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EXCERPTS OF REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE OBLATE COLLEGE DINNER, MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1969,
8:00 P.M., WASHINGTON, D.C.

I assure you this degree this evening will always be treasured by me. It gives me new inspiration. And this recognition from Oblate College under the patronage of the Mother of Christ shall serve as a standard and guidance in the days ahead.

Surely, in this time of trouble and temptation, we need such guidance. Too often we turn and see our ancient Christian and democratic ideals under assault from revolutionary minorities determined to take power, even if they destroy the country in the process.

Make no mistake, this is not a war of the poor against the rich, the black against the white, or the young against the old. It is a misguided adolescent revolt by a very small minority against the traditions of morality, hard work and self-discipline that have made this nation pre-eminent in the world.

But in our concern, we should not lose sight of the true facts. It is all too easy to misread the signs. We forget that behind the television cameras, life goes on as usual.

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Last year on campus, for example, it seemed that revolution was just around the corner. Some 225 campuses experienced disorders. Some three million dollars worth of damage was done and 4,000 students were arrested. What we forget is that major disruptions broke out on fewer than a dozen campuses and that a total of only 70,000 students participated in campus violence -- 70,000 out of a college group of over seven and one-half million. That is less than one percent.

But even this is too much, for it is not the size of this vocal minority, but their violence and extremism, the deliberate anti-Christ stance of some of their leaders. And I suspect their action may be a reflection of the religious skepticism at least in some of our population in this day and age.

I confess I do not understand these spiritual doubts. I look about me and I see a world that everywhere shows the handiwork of God. If the earth rotated at 50 miles per hour instead of 1,000 miles per hour, all vegetation would be burned to a crisp. If our orbit was much more elliptical than it is, we would boil half the time and freeze solid the other half.

If the moon were 18 percent further away, the oceans would cover almost the entire surface of the earth. And if the radiation of the sun increased by only one percent all life on earth would perish by fire.

The greatest mystery of all, life itself, is still beyond our understanding. These are miracles that we, as individuals, must acknowledge. And these are the well-springs of faith.

I suspect too the youthful extremist minority may be a result of the surrender to weakness by some of our adult population. We claim that we're the land of the free. Too many of us increasingly subject ourselves to unnatural dependencies, dependency on stimulants, dependency on psychiatry, dependency on sex, and dependency on handouts. We boast that we're the home of the brave, and yet too many are increasingly afraid of the streets, afraid of responsibility, and afraid of ourselves. Too many are buffeted by the winds of vast impersonal forces.

Too many feel enslaved by institutions we cannot control or comprehend. We need a rebirth of the stamina and fortitude of those men and women who obey and love the teachings of Christ.

The causes of youthful unrest are many and complex. I suggest, however, one solution may be a return to discipline. Now, discipline, by itself, is a harsh word, but it involves much more than just severity. I can probably best illustrate the discipline I would encourage by a story from my own upbringing.

When I was about seven or eight years old, I was not too young to start to do family chores. My brothers and I -- my brother particularly -- and I as the oldest, were expected to saw wood each afternoon when we came home from school, which we did.

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But one Spring afternoon, the temptation of playing baseball was much more urgent than sawing wood and brother and I decided that we might just skip this one afternoon's sawing of wood. When my father got home that night and found out that we hadn't sawed the wood, let me tell you we had the tar whaled out of us. And in Italian, we'd say we got "la mazzatta." And I mean we really got it that night.

And Pop indicated to us that we had really failed the family. But this was not discipline for discipline's sake. I didn't think so at the time, but it was discipline with love because the very next afternoon, what do you think happened? My dear, wonderful mother came out with my brother and myself and sat on the logs of wood on that sawhorse and she did that every afternoon to make sure that my brother and I sawed that wood every day so we wouldn't get a beating that night. That's the kind of love we had. And I might add I think that if we had a little more of that kind of discipline with love in our families here in America today, there'd probably be a great deal less of juvenile delinquency than you and I see today.

Now, I'm well aware that discipline is but a remedy. A true cure must reach deep into that love and appreciation for our nation and our rich inheritance that so many of us have, but which we accept as a matter of course. I'm fortunate in that, as a son of immigrant parents, I was never allowed to forget what a privilege it was to live in this great country. My father and mother came to this country to share in its freedom and to participate in the opportunities that it offered, primarily for their children; not so much for themselves. And they never ceased reminding their children how lucky we were to be born here. And I certainly know from my own experience how rich is this promise of opportunity.

And I remind myself constantly how fortunate I am to share in this precious prize of freedom. And I've also seen what it is not to be really free. I traveled to a nation some six years ago as the chairman of a delegation from our State Department. It was between my first and second term as Governor of Massachusetts.

I made this visit and it wasn't a weekend visit. I spent almost four weeks in this nation and I had a chance to see what it is to live behind the Iron Curtain. Yes, in one of its principal cities of millions of people, there was but one small Catholic church with a capacity of not over two hundred and fifty.

I spent a good deal of time looking, listening to what was happening in that nation. I had a chance to get to this small Catholic church on the only three occasions when it was open. And at one of those services, the last day I was in this major city, I wanted to go to Confession because I had missed Mass a couple of times during my travels through this country. I'd gone without my interpreter, which was taking quite a little chance because I didn't know the language! I finally made out to 3 ladies that I wanted to go to Confession.

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They pointed over to the Confessional and said, "Yes," in essence said the priest is over there. So I went over there and there were two or three ladies waiting in line. I got in line and waited and then went in and I started my Confession in English. And the good priest said, "Nyet, nyet, nyet", which means, "No, I can't understand." So he said, "Deutsch?" which means do you speak German and I said, "Nyet, nyet, nyet," because I couldn't speak that language either.

And all of a sudden he came out of the Confessional, pointed to his Sacristy and beckoned for me to follow. So I did follow him into the Sacristy and I thought maybe he had an American priest hidden there, but instead of that he pulled out a card written in English listing a few sins. And through "Nyet, nyet, nyet," and "Da, da, da," -- he heard my Confession.

But what impressed me that day mostly was 3 elderly women -- there were about 70 or 80 people in the church that morning -- and 3 elderly women were in the pew on the other side of the aisle. When it came time for the period of Consecration, they got out of their pew into the aisle; they knelt until their foreheads touched the floor and remained in that position during the entire Consecration period. They were praying as though it might be the last chance they'd have to pray and that has happened in this particular country. And I just wondered to myself, particularly as I returned to the United States, I don't want to say this emotionally, but just -- it's a fact. When I got back to Boston, I was so greatly privileged to be back and on my own soil, so privileged to be an American citizen, that I kneeled down and kissed the ground at that airport in East Boston.

I think about that visit to that nation quite often and I'm grateful that I live in America. And yet, here in this great country of ours where we enjoy religious freedom and there is a church, in some places, almost on every corner, how often do most of us stop by a church and just say, "Thank you, Dear Lord, for the great blessings and the freedom that I enjoy in this great country?"

There are those who say that the days of freedom and opportunity in our nation are over. And I say, "Rubbish!" The American Dream still lives and the opportunities are greater than ever.

I recall a statement by Eric Severeid which puts this in perspective and he wrote, and I quote him: "If by some magic, all barriers of emigration and immigration around the world were lifted tomorrow, by far the single biggest human caravan would start moving in one direction, our way." I know this reverence for freedom and this love of country is very much alive in our nation today. I know it inspires our Congress and I know it inspires our President, for he is truly a dedicated man. And my admiration for our President is greater than ever.

He's patiently working night and day to effect an honorable conclusion to the tragic war in Vietnam. He's undertaken to reform many of our vast unwieldy programs. He's working with certainty and dispatch to put his imprint on the reforms that will be so beneficial to our people.

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I think occasionally that we're too concerned with the problems of the youthful minority and the other unrest and agitations of the present. And it would do us well on occasion -- and I say only on occasions -- to set aside our newspaper or turn off the television set and look around us at what is more representative of our nation, what will not necessarily be in tomorrow's headlines, what is strong and good and true. We'd do well, for example, to consider the fine institution which brought us here tonight, the Oblate College.

The Oblate student can depend on the teaching he receives. He can know the lessons he learns in his classrooms are lasting, for it is learning which rests upon an eternal truth, the eternal truth that God has created this world and us on it. And it is through Him alone any of us do what we do. He alone can save it.

That truth has been imparted to hundreds of priests who, inspired by the holy life of the Virgin Mary, have taken the Christian message of redemptive love around the world, in Japan, the Philippines, Laos, Brazil, the Canadian Northwest, and in the armed services. Under great hardships and, often times, at great peril to themselves, they serve Mary Immaculate as they serve Christ himself.

Their devotion to the Blessed Virgin is total and is requited with equal totality. Surely, the Virgin must have been looking over this college and inspiring her leaders. And although as has been indicated it was started shortly after the turn of the century, it was only 11 years ago in 1958 that the college was authorized by the District of Columbia to grant the AB degree. And a year later -- only a year later -- the Masters and PhD degrees, an exceptionally rapid pace of academic advance. In 1965, the college was accredited by the Middle States Association. The remarkable progress has been so widely recognized that 9 different orders are now sending students here and the enrollment has increased immeasurably.

The college is distinguished among Catholic institutions by having appointed a lay majority to its Board of Regents, a bold development which augers well for the future.

I'm aware also of the Oblate College's outstanding lecture series which perhaps you read in the program this evening. Since the inception of this program, the college has had a President, our late, beloved General Eisenhower, and a Vice-President, who became his party's Presidential nominee, Hubert Humphrey, as participants in their lecture series. This certainly is an indication of the high respect in which the college is held.

I must take great pride as a Catholic in the upward thrust of this great institution. I believe the college will take an ever more prominent role in training priests for the pastoral services which is so essential to the spiritual well-being of man, of the church, and of society in general.

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I envy the young students at Oblate, for a vocation is God's greatest gift. There is no life which can compete with it. But to those of us denied this gift, I say a career in the public service is the next most satisfying. Many of us here tonight have chosen careers in public service. We're on common ground and we speak the same tongue. And I'm grateful that I have had the opportunity to serve. And I can't say that it's always been easy.

I remember many a night when I've gone home and I've thrown up my hands and I've said, "My God, did I ask for this job voluntarily? How'd I ever get into this?" But I know also that there were many other nights when I have gone home and I have thanked God for giving me the opportunity to serve my fellow man.

My concept of public life, I suppose, was best expressed by Thomas Jefferson. He said, "The care of human life and happiness is the first and only objective of good government." And I'm bothered somewhat by stories that I hear of some parents who try to discourage their children from entering the public service. I tell you in all honesty -- and I know that this audience will understand -- that I really did not begin to live fully until I entered public life.

Please don't tell your children that life in public service can't be rewarding or can't be conducted so that you still will be able to maintain your ideals and your principles.

The ancient Greek philosophers defined happiness as the utilization of all one's faculties in pursuit of a noble enterprise. I concur with this. And I ask what enterprise could be more worthy or more noble than in serving one's fellow humans?

At a recent cabinet meeting, we were discussing opportunity in America and the productivity of Americans and the thought occurred to me there in the Cabinet Room that men have always taken tremendous pride in their accomplishments. Granted we may temporarily feel relaxed and comfortable when we have the time to "goof off", as they say. Yet, in the long run, satisfaction and "mental comfort", (if you will) come from knowing that something worthwhile has been accomplished and not from goofing off.

And I believe that everyone connected with the Oblate College can enjoy a great feeling of satisfaction. This institution, which has the responsibility of training priests to carry God's word can instill in the students a profound sense of pride as they serve as priests of the people, for the people and with the people in the great tradition of good Pope John. And these dedicated and devoted pastoral leaders can instill in their parishioners the great need for individual accomplishments and the knowledge that accomplishment comes only through doing God's work.

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Those of us in public life can reap happiness, satisfaction and inner peace through the realization that our efforts bring happiness and inner peace to other members of the human family. We in public life have a full array of potential accomplishments. And those of you in this room know what they are.

A quote from Pope Leo XIII in the last decade of the 19th century would perhaps put it in a better perspective. He wrote before the turn of this century, "All Catholics must make themselves felt as active elements in daily political life in the countries where they live. They must penetrate wherever possible in the administration of civil affairs, must constantly exert the utmost vigilance and energy to prevent the usages of liberty from going beyond the limit sticks by God's law."

And I think that the key word in that passage is the word "all." He didn't just say some Catholics or some people. He said "all", because he recognized that without all citizens participating, you cannot maintain a democracy.

So yes, when we all strive together -- when the laity and the church have common goals for the freedom and the uplifting of man, we can count our blessings and consider ourselves fortunate.

We are privileged in this day and age to be able to pursue our daily path and at the same time, worship the Lord.

We are privileged despite the turmoil of the world around us to work to lighten another's burden. Yes, we are privileged in these trying times to work to serve our fellow man.

My dear friends, I know that those who serve in public life have had this feeling. I know I have had it. I have had more inner satisfaction from serving my fellow man than anything else I've ever done. And in a sense, when we serve our fellow man, aren't we truly serving God?

Thank you very much.

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