

KINGSWOOD COLLEGE SPEECH DAY ADDRESS

3 OCTOBER 1977

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Headmaster, Members of Kingswood College, Ladies and Gentlemen, I esteem it a great privilege to have been invited to address you this afternoon. Over the years I have come to know a fair cross-section of the former pupils of this school, from a variety of age groups and walks of life. From my acquaintantship with them, and from what I have learned about Kingswood during the years that I have lived in Grahamstown, I have the highest regard for the sterling qualities of this excellent school. Your independence of spirit and your instinctive ability to grasp what is of central importance in human endeavour, and to pursue it with single-minded efficiency and lack of ostentation, are object lessons worthy of the most careful consideration. The attention which is devoted to academic work, without for a moment losing sight of the intellectual and moral formation of the whole person, is most clearly evidenced by the oustanding results achieved in a succession of national olympiads, as well as by performance in public examinations. Exceptional endeavours too have been recorded on your playing fields and in a host of other cultural and general activities. Less obviously, but of equal importance, your Council has demonstrated extraordinary skill in the careful husbanding of resources during these trouble times of financial stringency. I extend my congratulations to you all.

Those of you who are nearing the end of your school careers may well be excused a certain natural tendency to look forward to a period of life when you will be accorded a greater measure of personal freedom. School life, particularly boarding school life, is a very structured existence. One looks forward to a time when one will be free to do as one likes. I remember very well having the same feelings myself. A particular resentment that I felt was a parental interdict against swimming alone in the sea. "You can do as you like when you are over twenty-one" my father frequently used to say. Strangely enough, after I had turned twenty-one I had no great desire to swim alone. Perhaps I had been "wiped out" sufficiently often by large breakers to appreciate his point of view.

It is as well this afternoon to probe a little deeper as to what freedom really is. Our first response is to think of freedom as being a state of unconstraint, the very opposite of the young man's situation depicted in these well-known lines from Langford Reed's Limerick Book:

There was a young man who said "Damn!  
At last I've found out that I am  
A creature that moves  
In determinate grooves,  
In short not a bus but a tram."

We call to mind phrases such as "free as a bird" or "Born Free" as in Joy Adamson's well-known book about returning a lion to its natural habitat. A forest tree could be described as free because it sprouts branches "wherever it likes", whereas an orchard tree or vine is pruned. The ultimate symbol of virile freedom is the wild Mustang roaming the wide unfenced plains of the legendary American West of Cowboys and Indians.

Freedom in this sense of doing as we please is the very stuff of daydreams, particularly after a bout of swotting or hard work. Getting up when we will, eating what and when we please, dressing as we wish, these are the activities we look forward to for a holiday period. Is this a goal or ideal around which we can build our complete lives? Can a whole nation live by such criteria and expect to be great? The very posing of the question is enough to convince us that we are not talking about real freedom but rather about sustained self-indulgence. Tennyson's Lotos-Eaters expressed it very well.

Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind  
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined,  
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.

Let me rather put before you another, deeper concept of freedom, much more coherent or goal-oriented in essence. I am speaking of freedom in the sense that the volunteer, in contrast to the dropout, might use it. The volunteer freely accepts the choice



of certain goals. He is not compelled to accept them, but having accepted them he also accepts the duties and obligations that are inseparably part of his choice. To use a word beloved of Calvinist philosophers, he is "konsekwent", or responsible for the logical consequences of his choice. He who strives to be a great athlete or a great pianist cannot avoid the self-discipline and responsibility of long hours of training and practice. Self-discipline and responsibility are inseparable from true freedom. To take a commoner example, a young man may choose to marry a particular girl. Having voluntarily made his choice he is no longer free in the sense of being uncommitted - but he is still free. In fact, the idea that one can remain uncommitted indefinitely to do as one pleases, is really illusory. Such a rudderless person ultimately falls victim to whatever is his dominant passion, be it avarice, gluttony, lust or anger. His very refusal to accept reasonable and responsible objectives is not an exercise of freedom, but an abuse of it. He eventually pays the price and becomes the opposite of a free man - a slave to some vice or other. I propose therefore to define a free man as one who is in the position to choose certain constructive goals for himself and who

(i) does not find himself subject to unreasonable, arbitrary and manmade constraints inhibiting him from reaching those goals,

and (ii) by his own actions does not himself place just such constraints on others, to hinder them from reaching their goals.

This second condition is necessary because freedom is by its very nature indivisible, and its exercise cannot properly interfere with the freedom of others.

Such then is a free man. What is a free society? It is, I submit, a society of free men, where the habits and outlook of free men are preserved, safeguarded and cultivated. Such a society does not imply that there are no laws. Indeed, the continuation of such a free society implies that actions which

militate against the exercise of freedom must be restrained. One of the greatest dangers facing free societies is the refusal, through a misplaced understanding of freedom, to act with sufficient resolution against those who would destroy it. It is unfortunate that not all men in a free society respect the ideals of the society, but they can only destroy it if the free men in it are not sufficiently vigilant. As with peace, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

Just as the enemies of freedom can coexist in a free society, so also can individual free men survive in a society that is not free, provided that they are prepared to suffer for their ideals, even to the the extent of loss of civil privileges, incarceration and even the ultimate penalty, death. It is not surprising therefore that free men in certain societies are as scarce as just men were in Sodom and Gomorrah. That they do exist at all is one of the crowning glories of the human spirit. Vilified by their leaders, spurned by their fellows they are accused of lack of patriotism, subversion, even treachery. Let us all be grateful for such lives. It is so easy to remain indifferent, or even alas to join in the general chorus of condemnation.

Let us consider a number of concrete examples.

(1) President Idi Amin, strongman of Uganda, can, and usually does, do exactly as he pleases. Does this then make him a free man? No, he is the licentious man par excellence. He is not free primarily because he denies that right to others. Furthermore, precisely because of the absence of moral constraints he is, according to a recent biographer, largely driven by lust and greed.

Is Uganda a free society? The question is an absurd one. It is an irrational and cruel society where one wild man usurps the freedom of all.

(2) Is the United States of America a free society? Judging by those fine phrases of the Declaration of Independence, one would be churlish to doubt. "We hold these truths to be



self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". The fledgling United States, however, was flawed from the beginning. Those stirring and fine-sounding words were for the ears of White men only. Dr. Samuel Johnson, in his robust High Tory way, put his finger unerringly on the flaw. "Sir", he is reported to have said, "it is remarkable how the loudest whelps for freedom come from the drivers of Negro slaves". The U.S.A., to its great credit, has striven mightily to remove the stain. The long and still unfolding saga of how that stigma on American freedom is being slowly eradicated, is one of the great dramas of human history.

(3) Is the average citizen of Switzerland a free man? I should answer without hesitation, "Yes". He can voluntarily make the fundamental choices of his life - religious adherence, education, marriage, profession, choice of domicile - without serious manmade restrictions; neither does he attempt to impose such restrictions on his compatriots. True, he may not always possess the means or talents commensurate with his ambitions, but these limitations will not have been created by his fellows. Further, he has inescapable obligations - taxes, obeying the laws, and above all, military service.

This latter point is one of the cardinal reasons why Switzerland is and remains the model of a free society. It also raises the great issue as to what a free man or free society must do when threatened by a tyrant. A condition of continued freedom is the ability to resist, to defend that freedom. We read in St. Luke that "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace his goods are in peace". The Swiss are indeed fortunate in this respect, for in addition to their preparedness they are heavily favoured by their mountainous geography. It is noteworthy how disproportionate a number of free societies have been located in mountainous areas, or else on islands.

Always being in a state of preparedness against tyrants, or would-be tyrants, is thus one of the best guarantees of freedom. This aphorism applies also to isolated individuals who defend,

not by force of arms, for that is not available to them, but by moral force, the ideal of freedom. When we consider some of the heroes revered by free men they fall naturally into two types - the great leaders and generals who successfully lead their people through the dark days, and then the individuals who kept their dangerous, lonely and uncomfortable vigils. In the first category are heroes such as Washington, Lincoln, Wellington and Churchill. In the second one could name Socrates, the great prophets of the Old Testament who confronted their Kings, men like Thomas More who would acknowledge his King as Head of the Church, but only insofar as the Law of God allowed, or Hampden who refused to pay unjust taxes. Nearer to home, but not of our time, we think of such men as Adam Tas in his conflict with van der Stel, or of Pringle and Fairbairn defending the freedom of the press against the strictures of the Colonial Government.

More suprising yet, even to think of them as free men at all, are Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German Theologian who returned to Germany at the outbreak of World War II, only to die a cruel death in prison at Hitler's hands; or of Josef Cardinal Mindzenty, that legendary symbol of the Hungarian struggle for freedom against the two greatest tyrannies of our time, Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the best known of them all, who surmounted the most all-pervading tyrannical machinery yet devised by man, explains in his Gulag Archipelago, such captives ultimately emerge as infinitely freer men than the captives who hold and scarify them.

Let us now bring the threads together, and apply these thoughts to our own time and our own society. Is South Africa a free society? Is it even a free society for Whites? Indeed, some of the ingrained habits of free men are not entirely forgotten in the still surviving deference which many of us pay to the concept of the Rule of Law, that sine qua non of free men. Yet surely, even the staunchest defender of South Africa must concede that our society is deeply, some would say incurably, flawed by the very defects that plagued the framers of the Declaration of Independence. The acid test of our concept of freedom is to ask who our contemporary heroes are. Paradoxically there are claimants to both categories of hero.



Are heroes to be found amongst our national leaders? Certainly, if exhorting us to prepare against the enemy at the gate makes a hero. Such also were the ancient kings of Israel. On the other hand, who, while not being blind to the external threat, bid us also look to the enemy within, are to be found in South Africa? Who indeed are playing the uncomfortable role of the Old Testament prophets, calling the people of God to repentance? The list, to our great credit, is a long one, both Black and White. One thinks of men and women of the stature of Margaret Ballinger, the Hoernlés, Alan Paton, Laurance Gandar, Archbishop Hurley, Dr. Manas Buthelezi, Rev. Beyers Naude or Mrs. Suzman, to name but a few. We may not agree with everything that each or all of them may have said, but nobody concerned with a peaceful and viable future for himself or his children, can afford to ignore them. Most important of all, none of us, as we come to look back from the vantage point of a few years ahead, will be able to offer the excuse of ignorance, or that we were not warned. As with the prophets of old, such folk are usually far from popular, but they, in the perspective of history, will emerge as the ultimate champions of our freedom.

The question of external threat, in spite of all the bombast and overblown rhetoric that surrounds it, is a very real one. We are in one of the cockpits of the gargantuan struggle of the two great ideologies of our time - Communism, fed by lust for power over men's minds and bodies and Capitalism, fuelled, at least in its pure form, by greed. As the old cow put it to her young heifer "The Red bull and the Black bull hate each other with an unquenchable fury, but their policy towards us cows is identical". The Eastern European social satirists, brought up in a more cautious school, express it more epigrammatically "In Capitalism man exploits man; in Communism it is the other way round!".

In accepting the need to prepare ourselves against the external threat we not infrequently find ourselves accused of condoning the flaws in our only partially free society. Unfortunately, the moral choices before men are not always simple. In the real

world the choice is often not between pure good and pure evil. If it were, it would entail no agony. Rather, it may well be a choice between partial freedom and no freedom.

A more pertinent question is "Do we best prepare ourselves against the perceived external threat by voluntarily surrendering too many liberties as part of the struggle?" The temptation is a subtle one, but it all too frequently leads to an abject acceptance of the very loss of liberty which we fear from the external source. Those more deeply schooled in freedom than we are have perceived the danger timeously. The British in Northern Ireland, for example, have accepted that an increased price in civilian casualties is a lesser moral cost than craven acquiescence in dawn raids, interrogation and detention without trial, accompanied by police methods subject to no accounting. Faced with such clearsighted courage and determination the I.R.A. is even now losing the taste for endless combat without prospect of ultimate success, and is preparing for truce. Condoning the longterm erosion of the civil liberties, both of ourselves and of others, is a higher price to pay than the increased carnage resulting from more serious civil commotion. Even so, it would not begin to approach the annual mayhem we already permit on our nation's highways. It never ceases to amaze me how unthinkingly we come to terms with 8 000 gruesome deaths and many more casualties on the roads every year. We are inclined to forget that in all the years of Mau Mau activity in Kenya fewer than fifty Whites were killed. The interminable years of urban strife in Ulster and all the terrorist activities in Rhodesia combined, do not even approach one year's slaughter on South African highways. No road safety campaign, however stringent, ever envisages any serious loss of civil liberties. We can hardly be persuaded even to use seatbelts. Yet, in the face of the prospect of guerilla action which, not even under the most pessimistic assumptions, is likely to reach one tenth of the road figures, we meekly surrender our birthright.

Given our strange, ambiguous and perilous circumstances, our proper response, it seems to me, is threefold.



- One            We must prepare ourselves soberly and realistically against external threats.
- Two            We cannot accept the facile argument that the suspension of our internal liberties is a regrettable but necessary sacrifice in the struggle against the external enemy. William Pitt the Younger still challenges us with his oft-quoted words "Necessity is the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It is the argument of tyrants; it is the creed of slaves".
- Three          We must not be guilty of baying for the blood of the prophets of our day, who have the courage to show us where our duty lies.

Finally, members of Kingswood College, are there to be found in this school, and in this audience those who will rise up to become the South African Socrates, to accept the mantle of Elijah, or to assume the role of a latter day Adam Tas or Thomas Pringle? Those whose consciences have urged them to follow such a path have often suffered defamation, ostracism, detention, prison or even death, but they have carried the ultimate honour of their people on their backs. The world would have been a poorer place without them. Would to God, for the sake of the fair name of South Africa, and for a wider and more generous freedom in this beloved land, that there are some to be found.

For those of us, the vast majority, who are made of lesser clay than prophets and martyrs, I conclude by commending to you the words of Patrick S. Agbada, an unknown Nigerian, who as a correspondent to an international weekly had these words to say:-

"Marx is certainly dead. Communism will always remain a mirage, and Europe is dead. Europe died when it thought that God was dead.

I would like to state that many of us in Africa believe that it is only a system of love sustained by God, 'the prime mover' or

the 'secret behind electromagnetism', in conjunction with a pragmatic view of society and the practice of politics, that will create social justice, equality and happiness. The dictatorship of the proletariat, with its basis of hatred, cannot. Neither can any other system of human ideas.

Europe will have to accept that while intellectual exertion is desirable, all of philosophy is empty and futile. It will have to rediscover a faith that will, this time, be capable of accommodating the utmost limits in science and technology, before it can stop groping and live again".

Is this a case of there always being something new out of Africa? I believe that we are rather being tactfully reminded of the most ancient verities whereby we should set our course.

D.S. Henderson

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