

CIVIC SERVICE, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA

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Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Sir,

Recently I was in London. I started off thinking I was on holiday and I ended up by attending the funeral of the greatest man of our time. I was very impressed by a number of matters associated with it. For example, his body lay in state in Westminster Hall. Westminster Hall is the most famous building in our history. It is very old. It was built by William Rufus. Dark, sombre, full of history. And there, on a little dais, lay the coffin with its custodians in uniform, and along two lines through the Hall there came the citizens of London, young and old, thousand after thousand, paying their homage.

I had wondered very much myself whether this great man, who was at the peak of his greatness more than twenty years ago, might be forgotten by younger people. I knew that grey-headed people like myself would never forget him; particularly those who like myself were fortunate enough to know him and to know him well. For us, it would be impossible to forget him. But I thought that those who were children in the greatest moments of his glory might now regard him as a remote historic figure of no more particular interest than other historic figures in the school-books.

I was delightfully pleased to see that a good half of all those who came through were young, exhibiting every possible mixture from those who looked quite usual to boys with long hair and girls with short hair. They all came through solemnly, with respect. It was a most amazing tribute and it confirmed in my mind the belief which I have always entertained that one of the great things in our character is a sense of continuity, that we are not here today and gone tomorrow, that we have had people before us and we will have people after us; we being influenced by those before us, and influencing those who come after us. This is the continuing city in reality that is referred to in the Bible and it is a great characteristic, particularly of our own people, and there it was that day, just as it was a few days later in St. Paul's Cathedral where the view, the picture, was unforgettable - the Queen there attending the funeral of her great Prime Minister.

Now I said just now that I knew him well. I did indeed. I was greatly privileged, and many weekends I have spent in his house and had many great matters to discuss with him from time to time. I always remember with a sort of sombre pride that on two occasions I disagreed with him, and I assure you, my friends, that took doing, because he was, of all men, the most formidable. But one night he said to me at the dinner-table something that I know he said elsewhere and which I know has now become familiar in the books. We were talking about war because this was a time of war. It was on every night, every day. And he gave me his great slogan -

In War, Fury
In Defeat, Defiance
In Victory, Magnanimity
In Peace, Goodwill.

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It's easy enough to say those words but they really stood for what he believed in. Time after time in my experience of him, when we were discussing some problem or other, I would say, "Don't you feel that such-and-such might be done", and his answer would be, "No. That couldn't be done. It couldn't be done because of the nature of man." And it is about that great element, the nature of man, that I just want to say a little to you this morning because we must never become so pessimistic, we must never become so sceptical of human virtue, as to become cynical about it. We must remember that there is something immortal in the nature of man. It is a continuing thing. It is indeed a continuing city in the heart and mind of man. The nature of man.

Now, it has been proved - if I may start with a practical example or two - that we are not, in our race, very great haters. In War, Fury. Yes, but you remember, not in Peace, Hatred. In Peace, Goodwill. Yesterday's enemy becomes tomorrow's friend time after time in the course of our history. After all, after the Napoleonic wars, as the boys and girls will remember, the French and the British were not what you might describe as great friends. There had been a generation of war between them, bitter wounds and bitter defeats, and the want of friendship, no doubt, endured a long time. And yet, in this century, France has been our ally and remains our ally in the North Atlantic Treaty. These things are forgotten, mercifully forgotten, because if we lived on our enmities for the rest of our lives, we would die the most miserable of people. It is in the nature of man not to nurture hatreds and not to live on their memory.

You know, Sir, I don't want to invade the field of theology of which you are a master, but the old observation that God made man in His own image has, I think, been rather misunderstood by some people, at least who appear to think of it in terms of a human image, a human body, a human appearance, and so we, in the old pictures that we used to look at when we were in Sunday School, we rather saw imaginary pictures of God as a man. This doesn't follow at all. When God made man in His own image, He wasn't creating something necessarily that had a physical resemblance to Him. He was creating something that had the God-like elements in the spirit and in the character. This is it.

If we are in His image, it is because we have within us a capacity for rising to great heights of pure virtue, side by side with a capacity for sinking to the lowest level of selfishness and bitterness; but these God-like elements in the human character, sometimes twisted, sometimes ignored, I believe survive and blossom and develop as life goes on. One has only to consider at a time like this the immense sacrifices that people have made, the highest sacrifices. This capacity for sacrifice, this capacity for preferring other people to oneself, this capacity for saying, "I will contribute all if it is for the good of the country," exhibited so frequently in war is a God-like quality. The capacity for sacrifice, the whole idea of sacrifice is at the very root of the Christian faith.

Man's incapacity for enduring hatred, I've said something about. I believe that it is one of the great elements in the nature of man. I think, indeed, that all the time we are with checks - sometimes with what appear to be a full stop - that we are proceeding along the path of civilisation so that one day we will be able to say - I won't perhaps, you won't perhaps, somebody will - that we are a fully civilised nation.

Now that brings me to the next little thing I wanted to mention to you. We talk rather glibly, don't we, about Western civilisation or ancient civilisation or Oriental civilisation. We take great pride in the fact that in this century, the most tremendous scientific marvels have occurred, not only in pure science but in applied science, in the technological field, marvels have been brought about. Some of the young boys here this morning might be fascinated to know that I saw the first motor car ever to come into our part of the State, and it wasn't a motor car as we now understand it. It was a monstrosity called a motor buggy. It looked like a buggy, and it was driven very precariously with a sort of one-lung engine. That was among the early motor vehicles in Australia. This is in my own time, and today there are so many motor vehicles on the roads that all those who rule over us are tearing their hair almost literally to know how they can cope with them. This is one of the marvels of technical civilisation.

I remember seeing for the first time in my life a moving picture, a movie. It was out of doors. Nobody would have thought of building a picture theatre in those days, and I remember the picture vividly, it jerked like that all the time, and it was called "The Great American Train Robbery". (Laughter) Well, that is only fifty-eight years ago and today we have talking pictures, we have the marvels of radio, we have the marvels of television, we fly through the air. I can be in four States in four days, unhappily to make four speeches (Laughter) because of the miracles of flight. And all this has made us rather pleased with ourselves, hasn't it, this half-century of enormous progress in the scientific and technical fields.

Yet in this same century we have had two great wars; we have had some of the greatest outpouring of brutality and hatred in the history of man. Anybody who wanted to sit in judgment on this century in respect of non-technical matters might well say that this was one of the most uncivilised centuries in modern history. Well, I don't want to go so far as to say that. That would be extravagant because these wars have had their compensating elements because of the nature of man, but I do want to remind you and to remind myself that civilisation has very little to do with aircraft or radios or transistors or television sets. Civilisation is in the heart and in the mind and those two elements will make us civilised and the century a civilised one.

Sir, one other thing I would like to say to you is this. We are a little inclined, aren't we, to make rather quick moral judgments about the conduct of other people. One sees this constantly in politics. In fact I don't mind admitting on my behalf, if not on behalf of Mr. Chipp that it is a constant temptation and one that has to be resisted - these quick moral judgments on what other people are doing and are doing in good faith. I had occasion to think about this recently, because I have been talking to you about the nature of man and my profound belief that as time goes on, with all its checks, the nature of man grows stronger and better. This is the path of civilisation.

But recently, for example, I have been hearing criticisms of the United States for intervening in a country called Vietnam. Very easy to be critical about what a great country like the United States does. I venture to say that what the United States is doing and the responsibility it is accepting for the good of all of us is one of the greatest manifestations of the nature of man, a very great piece of moral responsibility. And you have only to ask yourselves the simplest of questions: Why do you suppose that the United States, living in its own

continent, the richest country in the world, the strongest country in the world, why do you suppose it is engaging itself in a little piece of land in the South East of Asia and sending its men into it and losing men there and spending vast sums and producing vast stores of equipment? Why do you suppose they are doing it?

I hope I won't have anybody suppose that they are doing it because they want to make South Vietnam an American colony. That would be too silly for words. That would be, in the homely phrase, buying trouble. I don't think any of us would want to have one of these countries as a colony. Of course not. Is it because the Americans have enormous financial interests in that colony? I venture to think they have practically none. Then why are they doing it? Why are they, with all the temptations in the world to be isolationists, to say, "Well, we will protect our own interest. We have the wide seas on each side of us"; why do they send their men and their equipment thousands of miles away across the sea?

The answer to me is perfectly irresistible. They are doing it because they believe that what is at issue is human freedom and they believe that human freedom ought to be defended wherever it is challenged and that they, as the greatest power in the world, should accept the greatest responsibility for it. This is, in reality, a tremendous piece of altruism on their part. It involves a recognition that world power must be met by world responsibility and that what they believe in and what we believe in should be defended against attack. This is the greatest exhibition of this kind that we have seen since Great Britain stood alone in the last war.

It couldn't have happened, I think, fifty years ago, sixty years ago when Americans were a bit inclined to say, "We're here. We will look after ourselves. We are not concerned about the world." They are concerned about the world today. A very good thing for us that they are and a very good thing for the world that there should be a great power which makes it quite clear that it is not moved by individual selfishness or a narrow cultivation of its own national position but is moved by a feeling that it is its brother's keeper. This is the last, and I think, magnificent example of the nature of man.

And so, Sir, I end as I began. I can't think of Winston Churchill without thinking of what he has said to me about the nature of man. There are certain things that can't be done or that certainly can't be done in the long run because in this fashion, in this pervasive fashion, God has created us in his own image.
