



Hillsdale College Hillsdale, Michigan 49242 Vol. 8, No. 8
August 1979

FAITH AND FREEDOM

By George C. Roche III

George Roche has been President of Hillsdale College since 1971. Prior to that he was Director of Seminars at the Foundation for Economic Education, where he travelled annually 100,000 miles defending free enterprise, limited government, and individual freedom. Before that he taught history and philosophy at the Colorado School of Mines. He received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Colorado.

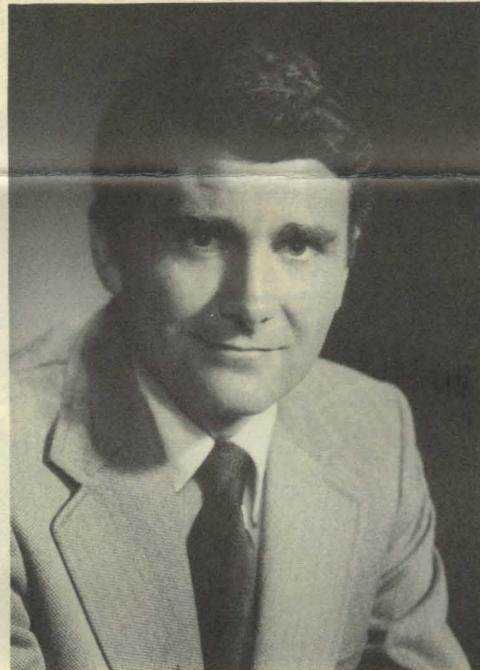
A member of a number of professional and academic organizations, President Roche has won the coveted Freedom Leadership Award from the Freedoms Foundation. He has contributed several hundred articles to a number of national and international journals and is the author of five books. Perhaps his love for traditional American freedoms originated high in the Rockies where he grew up attending a one-room country school.

President Roche recently delivered the following sermon in the Chicago Temple, Chicago, Illinois, following Hillsdale College's "Evening for Freedom" gala in that city.

"I am the light of the world," Christ told us, in a phrase which seems peculiarly suited to our present age, darkened as it is with problems on every hand. He also told us, "Let your light shine before men." On those occasions when I find myself in the pulpit, I have a great longing to do just that—to shed some light in a darkened world, to say something truly worth hearing. How many words most of us speak! How little real light we usually shed!

And yet, we have the right words and thoughts available to us. If we are truly dissatisfied with today's worldly values and attitudes, we *do* have an alternative—a magnificent alternative first offered us 2000 years ago near the Sea of Galilee.

Today a person who rejects the worldly values of contemporary society and turns his faith to Christ is



called an escapist, a pessimist, a fool. And yet, surely there can be nothing pessimistic or foolish in turning from the passing pleasures of this life to the eternal satisfactions offered us in the Bible. The Gospels tell us that with God's grace we may escape from death and decay, achieving what St. Paul called "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

What could be more truly optimistic than for us puny mortals to aspire to such dizzying grandeur? How could any man, having once grasped, even for an instant, the mysteries of the universe, what Isaiah called "the life of the soul," ever again take seriously fame, money, sensual pleasure or any of the other worldly delusions daily offered us by our newspapers and television screens?

Listen for a moment to the testimony of one very

im•pri•mis (im-pri-miš) adv. In the first place. Middle English, from Latin in primis, among the first (things).

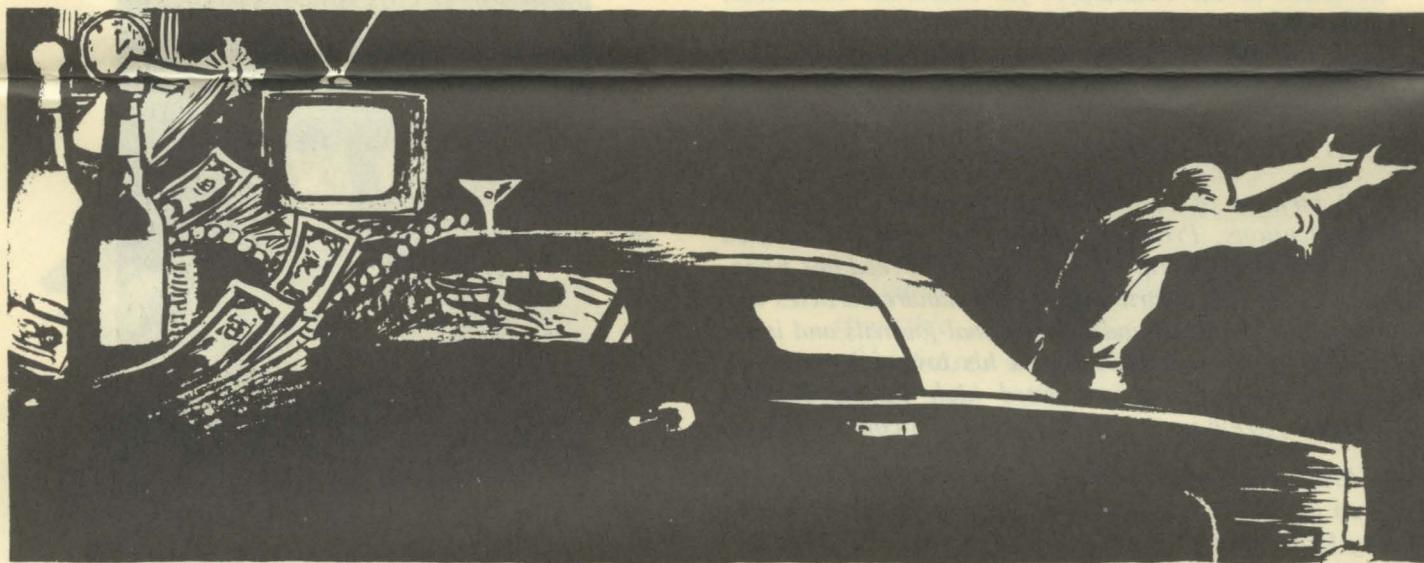
IMPRIMIS is the journal from The Center for Constructive Alternatives. As an exposition of ideas and first principles, it offers alternative solutions to the problems of our time. A subscription is free on request.

successful man, the distinguished British journalist, author and broadcaster, Malcolm Muggeridge, who recently visited us on the campus at Hillsdale College:

I may, I suppose pass for being, a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets—that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue—that's success. Furnished with money and a little fame even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of trendy diversions—that's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that

the moon, send our pictures flashing round the world in a fraction of a second, satisfy every physical need from peanut butter to the most sophisticated medicines. Why can't we provide eternal life itself? Already we are so sure of our final control over life and death that we now pass judgment over which unborn infants shall live and which shall die. We now replace the worn-out or diseased vital organs of some men with healthy hearts, kidneys and other organs, freshly taken from the living flesh of other men. Thus we promise a kind of eternal life. Perhaps science will soon triumph over death itself, or so Dr. Christian Barnard seems to promise us.

And so we play at building our own heaven on earth,



it represented a serious impact on our time—that's fulfillment. Yet I say to you—and I beg you to believe me—multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing—less than nothing, a positive impediment—measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty.

What I believe Muggeridge had in mind was that there comes a time to every man when he must ask himself what his life is all about. There comes a time when "success" can no longer be measured in larger and larger portions of money, sex, power or fame. Indeed, there comes a time when more and more of what the world calls "happiness" brings only disgust and despair.

Our age does not take kindly to such an evaluation. We believe in "Progress" with a capital "P"—Progress defined as more and more material goods, more and more instant physical and emotional gratification. Science has given us so much—why not turn to science to give us everything? We travel faster than sound, visit

blithely ignoring the one aspect of life which science, success, or prosperity cannot supply: *a reason for living*.

Listen for a moment again to Malcolm Muggeridge, one of my favorite Christian authors, as he describes the reaction of a future historian to the antic behavior of our age:

Looked back across the centuries, it will all seem even more hilariously comical than it does today, though I imagine our historian being somewhat at a loss to understand what lay behind the plunge into sheer fantasy that his researches reveal. They can't really have believed, he'll say to himself, that this notion of Progress they bandied about meant anything; that happiness lay along motorways, and well-being in a rising Gross National Product; that birth pills, easy divorce, and abortion made for happy families, and sex and barbiturates for quiet nights.

The modern world's principal substitute for a sense of personal identity—of individual responsibility, of a reason for living—is the notion of collective regeneration. We rush to lose ourselves in collective solutions. This is the age of Communism, Socialism, the Welfare State, the Great Society. We fondly believe that we can turn to the collectivity to solve our problems, to assuage our conscience, and to build the latest version of heaven on earth.

The historical result of such collective experiments has been uniformly disastrous. Collective politics seems to cause problems, not solve them. When the collectivity fails us, then where can we turn? What

overcome within the individual soul." Roepke was perfectly correct. And if the care of souls is not, first and foremost, the province of the church, what—in God's name—is the church's main business?

Yet many clergymen seem to exclude God from their reckoning. In one sector of the church we witness the paradox of a school of thought proclaiming "secular Christianity." The present outlook views the world as self-existent and reduces man to a mere pawn—stripped of all attachments which were thought to bind him to a transcendent realm of being. Shorn of his cosmic dimension, man is depersonalized; no longer the creature of God, he is reduced to a mere unit of mass society,

remains to which a man may give himself? Only one thing remains: our Christian faith.

One of the great tragedies of our time is that a large proportion of our Christian leadership has chosen to depart from the salvational message of the traditional Church, substituting social religion in its place. Such churchmen preach collective political solutions to all our problems, offering us heaven on earth as a substitute for truly Christian values. In the process, such clergymen depart from God Himself.

The great Swiss economist, Wilhelm Roepke, was also a deeply religious man. He fought in World War I and was the first intellectual exiled by Hitler. "For more than a century," he writes, "we have made the hopeless effort, more and more boldly proclaimed, to get along without God. It is as though we wanted to add to the already existing proofs of God's existence, a new and finally convincing one; the universal destruction that follows on assuming God's non existence. The genesis of the malady from which our civilization suffers lies in the individual soul and is only to be

struggling to retain vestiges of his humanity as his world goes through a time of troubles.

It is interesting to note that this secular age has retrieved one word that was discarded from the religious vocabulary, the word "soul." Now we have soul music, soul food, soul brother. But it tells us something that the word "soul" has been revived as an adjective and not as a noun!

Many of our so-called Christian leaders seem insistent that Christ's kingdom, contrary to what He said, is of this world, and that treasure *can* be laid up on earth in the shape of the endlessly increasing wealth of an affluent consumer society, properly redistributed by some collectivist political machinery. These men are out to remake the world—some wit remarked—as God would have made it in the first place—except that He lacked the necessary funds!

Perhaps it is time to ask ourselves a fundamental question. What is the dominant philosophy of the Western world today? Is it really so different from the

Communist philosophy? In Whittaker Chambers' phrase, "The West believes that Man's destiny is prosperity and an abundance of goods. So does the Politburo." Chambers went on to suggest that such a materialistic philosophy dominates the minds and hearts of many in our churches, it strikes at the very basis of our social order.

Of course we *must* be concerned with the good society as it can be achieved in this life. We want to feed, educate and care for our children. *But* we also must remember that the good society is never more than the reflection of a proper moral understanding on the part of the individuals composing the social order. Communism, Socialism, the Welfare State—all the collectivism—promise heaven on earth, but they cannot deliver, because they deny the Christian concept of the *individual* soul upon which all true happiness and accomplishment must be based. To be successful, our economic and social arrangements must be compatible with that Christian sense of the individual.

Biblical religion understands the world as the creation of God, Who looked out upon His work and called it good. It regards man as a creature who bears a unique relation to this God, being formed in His image—meaning that man possesses free will and the ability to command his own actions. This free being is given dominion over the earth with the admonition to be fruitful and to multiply. He is commanded to work in order that he might eat; he is made steward of the earth's resources and held accountable for their economic use. He is to respect the life of his neighbor and not covet his goods; theft is wrong because property is right.

Poverty can be overcome by increased productivity, and in no other way; and a society of free men is more productive than any other. It follows that we maximize production and minimize poverty only as men are increasingly free to pursue their personal aims—including their economic goals—within the framework of law. Prosperity, in fact, is a by-product of liberty. Limit the government to its proper competence, so that men are uncoerced in their interpersonal relations—including their economic arrangements—and the general level of well-being rises.

When this outlook comes to prevail, the groundwork is laid for a free and prosperous commonwealth; but it is well to remember that the City of Man is not an end in itself—it is only the proving ground for the City of God.

If we truly want to achieve the good society in this life, we must return to proper goals—to the individual and his spiritual capacities. To put this another way, while we cannot find lasting salvation in this life, we *can* find the good society, by first discovering the road to salvation in the next life.

Together with Malcolm Muggeridge, another of my favorite Christian apologists was C. S. Lewis. I am deeply indebted to both men for the ideas we are discussing today. A professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature at both Oxford and Cambridge, Lewis once wrote: "Aim for this world and you get nothing. Aim for the next world and you get this world thrown into the bargain." Or as he wrote on another occasion: "Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distant place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself."

Freedom in this world and in the next must go hand in hand—God made us that way.

This obvious conclusion is, of course, denied today by all collectivists. The goals of collectivism involve the reduction of human persons to mere minions of the state. The state becomes a mortal god which cannot permit the loyalty of its citizens to be divided between itself and a superior order of majesty that transcends the visible world. God must go, and by the same token the collectivist state must reject the idea of an independent moral order; right and wrong are now whatever the State commands; the State can do no wrong.

As Christians we must challenge collectivism and its goals, because of our Christian conviction that every person has destiny beyond society; each of us has a soul for whose proper ordering he is ultimately responsible to God.

What does all this have to do with you and me? Although the Son of God can turn from the world and from political power, how can poor, puny mortals such as we hope to follow such a road? That is the glory of the Christian experience—He has given each of us the chance to do as He has done. More important, His Sacrifice has given us the *grace* to do as He has done.

Yet the choice remains to be made. Each of us chooses anew each day.

The rules for our choice are simple enough really—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

C. S. Lewis has reminded us that this promise and this responsibility apply to all men, to *every person we meet*:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest

and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people, you have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.

Think of the awesome responsibility involved in dealing with those around you! Think of the even more awesome task of coming to God Himself. Who among us could do that? Who could walk such a road?

We all can walk the road, because none of us walk alone. We have a Companion ready to go every step of the way with us.

Each of us must first want His company. He comes to us one by one, He measures our conduct one by one, He transforms our life and work one by one. For that reason, never has there been greater danger to men's immortal souls than in the collectivism and materialism of our present age, a collectivism and materialism which disguises the highly individual, highly spiritual task that lies before each of us if we are to save our immortal souls.

Faith in freedom, freedom in faith. Those vital words read the same in either direction. We must have individual freedom, because our faith demands the power to make individual decisions. Likewise, only in faith is true freedom possible, because without faith in God, we are slaves of passion, of our own dark inner selves.

Malcolm Muggeridge often describes

our human condition as manacled and in a dark cell. The chains are our mortal hopes and desires; the dark cell is our ego, in whose obscurity and tiny dimensions we are confined. Christ tells us how to escape, striking off the chains of desire, and putting a window in the dark cell through which we may joyously survey the wide vistas of eternity and the bright radiance of God's universal love. No view of life, as I am well aware, could be more diametrically opposed to the prevailing one today, especially as purveyed in our mass-

communications media, dedicated as they are to the counterproposition that we can live by bread alone, and the more the better. Yet, I am more convinced than I am in my own existence that the view of life Christ came into the world to preach, and died to sanctify, remains as true and as valid as ever, and that all who care to, young and old, healthy and infirm, wise and foolish, educated and uneducated, may live thereby, finding in our troubled, confused world, as in all other circumstances and at all other times, an enlightenment and a serenity not otherwise attainable. Even though, as may very well prove the case, our civilization, like others before it, soon finally flickers out, and institutional Christianity with it, the light Christ shed shines as brightly as ever for those who seek an escape from darkness. The truths he spoke will answer their dilemmas and assuage their fears, bringing hope to the hopeless, zest to the despairing, and love to the loveless, precisely as happened two thousand years ago, and through all the intervening centuries.

May we then seek to serve the Author of our liberty, in Whose service we find our perfect freedom. Amen.



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