not approve of its policies. They should try to change those policies. When their country is in danger or at war, it is their bounden, moral duty to defend their country. I have heard from time to time people who have certain grievances, and perhaps justified grievances against their government, because of discrimination practiced in certain parts of our country against certain races and certain religions, or I have heard that certain people who are completely infatuated with the system of government of another country, say, "I will never fight against the Soviet Union," for example. That is not only unwise; it is unjustified.

The famous Greek philosopher, Socrates, who was unjustly sentenced to death by the Athenians, and on the day before his execution, he was compelled to drink the hemlock, a friend of his - Crito by name - came to his prison cell and told him that arrangements had been made for him to escape. His friends were deeply concerned about him and made these arrangements, and Crito summoned all the arguments to persuade Socrates to escape. He owed it to himself - ~~he~~ he owed it to his family - the sentence was wrong - it was a prejudiced sentence. Socrates refused to escape. And this how Plato reports the dialogue, the conversation which took place in the prison cell between Socrates and his friend, Crito. It is only part of the amazingly noble dialogue:

Socrates says to his friend:

Consider the matter in this way: Imagine that I am about to play truant (you may call the proceeding by any name which you like), and the laws and the government come and interrogate me: "Tell us, Socrates," they say, "what are you about? Are you not going by an act of yours to overturn us - the laws, and the whole state, as far as in you lies? Do you imagine that a state can subsist and not be overthrown, in which the decisions of law have no power, but are set aside and trampled upon by individuals?" What will be our answer, Crito, to these and the like words? Anyone, and especially a rhetorician, will have a good deal to say on behalf of the law which requires a sentence to be carried out. He will argue that this law should not be set aside; and shall we reply, "Yes, but the state has injured us and given an unjust sentence." Suppose I say that?

Crito says, "Very good, Socrates." And Socrates says:

"And was that our agreement with you?" the law would answer; "or were you to abide by the sentence of the state?" And if I were to

express my astonishment at their words, the law would probably add, "Answer, Socrates, instead of opening your eyes - you are in the habit of asking and answering questions. Tell us - what complaint have you to make against us which justifies you in attempting to destroy us and the state? In the first place did we not bring you into existence? Your father married your mother in this state. . . . Say whether you have any objection to urge against those of us who regulate marriage." None, I should reply. "Or against those of us who after birth regulate the nurture and education of children, in which you also were trained. Were not the laws, which have the charge of education, right in commanding your father to train you in music and gymnastic?" Right, I should reply. "Well, then, since you were brought into the world and nurtured and educated by us, can you deny in the first place that you are our child. . . ., as your fathers were before you? And if this is true you are not on equal terms with us; nor can you think that you have a right to do to us what we are doing to you. Would you have any right to strike or revile or do any other evil to your father because you have been struck or reviled by him, or received some other evil at his hands? - you would not say this. And because we think right to destroy you, do you think that you have any right to destroy us in return, and your country as far as in you lies? Will you, O professor of true virtue, pretend that you are justified in this? Has a philosopher like you failed to discover that our country is more to be valued and higher and holier far than mother or father or any ancestor, and more to be regarded in the eyes of the gods and of men of understanding? also to be soothed, and gently and reverently entreated when angry, even more than a father, and either to be persuaded, or if not persuaded, to be obeyed? And when we are punished by her, whether with imprisonment or stripes, the punishment is to be endured in silence, and if she leads us to wounds or death in battle, thither we follow as is right; neither may anyone yield or retreat or leave his rank, but whether in battle or in a court of law, or in any other place, he must do what his city and his country order him; or he must change their view of what is just; and if he may do no violence to his father or mother, much less may he do violence to his country." What answer shall we make to this, Crito? Do the laws speak truly or do they not?

Crito says, "I think that they do."

Finally, just as a free man would himself like to be free, he has responsibility to see that all of his fellow-citizens are free. He must tolerate no discrimination, no artificial limitations of opportunity on others, no favoritism because of race or creed. He must be jealous of the freedom of others, not merely of their political freedom, nor even merely of their economic freedom - of their social freedom, of their status, of dignity and respectability and honor in their community. "That the honor of thy neighbor be as dear unto thee as thine own," said our Rabbis. We must respect

a man for what he is, regardless of the accident of his birth. "Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political." That is how Thomas Jefferson put it in his 1st Inaugural. That, of course, means responsibility for brotherhood, for an harmonious cooperative society.

And so, good friends, citizenship, which is the greatest privilege that can come to a human being - citizenship in a free society, which carries with it so many privileges, so many opportunities, which brings with it so much dignity to a human being - citizenship carries with it tremendous responsibilities, day-by-day responsibilities. "We, the People - " We, the People, who run a great government like the government of the United States - its power, its wealth, its majesty. We, the People, who by our power can unseat the Chief Executive and designate our legislators, can order everything we want to - We, the People - have the gravest responsibilities to see that what we do is wisely done, justly done. We have the responsibility so to discipline ourselves as to deserve the blessings of freedom.

Many citizens are aware of this. Unfortunately, all too many look upon a free country as freedom to do what they please just so they can keep out of the toils of the law.

There aren't many free societies left in the world today. They are getting fewer and fewer. We want to preserve this, the greatest and noblest society that man has ever created upon the face of the earth. We must think in terms of these serious and onerous responsibilities and try to live up to them.

1/ This is a prevalent fallacy that the free society
men have fewer responsibilities & in an unfree society - under
tyranny or despotism - under a monarchy or a dictatorship.
It is commonly assumed that because a man is not subject
to a ~~compulsory~~ superior authority in govt. which he
cannot control that because he is free to choose his
representatives who administer his govt, and ~~therefore~~ therefore
in the making of the laws of his ~~state~~ country that
he has fewer responsibilities. He is relieved of many
onerous obligations which he would otherwise have.

(a) There are those who believe that a free man is one
who can do anything he wants to do just as he does
not break any law as the state holds for which he
can be punished. Beyond that, he has no responsibility
to his govt, his country, or the society in which he
lives.

2/ Nothing can be further from the truth. A free
man is more responsible as a citizen to the state
than in unfree societies of subjection and autocracy or a feudal society.
The sole duty of an involuntary subject is to obey.
and his obedience is not a matter of choice. It is
not a moral virtue - Failure to obey brings on
condemnation and punishment. He who shies under
subjection and compulsion assumes no responsibility
for his conduct, for the despot or the govt which makes

41. Must be prepared to do his own thinking.
Must guard himself ag. being swayed by mass judgments (3)
and mass prejudices.

Special interests have perfected the dangerous art of spreading
whereby the mind, man is attracted - practical judgment undermined - forecasts and half-truths
highly charged with emotionalism - are funnelled
into the minds year to day - confusing & confusing
them - and incapacitating them for clear, clear and
independent thought.

This is the gravest threat to free govt. to day.
It is not easy to guard oneself to insulate one-
self of it - It is subtle, pervasive and per-
vasive.

But we must do it - screen what we hear,
& read; analyze, question, check & double
check - Try to get at the facts! Ask
yourself is it really so?

Not everything that comes from the mouth of a
news commentator - a news column - an
editorial - emanates from high authority in
govt - as the military is discredited
truth - a fallible judgment.
Compare - listen to a contrary view point -

- Don't jump at conclusions - Discriminated - ¹⁴
 - Inform yourself! - a pol. uneducated and immature people
 will not stay free long -
 - Self-education
 - Avoid mass hysteria - Think for yourself! Salvatore

5/ Don't be afraid to think for yourself - Cowardice is the
ruin of a free society -
 Don't be afraid to differ - and to express a contrary opinion
 - if it is an honest and reasonable opinion.
 In a democ. the majority governs - but the majority may
 at times be wrong - It is the moral duty of a free
 citizen to call attention to such a way - to advocate
what he regards is the truth - the right way
 And not be deterred by criticism, abuse or intimidation
 It is his duty to speak up - and not by his silence,
indifference or calculated prudence, confirm the wrong
 and perpetuate the evil.

Despots and dictators - and their lackeys - count on
 their retreat success - on the timidity, submissiveness
 and weakness for complicity on the part, most people

"Cry aloud, spare not. lift up thy voice like a horn,
 and declare unto my people their transgressions, and to the
 house of Jacob their sins" - Go to work with them - cooperate but

6/ Don't be afraid to stand alone - Good to work with them - cooperate but
Defend intell. freedom and indep. of judgment and the
right of expression of others. This is an even more

5

① ~~Resist to temptation~~

But no vest. should be perpetuated, must be. it is venerable. There is nothing static abt souls and

institutions - no finality.
Govts are constituted to make secure human rights. (6)
They are the servants of man

(a) Change ^{+ progress} should be sought thru education, information
of the popular mind and will ^{common consent} thru democratic process -
not thru dict. of a minority ^{+ violence}. Democ. is not only
an end. It is also a means!

8/ Must take active part in Govt - Place in position
of authority the best - Men of ability - Integrity -
Keep in touch with them.
Merely to criticize, ~~then~~ do is not enough.

9/ Ref. to defend our country - even when we do not
approve of its policies. Try to change them -

(a) will never fight ag. Soviet Union - Unjustified

(b) Socrates Indis (Critic) by a harsh government
induced to escape - (not just, but in
the face of his life
- desert his family)
The laws would come and
argue - (p. 434)

10/ I want to be free - Ref. to so that others are -
No oppression - no discrimination - no artif. limitation
of freedom - no favorites! - It is wrong
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"Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever State
or persuasion religious or political." Thom. Jefferson - 1st Inaugural

11/ Ref. for Brotherhood - An harmonious co-oper. society -
- an action worker for the good society

12/ Citizenship - is concurrent with
'We, the People' -

