

# 10 TESTS OF A FREE SOCIETY

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this is a responsibility not of the schools but of society. We must not expect, as most of us do, too much of our schools...

All this means, among other things, that we must abandon that easy and shabby pose of anti-intellectualism so popular in our own time. It is unbefitting in a people who have made a religion of education, who

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have been more successful in mass education than any other, whose whole political system rests upon the assumption of an enlightened electorate, whose greatest leaders were educational statesmen—it is unbefitting in such a people to indulge in sneers at intellectuals or to make the term "intellectual" a term of reproach. Ours is the only country where it is a term of reproach. And it is the last country where it should be!

It is nothing less than absurd to embrace the notion, now achieving some popularity, that universities are not primarily a place for the cultivation of the mind, but for other things—social graces, perhaps, or football! Whatever may be the virtue of athletics, or of the social graces, whatever may be the virtues of adaptation and accommodation, gregariousness, and fitting groups, and fitting patterns—and I think all of these virtues are exaggerated—whatever they may be, they

can and should be cultivated elsewhere than in the universities or the laboratories. Keep in mind that there are hundreds of forces and pressures and agencies all making for the cultivation of social graces, all making for conformity, for adaptation—almost all the pressures to which the young are exposed. We have conservatives enough. We have adapters enough. What we need is not more agencies to fit the individuals to groups, but some agency to fit the group to the individual, and fit the society to the individual.

There is, then, another test of a free society; a free society cherishes non-conformity. It knows that from the non-conformist, from the eccentric, from the dissenter have come many of the great ideas of freedom.

A free society must fertilize the soil in which non-conformity and dissent and individualism can grow. It must not only refrain from penalizing the non-conformist, whether by the penalty of the law, or by the penalty of dismissal from jobs, by the terrible penalty of social ostracism; it must provide premiums and rewards for the non-conformist and individualist. These are the men and women who give us our music, our art, our political ideas, our social ideas, and our religious ideas. Let us give aid and comfort to the dreamer and the come-outer, the eccentric and the lame duck, confident that from this group comes incomparably more than its normal share of the geniuses of the world.

A free society is a society which encourages experimentation and innovation... Those who welcome experimentation in the realm of engineering, but fear it in society are guilty of a profound inconsistency. I am not saying it is possible to tinker with society as you can tinker with an automobile engine, heaven help us! That attitude is a doctrinaire one and a dangerous one. I am saying that it is possible to experiment with social institutions, with political institutions. Certainly this is the meaning of our federal system; this is the meaning of the fact that we have always had denominationalism in America and not a state church. Any other attitude is a vote of no confidence in the present and in the future. It was Jefferson who decreed the notion that all wisdom was in the past, that the preceding generation held the

earth more freely than we and had a right to impose laws upon us and declare that the earth belongs to the dead and not the living.

An essential part of experimentation is, of course, diversity. Who can doubt that diversity is a distinguishing feature of a free society? Go, as I went last summer, from West Germany to East Germany—and West Germany hasn't had a long time of being a free society—and you are struck at once in the East with the sameness, the monotony, the drabness of life, with the drabness, the dullness, and monotony of thought. Free societies present a scene of endless activity and diversity, of endless and delightful play—play in the sense of the play of the mind, the play of the spirit. Free societies present a diversity in religious organization and a diversity in political organization. Not one political party, but two or more. Not one church, but as many as we choose to have. They present endless diversity in the realms of literature, art, and music, no official art, no official music, or official history. But each competing for our approval as each commercial product competes for our approval.

A free society is one that refrains not only from the ostentatious methods and devices of censorship or of suppression of opinion, but from visiting social and economic penalties on those guilty of dangerous or unpopular views. It refrains from depriving them of their jobs, of excluding them from clubs; it refrains from using a sort of social Bill of Attainder...

We are witnessing today a revival of absolutism in many fields. Now I think it is true that those societies with the longest experience with freedom are societies that resolutely repudiate absolutes. For they know that absolutism is the mortal foe of compromise, of evolution, of experimentation, and of tolerance. Freedom, itself, may be called an absolute; but even here there are common sense limits, the kind of limits that Justice Holmes had in mind in his famous observation that there was no freedom to shout fire in a crowded theatre, the kind of limits that civil libertarians recognize when they refuse to champion the purveyors of obscenity in comic books for children on the specious grounds that it is an infringement of liberty of the press. Absolutism has ever been the

enemy of freedom and the parent of fanaticism, as it is today.

It is a test of a free society that it never imposes or permits any group to impose its notions upon others by intimidation. It does not permit this because there is always a chance that those who are so sure of themselves may be wrong. It does not do this because it knows that ideas, even true ideas, imposed by force, lose much of their value. It does not do this because it will not sacrifice the tremendous educational value of free discussion, and the independent discovery of truth by all concerned. It does not do this because it knows that societies that do it never achieve a genuine unity or agreement, but seethe with hidden dissensions and are torn apart by internecine wars. It does not do this because it knows that all genuine unity, like genuine loyalty, genuine faith, grow from within and cannot be imposed from without.

Another test of a free society is a free and responsible press... What is not always obvious, though it should be, is that a press must not only be free; it must be responsible. What is not always obvious is that freedom carries with it obligations. Freedom of the press is not a negative concept; it is not merely a happy device to avoid censorship or government control. As our freedom generally has been positive and creative, so freedom of the press must be positive and creative. It involves not only the right to tell the truth but the obligation to tell the truth and the whole truth, in so far as that is possible. It is something that conditions the whole press, not just the editorial columns. It conditions the cartoons, news reports, the book reviews, the advertisements... The obligations of freedom and responsibility are as implacable for magazines and books as they are for the newspapers. Who can delude himself that in America these obligations are fulfilled?

A free society—and this is one of the important tests—a free society depends not on restraint, but on self-restraint. We must learn not only to respect the legal and constitutional restraints which we have placed upon ourselves; we must learn self-restraint, moral restraint, if you will... A free society respects its courts and its judges so much that it does

not seek to intimidate them, but it places ultimate reliance not so much on courts and judges, but on the intelligence and virtue of the people... There is another test of freedom, namely, public service and public activity. By this test where do we stand? A smaller percentage of our citizens take the trouble to vote than in any other democratic state. This apathy towards voting is, however and fortunately, counter-balanced by a practice which is of utmost importance—participation in the affairs of the commonwealth not through politics but through private voluntary organizations... One crucial test of freedom in our society is the extent to which freedom is permitted these voluntary organizations, the extent to which they do flourish.

We judge a free society by the kind of men and women that it produces. Does the society produce men and women of independent minds and spirits? Does it produce men of integrity, men of courage, and men of virtue, to use an old-fashioned word—who value their intellectual and spiritual integrity above all other things? Does it produce men and women with a sense of loyalty not only to the state but also to the law? Not merely to the law but to the higher law, to the cause of truth itself, to loyalty itself? Does it produce not only statesmen, soldiers, and merchants but also artists, poets, and dreamers?

What we are saying is this: A free society cherishes the dignity of man and exalts it. It provides men with the opportunity to go on as far as their native talents will carry them. It erects no barriers of an artificial character... It does not try to subordinate man to the State, but keeps ever in mind that the State is made for man, and not man for the State. If it requires the services of men, as it does in time of war, it does so on terms compatible with individual integrity and dignity. It does not humiliate its citizens. It does not expose them to obloquy. It does not intimidate them or permit officials, clothed with temporary authority, to humiliate them. But it keeps ever in mind that in a free nation the citizen is master and the official is servant.

In short, a free society is a just society. This, more than any other single thing, distinguishes the free society from the slave society: A free society is one that never yields to the seductive but perilous doctrine that the end justifies the means, that private judgment may be substituted for legal proof. A society which disregards due process is in the process of disregarding justice itself. A society which permits and does not repudiate injustice to individuals, even to the weakest of them, is a society that has already lost a sense for the meaning of freedom and will soon lose freedom itself.

## CHURCH DINNER SLATED

Members of the congregation and the Sunday School of the Franklin Methodist Church will hold a picnic dinner in the church basement Sunday morning, immediately following the morning service.

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