

FROM: St. John's College
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ADDRESS OF JOHN W. OWENS
at the Inauguration of
Richard D. Weigle

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At the outset, I shall make the way easier for myself by confessing that I speak in platitude. As some of you may know, most of my life has been spent in an environment in which platitude is an ever-present help in time of trouble. But today I use the platitude not because of indolence; rather, I hope that it may be of some value. After all, a platitude is supposed to be a truism. There are times when the air is filled with a babel of voices and a man's integrity of thought may be served by holding fast to some long-tested truism and saying within himself: "This I believe!" In this particular setting, I venture to recall a truism of thought and of conduct which is some 2,000 years old. It is recorded in one of the great books -- Matthew xxii chapter, xxi verse: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." President Weigle has given you a sensitive review and appraisal of the idea which rules St. John's College. That idea stands, of course, against the background of our times. Taken together, the idea and the times make the truism laid down in Matthew a primary rule in our society.

As all of you know, we live in an age of authority -- an age of expanding authority in government. Wherever you turn your eyes in social organization you see expansion of authority. In the East of Europe and farther East, you see nation after nation which has passed under iron authority. This authority professes a philosophy which resembles the tender teaching of Christ. But its rule is iron. In the West of Europe, you see efforts under the democratic process to expand authority without the use of iron. In Britain, which taught us much of what we know about constitutional rights of the individual, one of the most fascinating of all experiments in social authority is pressed without ceasing. It is pressed by men

who remain at heart libertarians. In differing measures, the movement runs throughout the old civilizations in the West of Europe. Here in the United States you have seen in less than 20 years a social revolution which has profoundly altered much of our economy and much of our thought. Again under the democratic process, the authority of government has been expanded as never before in our history.

Almost nowhere is there sign of substantial retrogression in this movement to expand the authority of government. In Britain, where debate probably has been better than anywhere else, the issue is not on whether to travel backward, but on whether to slow down. In large parts of the British economy, the choice is between Socialists who say, "We will." and Tories who say, "We must." In our vast land, the movement toward authority is not so far advanced as in Britain, but again the debate is, in actuality, not on whether to travel backward, but on whether to slow down. I have not the time or the competence to trace the threads which have led from cause to effect in this movement toward authority. All of you read daily some section of the debate on cause and effect. All of you have read a thousand times discussion of the influence of modern industrialism on the social order. All of you have heard a thousand times discussion of the effects on the social order of the two deadliest of wars. All of you have heard theories on the interplay of industrialism and wars in forcing social change. Letting such discussion take its course, we find ourselves living before the towering fact that expansion of authority in government proceeds stubbornly throughout the world -- almost as though it were ordained evolution.

Arising under the general phenomena and spreading its effects throughout the world is another towering fact. That is the division between East and West which affects the terms of government in all lands. In few nations are the effects more pronounced than in this country. Division compels us to prodigious measures of defense on a scale that may be called global. These measures of defense ratify and confirm the movement toward expansion of authority in government. Over and over again, additional authority must be delegated to the Chief Executive who also is

the Commander-in-Chief. Often the new authority which is delegated must be exercised in a degree of secrecy which is without precedent and gives further concentration to authority. No other course is feasible or possible.

All of this sums up into a condition which may be stated simply. In this gathering there is not one young man who can imagine, for himself, the freedom from regulation by government which older men, in their youth, took for granted as they took for granted the air they breathed. Regulation in this country is usually self-critical. For the most part, it is in the hands of men whose inner attitudes were formed in a day of freer individualism. Moreover, they are aware of public opinion and of the ballot. We retain the right to turn out one party and put in another. Nevertheless -- with one party in power or another -- spreading regulation by government is the rule. Authority to decide whether young men shall be free to build civilian careers or shall be dedicated to the military arts is a more imminent power than this nation ever has known save in actual war. Many thousands of young men -- and many thousands of those who can see the first hints of middle age -- cannot be sure how much of their lives and careers shall be at the order of government. But this is only the more intimate phase. As you know, regulation by government reaches into civilian life -- into industry, into finance, into agriculture, into labor. Unless the fates favor us, regulation will reach deeper and deeper into civilian life -- sometimes indirectly, sometimes directly.

There is no occasion for me to speak of the dangers which inhere in expansion and centralization of authority in government. You hear warnings each day and none is needed from me. But I should like to say a few words about protection against these known dangers. I believe that the foundation of protection will be found in the work of such schools of liberal education as St. John's College. For, in asking protection, we can no longer comfortably assume that our fathers did for us all that is necessary when they surrounded authority with signs which read: "Thou shalt not!" We cannot rely upon negations which long ago were written into constitutions and statutes. We have seen limitation after limitation give way under

necessity or appearance of necessity. In this age of authority, protection must once again be found in the affirmative will of the people themselves to preserve the essence of liberty -- not always the old forms of liberty, but the essence. Our generation, in the circumstances of our generation, must themselves preserve liberty as our fathers in their generation found a way to do.

We may find strength in our day by remembering that the will of our fathers to preserve liberty taught them in their day the way to forge instruments with which to preserve liberty. Their will made the difference between success and failure. Their will caused them to imbed the Bill of Rights in the written statement of our constitutional principles. But, had they not done so, their will would have imbedded the Bill of Rights in our constitutional practice.

In this country, the protection which must be sought is against failures in intelligence, rather than failures in character. As I have said, we retain the power to turn out one party and put in another. But, apart from the ballot, we live in no danger that authority will produce the man on horseback. Ours is not the climate in which Napoleons are produced. The muscular humor of the bleachers pervades our politics. The first of the actual dangers against which we need protection is the danger that we shall not find and gather the intelligence which will be required in administration of the gigantic machine of authority. We may blunder into acts of oppression. Broadly speaking, the administration of the gigantic machine of government which has been erected calls for two types of men. One is the technician who can keep the particulars in movement. The supply is fairly abundant. The other is -- for want of a better word -- the statesman who can keep the particulars in proportion and build them into ^a firm and yet flexible unit. That supply is not abundant. The next of the great dangers against which we must find protection is failure of the people to think. Already, the machine of governmental authority is so gigantic that there is no hope that the people can know more than fragments of the particulars with which technicians deal. The machine is so gigantic that many of the people also lose sight of the general movements with which

those we have called statesmen must deal. The burden of understanding is so heavy that the people could drift into habits of complacent obedience to authority, relieved only by more or less aimless outbursts of temper at the polls.

The broad base of protection against these twin dangers of failure in intelligence -- failure in the vast authority and failure in the people who live under authority -- can be stated in simple terms. The base of protection will be in spotting the life of our country with men who are bigger than their daily tasks. The base of protection will be in spotting the life our country with good lawyers who are more than good lawyers; with good engineers who are more than good engineers; with good doctors who are more than good doctors; with good financiers who are more than good financiers; with good farmers who are more than good farmers. The base of protection against the dangers of this age of authority will be in spotting our country with lawyers and engineers and doctors and financiers and farmers who are citizens of the world of thought which lives above and beyond tasks of the day. Out of such material we may breed the quality of men who will be big enough to administer the gigantic machine of authority and out of such material we may breed the quality of men who will lead the people in perception and in reason as they exercise their sovereign authority over the authority of government.

You may say that already we have spotted the life of our country with men of the quality that is required. The point can be argued. Certainly, we have spotted the life of our country with good men in the professions and in all the lines of material production. But a case can be made that we have compressed their minds. Nearly two centuries have passed since Adam Smith dropped into the melting pot of ideas his elucidation of the principle of division of labor. In our country, we have divided with a vengeance. Professions have been divided into sub-professions. We take the most promising material that comes out of the law schools and in a little while this material is divided into tax lawyers, insurance lawyers, admiralty lawyers, labor lawyers. The course is followed in other professions. One can hear a throat doctor tell a patient that he does not touch heart cases. For anything that

I know to the contrary, there may be bankers who are equivalents of throat men and heart men. We have made this division and subdivision of labor pay material dividends of which Adam Smith could not dream. But in our American way of doing things, we have brought into society able, brilliant, distinguished specialists who often know practically all there is to know in their own specialized fields and are dull mediocrity itself beyond their fields. So far as social and political institutions are concerned, there are distinguished specialists in the professions who seem to know no more than could be learned in a high-school course in civics. Some have had little time to learn more. And that is not all. In this greatest of democratic experiments, brilliant minds which are set apart for specialization are often taught that their priestly robes must not be contaminated by contact with the practicalities of government or politics -- save in special circumstances which will set them apart from pollution.

Few things deserve more of satire than the condescension toward government and politics of fortunate men who themselves do little more than the casting of an angry ballot or the sending of an angry check to the tax-collector.

Now, nothing could be more foolish than to deal lightly with the abundant fruits of division and subdivision of labor even when division is carried into the refinements of specialization which we know. The special training which makes a great throat doctor or a great heart doctor is one of the blessings of the human race. But, equally, we cannot be so foolish as to take much of our best brains and set it apart from the central issues of society -- from vital things in the common life. We cannot afford to take much of our best brains in this age of expanding authority in government and so narrow the life and work of those brains that they yield but scant material either for wise administration of vast authority in government or for wise criticism which will keep authority in its place. Our task is to keep the good minds and the brilliant minds as good and brilliant as ever in their own fields and yet to enlarge them for full performance of the duties of democratic citizenship in a period in which these duties call for all that we have in

intelligence.

If you will allow me to speak somewhat dogmatically in a field in which I should speak with extreme timidity, I will say that production of big citizenship in this democracy is today one of the first things that must be rendered unto God. After all has been rendered unto Caesar that must be rendered in this age of authority, there remains to be rendered unto God the production and development of those qualities in men which keep them erect on their feet as men and as members of a free society. Nowhere can that work be done so well as in the schools of liberal education. You do not, of course, have a monopoly. Society always has hidden assets. In some unknown hamlet, an unknown Lincoln may in this hour save coins with which to buy one or two great books, to be read after the day's toil and to be treasured as pearls of great price. He may appear. And he may voice the dreams of men in words so pregnant and so poetic that they will sing in the ears of posterity. But we cannot afford to wait for genius. A democracy must use its good material. And nowhere is there such opportunity as in the schools to take the good material that lies all around and to treat and develop and fashion it into fine material. Nowhere else is there such opportunity to take the men who are destined to be competent or distinguished in specialized fields and to make them into active members of the broad society of thought which must be the foundation of democratic aspirations. Nowhere else is there such opportunity to teach the final lesson that the search for wider communion of thought stops at no milestone and marches with man to the grave.

When I speak in these terms before a gathering at St. John's College, I realize that I do no more than reaffirm as best I can the doctrine by which you live and in which you have reared an exalted example. Perhaps, I should excuse myself for trying to say things which you have shown so well that you are able to say for yourselves and to do for yourselves. If an excuse is necessary, it is to be found in my conviction that St. John's College -- in training men to think and to think of many things, in training them to be bigger within their own minds than

the daily tasks which await them -- is meeting the first requirement of our democracy in this day. And, since our American democracy does not exist solely for its own glory, St. John's is doing the work of which mankind is most in need.

You are about to move into a new stage of your work. You are about to do so in a time when history races at top speed. And you will go into this stage under new leadership. I shall not occupy your time with conventional recital of the record in other places which shaped Richard Weigle for leadership of St. John's. You know the record. Instead, I shall embarrass President Weigle. Some of you have learned to read the stories which are written on the faces of men by their inner thoughts. You will know that President Weigle is, inside of himself, the scholar whose life is dedicated to pursuit of truth. No more need be said of his coming to St. John's. But I should like to say one word to the young scholars of St. John's. Were I of your age, facing the world that lies ahead of us, I hope that I would be wise enough to offer humble thanks that a little time had been given me, here in these quiet and gracious halls, to follow Richard Weigle in meditation with the great minds and the great souls who lighted lanterns in the darkness of the past.
