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## ANNUAL ADDRESS

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### FREEDOM AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

By

SIR KENNETH GRUBB, C.M.G., LL.D.

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THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE

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# FREEDOM AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

By SIR KENNETH GRUBB, C.M.G., LL.D.

THIS paper has been prepared in the conviction that the course of this world is ultimately determined by what men believe about God. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that men should be free to ascertain, believe and proclaim the truth, and that they should not be deterred from doing so by the deliberate actions of governments, by a structure of society which gravely impedes access to truth, or by the pretensions of religious authority itself. I am aware that my theme differs from those ordinarily selected for the annual lecture of this Institute. I do not apologize for this, for I am convinced of its importance. I shall not be concerned here to discuss the truth and accuracy of the Bible, but I hope to make it clear that only a Biblical approach can provide firm ground for the consideration of my subject.

Up to a few decades ago it would have been thought both unnecessary and presumptuous to voice again this familiar question of freedom of conscience—unnecessary, because in the great age of liberalism it was commonly held that such freedom really did exist with some degree of universality; presumptuous, because it was equally commonly held that man, by his assumed nobility of nature, would never decline from his devotion to freedom, but ever seek to enlarge its horizon. We can no longer count on this facile self-assurance which has become a self-deception. We live in a sterner and also a more confused age when the very foundations on which freedom was supposed to rest have been challenged, and the determining power of belief in moulding the institutions of human history is too often dimly perceived and only faintly acknowledged.

But I shall also argue that freedom of conscience is not enough: it must be completed by freedom of confession and of conversion. If men are ready either to dissimulate or to suffer, they can usually have freedom of conscience, although even that is not necessarily true to-day. It has never been true that liberty has been brightest in prisons, as the romantic poets have claimed, but it may be noblest there. What is at stake in the modern world is freedom to confess, to propagate and to convert; in a word freedom not necessarily of conscience, in the common sense, but of mission.

What on one side of the coin appears a freedom, on the other side bears the stamp of a human right. Human rights and freedoms are inseparably related. In these days the emphasis has come to be put upon human rights rather than freedoms, and there are sound reasons for this. But the difference is slight, for freedom is itself a human right. Human rights and human freedoms stand and fall together. To-day the struggle takes place over the issue of human rights, because the conception of freedom has been so much abused in the very experience of liberalism itself. Within that experience freedom has come to be regarded as something that just exists, that can, so to speak, be gathered from the air. This has altogether overlooked the truth that freedom is the result of healthy conditions in

society. Its existence implies certain conceptions about God, about the meaning of man's life and nature, and the functions of the state. It also demands a careful and generous understanding of the limitations of the economic order. Freedom without bread is simply liberty to starve. The realization that freedom and human rights must be considered in relation to the conditions of society has been a very healthy one for two principal reasons. It forces each generation to examine, define, secure and expand its freedoms anew, and it shows that freedom is, in practice, the product of a relationship between the different institutions and pressures that help to constitute a living society. As far as the Christian witness is concerned these institutions are mainly the Church itself and the State. But it should be carefully noted that Christians ask no freedom for themselves which they do not wish for others; on the contrary the struggle for religious freedom has not infrequently been the key to the general struggle for man's freedoms.

In developing this subject within the confines of a short paper I cannot do more than select certain leading aspects of it to the rigorous exclusion of others. I shall, therefore, devote myself, in the main, to examining briefly the following questions. What is the source of authority for maintaining and asserting human rights and freedoms for all men? From what quarters does the menace to full human rights and freedoms, particularly the right to maintain and confess the Christian faith, arise? And what is the present state of progress in the effort to secure and extend the observance of human rights, particularly in regard to the witness and life of the Christian Churches?

The first question, that of the authority for asserting human rights and freedoms, is obviously crucial. It has been instinctively recognized as such since the earliest days when man began to examine the meaning of his life, and to give intelligible voice to his tentative answers. The old Greek tragedians, in their endeavour to present, on the stage of Athens, the poignant drama of man's conflicts and sorrows, were fully aware of it, and Sophocles to whom, above all, it was a puzzle, poses the question as follows:

Oh may my constant feet not fail  
 Walking in the paths of righteousness  
 Sinless in word and deed—  
 True to those eternal laws  
 That scale for ever the high deep  
 Of heaven's pure ether, whence they sprang. . .  
 Mortal wisdom did not give them birth  
 And howsoe'er men may forget  
 They will not sleep.

The problem took a new turn when men began to toy with the idea of the natural law, an approach which was afterwards taken up and greatly

modified by the Catholic Church of the Dark and Middle Ages. Zeno, the Stoic, was the first to deal explicitly with it, and to argue that there was a natural law which was binding on all men, to which the laws of men must strive to conform. The undoubted truth of this famous conception became, however, rapidly obscured through the dangerous qualifications to which it was obviously subject. What was this natural law? Do men agree on its formulation? In what terms could it be expressed? Can it be other than a static conception? Were the celebrated laws of the city which, Socrates imagined, would arise to rebuke him if he availed himself of his friends' plans to extricate him from prison and death, really a reflection of the will to righteousness? If not, was there any reason why he should obey them and remain in prison? The argument continued across the centuries, and in modern forms it has become much more involved with the complications of society. Psychology came to throw new and sometimes perplexing light on the meaning of conscience and man's understanding of himself. The social and economic analysis of society showed that rights and freedoms which appealed to some men as natural were more or less meaningless to other men. All this has contributed to depreciate the authority and meaning of the idea of natural law, and debase its currency in the world of thought.

I think that much of this tendency to depreciation is due to the misleading nature of the phrase "natural law". What is surely at stake here is not really law at all. Law is the command of a sovereign, whether that sovereign be the sovereign people or anyone else. But when Rousseau, for example, speaks of the "conscience to love the good, means to ascertain it and freedom to choose it" as denoting an instinctive knowledge of natural law implanted in man by his Creator, he is not really dealing with law at all. He has in mind a natural pattern, or, if you like it, the natural principle of man's being. The concept of natural law can be supported from the Bible (see, for example, Rom. 2) and was early accepted by the Fathers of the Church. It was considered consistent with the old Biblical law, and with the law of the new Israel fulfilled in Christ. Indeed, it is implicit in the denunciations and appeals of the earliest Hebrew prophets from Amos onwards.

When men to-day speak of human rights and freedoms being derived from natural law, they are, therefore, thinking more of natural principles or an ideal pattern of which human law and institutions must strive to be an expression. Human rights are rightly called human, and, in the familiar language of constitutions, are rightly dubbed inalienable, because without them man would not be man, but something less than man, a beast: if you wish, a demon or even an angel, but not a man. The rights of man are nothing less than a direct derivation from the indispensable qualities of man. They are the supposed laws of his nature.

This, I think, would be generally admitted almost everywhere to-day,

even in the Communist states. The real dispute takes place over the origin and authority of these rights. So far from being an outmoded squabble of the philosophers, this is one of the crucial turning points of modern society, as was very evident in the final debates at the United Nations on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where the matter was brought into the open by several speakers. Briefly there are three views to be considered in this context.

There is the humanist view which largely coincides with what I have just summarized. The nature of man is discerned by a study of man himself. From this study it is evident that man possesses certain rights and freedoms which are indisputable constituents of his nature. He cannot be deprived of these without defacing it and thus relegating himself to some lower order of creation. He alone can define these rights, since they draw their authority from his own conception of his place in the universe, and the meaning of his life. If he is able to enjoy and pursue them, he is also capable of creating a civilization which will give them full and useful expression.

But there is a different view which holds that man's rights are vested in the State. He does not possess them as an individual, still less as one who has been created in the image of God. Since the State is man's sovereign, and law is the command of a sovereign, rights and freedoms are defined in law and decreed by the State alone. They are not possessed by persons by virtue of any natural claims, but conceded by the sovereign. There is no right to rights as of right. It follows that as the State has power to define and grant human rights and freedoms, it can abrogate or withdraw them just as readily, and in practice it not infrequently does so. This view is held in Communist countries quite explicitly, but it is apt to become implicit in the policies and sometimes the actions of other than Communist states. There is a tendency here that always needs to be carefully watched.

Finally, there is the view that man's rights are derived from the fact that he is a child of God, created in His image and likeness. This view takes two forms, the first of which leads, in practice, to much the same position as the purely humanist approach. Man has been endowed by his Creator with inalienable rights which are self-evident, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is his task to discover the meaning of these rights in the light of his own nature, as a child of God. Since he does not have access to any further self-disclosure or revelation by God, he must do that by studying to discover what are the principles by which he can live in a community of peace and justice with his fellows, his freedom being limited only by the corresponding freedoms of others. This is, roughly, the position taken by Locke, and Montesquieu, by the Deists and Encyclopædists, by the authors of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, and of the American constitution. Nor should it be

lightly dismissed as inadequate, since it has led to much happiness and freedom, and has been at the basis of the great liberal tradition of western European history.

But I submit that the Christian cannot be satisfied with this. He too will accept that since God has created man in His image, his rights and freedoms must reflect the sanctions of the divine law and must, as far as possible, be expressed in a human law which will be a reflection of it. But he will insist that this is an inadequate basis in itself, on which to rest a theory of human rights. The Christian must take a Biblical view. Natural law or natural principles only gather any full or concrete meaning when they are directly related to a self-disclosure or revelation of God, in the light of which the nature and meaning of man's life can be understood. It is the Christian claim that this revelation is recorded in the Bible, and receives its complete expression in Jesus Christ. Three consequences of utmost importance follow. One is that the nature of the divine law, and, therefore, the form and expression of those rights and liberties which must be defined in human law, can be perceived. The second is that the conception of rights is inevitably bound up with that of duties since, if man can perceive that the law of his nature is in fact found to rest in his obedience to the command of his absolute Sovereign, he has a duty, indeed, an obligation, to obey the will and word of that Sovereign. And the third is that the meaning of man's proper use of his rights and liberties is illustrated for him in the life of Jesus Christ.

I conclude, therefore, that although the claim to human rights and liberties can be made very cogently from the background of natural law alone, particularly if it is associated with the sanctions that derive from the conception of a Supreme Being, it is only Christianity that can sustain an adequate doctrine of rights. Similarly it is Christians who feel the claims of the law of God upon them most deeply, and the obligation to respond with duty and service. But since the Christian understanding of the authority, origin and nature of rights and freedoms is only partially acknowledged in human society, or not at all, it is not surprising that the Church has frequently been involved in conflict with the civil power. This is not to say that the Church has invariably been in the right in such conflicts, has always proceeded wisely, or has itself not abused its own powers. Alas! it has committed many of the faults from which history is unwilling to exonerate it. But it none the less remains true that the Church, in fighting for the right to believe, to confess and to welcome and permit change of belief and confession, has been defending the rights of all. It is, indeed, a liberal Catholic, Lord Acton, who has insisted that the theory of liberty demands the independence of the Church. Liberty cannot be left at the sole mercy of the State, even the democratic state; indeed it must not be left at the mercy of any purely human institution, for the sanction of the people is no higher than a human sanction.

Liberty must depend on obedience to God, whose law is the ultimate guarantee of freedom. "In Thy service," as the Anglican Prayer Book says, "is perfect freedom."

I now turn to the question of the contemporary threat to freedom and rights, and in particular the threat to the confession and propagation of the Christian faith. If it be true that the safeguard of freedom lies in the independence of the Church, it means that once again we must fight in the hard-trodden field of the relations of Church and State. What is comprised in the somewhat dangerous words that I have used, "the independence of the Church", is a spiritual independence. The Church as an organization can exist in various forms of association with or separation from the State, but it can never agree that its doctrine be determined by the State or its order and worship altered to oblige the peremptory demands of rulers. In these matters it owes obedience to its divine Head. For that reason it cannot live a full and satisfying life under regimes where rights and liberties are regarded as the perquisites of the State, to be loaned out to citizens or corporations as convenience may require. In such cases it may profit from a measure of conceded freedom, but it is a freedom not of right, but of sufferance. This is the situation in Communist countries to-day.

But if it be granted that the independence of the Church is essential to its freedom and its witness, it must be admitted that this implies a kind of dualism in history, at least in all that history that we dub "A.D." There is the Church, and there is the State: throughout the centuries they have entered into relations with one another, sometimes fruitful, sometimes false. Almost every historic country of Western Europe, not least our own, can illustrate this. It was a problem well perceived by St. Augustine and even more clearly by Dante in his prose work, *De Monarchia*. It belongs to the very stuff of European history. So far from being solved at the Reformation, or by the modern formula of the separation of Church and State, or by Mazzini's motto of a Free Church in a Free State, it has continued to exist even where such attempts at solution have been bravely adopted. This is due to the simple fact that all these formulæ ignore the overwhelming pretensions created by the possession of power, whether civil or ecclesiastical; they presuppose a moral and spiritual void within which freedom can float as a shadowy wraith. The truth is that the very tension in which Church and State must exist to the end of time is a part of the price which must be paid for the preservation of man's rights and liberties. There have been times in history, as in the Middle Ages or Czarist Russia, when the Church has acquired far too much power. And there are times, such as to-day, when the State, in many countries, has been able to do the same. In either case, freedom is threatened. To-day, with certain important exceptions, the threat comes from the side of the State.



When the Church has to survive in a total state like Soviet Russia, the nature of the threat is unmistakable. But it should not be supposed that the menace is limited to situations of such clear and overt opposition. Democracy itself contains the seeds of the same peril. The highest repository of power in democracy is the *demos*, the people. It is said that you cannot deceive all of the people all of the time, but they can do so themselves for as long as they like. Those who understand this will not in the least be surprised that modern democracies are unable to resist the concentration of power, albeit almost imperceptibly, in the hands of the State. Do we not see it going on all around? The Christian conception, once again, is that power belongs unto God, who alone is the final Judge of men and nations. The Church, as much in democracy as in any other form of State, must insist on its freedom to declare and obey the counsel of God. If it does so faithfully, then it will be found, as has happened before, that it has been defending the rights and freedoms of all.

But the Church itself has its own temptation to power, and does not always resist it. So the Church, in its turn, becomes a threat to human rights and freedoms. This is unfortunately apt to be true of the Roman Catholic Church when it possesses a dominant position as in Spain or in Colombia. What actually occurs is that a *mariage de convenance* is consummated between an anxious Church and a willing State, and in such cases, the independence necessary to freedom, and the freedom indispensable to independence are alike submerged. The resultant position of religious minorities is often distressing. The situation is not very dissimilar when a non-Christian religious system, such as Islam, works in close association with the State. But the assumptions on which such an alliance rests are often different, because the theory of the State, held by these religious systems, is different.

The readiness with which the Church itself, or any other religious system, succumbs to the temptation of power, and enters into an alliance with the State as the executor of power, leads to particular dangers for the Christian mission. The conception of "mission" implies the diffusion of a belief by means of a message and witness designed to effect change and conversion to that belief. When religion enters into an association of power with the State, it is a minimum assumption on both sides that the *status quo* be preserved: that is, the Church shall be guarded from heresy and the State from non-conforming citizens. This is evident if it be remembered that it is the first instinct of power to seek its own preservation. The consequences of this conservation of power in Church and State are two-fold. Firstly, even if, because of the presence of historical minorities, such as the Waldensians in Italy, it has to be admitted that freedom of religious belief be allowed as a basic human right, it is sought to prevent that their numbers be extended by preaching and the receiving

of converts. In other words the right of some men to manifest and others to change their beliefs is denied.

Secondly, since the State has its own pretensions of power, the self-consciousness of modern nationalism is very alive to the dignity of its own prerogatives. It is, therefore, very easy for the modern State, especially if it is moved thereto by the leaders of a dominant religion, to limit or forbid the right of foreigners to engage in a religious ministry of a relatively novel kind. This sort of restriction is a serious blow to the work of missions. But it cannot be regarded in the same light as the denial of fundamental human rights and liberties. In the modern world the national state is the only real political sovereign, and its sovereignty is limited to a very minor degree by its international obligations and by such documents as the Charter of the United Nations. A solution may eventually be found through the development and wider application of international law, and the enlargement of reciprocal facilities and obligations between the nations. No freedom, not even the freedom of Christian witness, is unlimited, and what is in question here is not the right to witness to and spread one's faith, but the right to do so in particular ways and places. Restrictions of this kind should not be complacently accepted, but they are not to be regarded as in the same category as the denial of more fundamental rights.

Christianity is a witnessing faith: it survives only by growth. The testimony to Jesus and the Resurrection was the impelling force behind the expansion of the early Church. On the other hand, the modern world, with its conveniently relativist views of the coexistence of cultures, and its concentration on technical progress to the depreciation of the quest for truth, is not sympathetic to the idea of conversion. For this reason alone, it is essential to the freedom of the Christian witness that the Church should understand the front on which the battle is being waged. The Church cannot be content with anything less than the freedom of witness and teaching, and the right to change belief.

I hope that I have now somewhat cleared the ground for answering my third and last question. Where do we stand to-day in the effort to secure rights and freedoms adequate for the life and witness of the Church? You will not, I hope, expect me to deal with this, country by country: if so, this paper would become something like Homer's catalogue of the ships, or, to change the metaphor, we would be unable to see the wood for the trees. It must be patent, I think, for the reasons I have summarized, and for others that I have not been able to cite, that the struggle for freedom of belief and witness is with us to-day in acute form. Communist theory and practice, other forms of dictatorship, extreme nationalism, the pretensions of dominant religious groups, the new Leviathan in the form of the highly organized progressive state with all its merits, and the sensitive pride of men in their own scientific and technical

progress—all create a novel and difficult, but not intractable, world situation.

A first attack on the difficulty has been made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. The Declaration is a document adopted by the United Nations—at the final vote there were 48 in favour, none against, and 8 abstentions. It is not a document which has to be ratified or adopted by the nations; it stands only as a declaration of principles to which the nations give their general assent; it has no legislative or binding authority. It may be hoped that, in course of time, it may come to have an influence on the outlook of men such as has been accorded to the principles of the Magna Carta, or the American Declaration of Independence, or the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. The question of how to strengthen the Declaration by Covenants which will be submitted for formal adoption by the nations is under consideration. It must be always remembered, however, that all procedure by legal enactment demands a certain sincerity and good faith between men, and the State itself is bound to define the limits of freedom in the interest of public order and morality.

Article 18 of the Declaration reads as follows: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." It will be observed that this article is formulated so as to include not only the right to worship, but the right to teach; not only the right of individuals to do these things, but the right to do them in association with others; and not only the right to believe, but the right to change one's belief. If this last provision is taken in conjunction with the right of manifestation and teaching, it is a clearly expressed sanction of the maintenance of religious missions and the use of reasonable persuasion, for example by means of witness or manifestation, teaching and practice, in order to convert.

The actual form of this article, in the redaction of which the Churches, through the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, have had considerable influence, is satisfactory. But the situation in the world is anything but satisfactory. Indeed, it is hardly open to question that religious intolerance is a pressing problem of our time; and of the complaints which reach the United Nations on violations of human rights, the vast majority relate to alleged interference with religious freedom. But the importance of establishing a standard should not be overlooked. Probably further advance will not be achieved by international action alone, but by States incorporating the principles of the Declaration into their domestic legislation.

But although I cannot here enter into the reasons and conditions of

intolerance in say, the U.S.S.R. and the Communist states, Spain, Colombia, Italy, certain parts of the Moslem world, or elsewhere, I must go on to show what seems to be the main line of approach in the endeavour to secure wider freedoms.

We must recognize the positive achievements of nationalism in developing the solidarity and progress of the newer nations especially. It ill becomes a nation with a long and continuous history like our own to belittle this. But there is an intense and fanatical nationalism to-day which has no place for diversities of free outlooks. When nationalism is Communist or fascist, or purely dictatorial in the personalist sense, it is apt to be hostile to religious freedom, freedom of witness, and the religious practices of minorities. A nation infected with this kind of nationalism will only allow it to subside to a reasonable emotional level when it can lay aside suspicions that its existence and foundations are being threatened by other nations, and enter into free reciprocal relations with them. That means the breaking down of barriers, and it is a contribution to the better observance of human rights and freedoms according to standards internationally accepted. But I do not think the mere formula of peaceful coexistence, so popular in the modern world, really indicates an international fellowship of the free and open kind that is here envisaged. It is not a genuine and willing living together, but a limited tolerance imposed by a frail balance of power and interests. It solves, in a certain crude and immediate manner, the problem of peace, but not that of justice. It means that if you commit a murder, I, your neighbour in the street, can do nothing about it, since there is no law and no police, but only an unstable agreement that I will coexist with you, in other words, live next door—until, perhaps, my own turn as victim comes round.

A true international order, in which freedom and rights are no longer threatened, requires at least a minimum of agreement on a common set of guiding principles. These cannot be expressed in specifically Christian terminology, since in this matter we are dealing with many who are not Christians. But such principles ought to be of Christian inspiration. We tried to wrestle with this in a preliminary way, at the recent Assembly of the W.C.C., under the heading "Towards an International Ethos" and we tentatively advanced the following considerations as constituting the foundations of such an ethos:

1. All power carries responsibility and all nations are trustees of power which should be used for the common good.
2. All nations are subject to moral law, and should strive to abide by the accepted principles of international law to develop this law and to enforce it through common actions.
3. All nations should honour their pledged word and international agreements into which they have entered.

4. No nation in an international dispute has the right to be sole judge in its own cause or to resort to war to advance its policies, but should seek to settle disputes by direct negotiation or by submitting them to conciliation, arbitration, or a judicial settlement.
5. All nations have a moral obligation to ensure universal security and to this end should support measures designed to deny victory to a declared aggressor.
6. All nations should recognize and safeguard the inherent dignity, worth, and essential rights of the human person, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.
7. Each nation should recognize the rights of every other nation, which observes such standards, to live by and proclaim its own political and social beliefs, provided that it does not seek by coercion, threat, infiltration or deception to impose these on other nations.
8. All nations should recognize an obligation to share their scientific and technical skills with peoples in less developed regions, and to help the victims of disaster in other lands.
9. All nations should strive to develop cordial relations with their neighbours, encourage friendly cultural and commercial dealings, and join in creative international efforts for human welfare.

Obviously, we are a very long way from all that, and the road winds uphill to the very end.

Finally, and by far the most important, is the growth and development of the Church itself. By its extension throughout the world the Church provides a form of association between men whose lives have been subordinated to the obedience of Christ. Thus the Church offers a loyalty in fellowship which transcends the loyalties of nationalism, and mitigates the sharper acerbities of natural antagonisms and tensions. It does not follow that the higher loyalty must conflict with the loyalty to the nation-state, since, as we have seen, the Church and the State are both necessary to man's full life in community. But insofar as the existence of the Church mollifies the asperities of national confrontations, it contributes to the growth of that understanding in which human rights and freedoms, including the Church's own freedoms, can flourish.

And it is in the Church, and by the teaching of the Church with its authority in Holy Scripture, that the conception of rights and freedoms can be put on the only sound and enduring basis, since the Church derives them direct from the law of God and the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. Here we stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and advance from that to give it full meaning, in all charity and understanding, in the witness and life, individual and corporate, of Christians in the world. Here we have stable ground beneath our feet, and sure standards to which to appeal. Thus, while freedom is essential to the Christian mission, it is from that mission that it derives its ultimate sanction.

It is not to be supposed that full freedom of Christian witness can be secured in any age without suffering, and, maybe, martyrdom. In opening this lecture I remarked that the course of history is determined by God and by what men believe about Him. I might well have added that this is more than ordinarily true of those beliefs for which men are prepared to suffer. This lesson is writ large across the pages of man's long history. If belief is worth living for, it is worth dying for, and the readiness to accept sacrifice is a test of the truth of mission.