ROOSEVELT
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Address of
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"The assertion that President Roosevelt is closely associated with or supported by prominent Communists is utterly without foundation, as is the charge that he is a communist himself. Both accusations are ugly, cowardly and flagrant calumnies. They are violations of the Eighth Commandment... Today in America, as in every other great industrial country the opponents of necessary and just legislation for the weaker economic classes, endeavor to discredit these measures by fastening upon them labels which frighten the timid, the ignorant and the uncritical. It is a very ancient but, in the long run, a very stupid device."

Because I love justice and hate iniquity; because I love honesty and hate deception; because I love truth and hate lies,—I am making tonight what is liable to be called a political speech. It is not that. It is mainly a discussion of certain political events in the light of the moral law.

I take up first the despicable assertion that the President of the United States is a Communist. Men who make and repeat this charge apparently believe that during a political campaign the Eighth Commandment should be suspended, abolished, thrown out the window. For the benefit of my non-Catholic hearers, I observe that in the Catholic version of the Ten Commandments, the Eighth is: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Men who believe the accusation of Communism against the President because they want to believe it or because they are too lazy to investigate it, are guilty of rash judgment. Their sin is only one degree less than the sin of those who utter and spread the contemptible accusation. The amount of false assertions that have been accepted as true in this campaign by persons who in other situations are fairly critical, tempts one to lose faith in American intelligence. One almost wonders whether Aristotle was right when he defined man as a rational animal.
An hour before he went to the Capitol to be inaugurated as President of the United States, March 4, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt and his family betook themselves to St. John’s Episcopal Church. There was no formal religious service, no ostentation, no publicity. Mr. Roosevelt and his family visited the church to ask God’s guidance and assistance in the very difficult office which he was about to assume. Not since Washington knelt in the snow at Valley Forge had any President so openly and dramatically acknowledged his dependence upon the Divine Ruler of nations.

In 1933 President Roosevelt received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the Catholic University of America. This distinction was awarded to him by the fifteen archbishops, ten bishops, ten priests and ten laymen who constitute the Board of Trustees of the University. The citation read on that occasion by Archbishop Curley, the Chancellor of the University, proclaimed the President as “a man outstanding among men for upright living, faithfulness to God and country, breadth of thought and wealth of kindly feeling.”

Would a Communist have publicly acknowledged the rulership of God over America on the morning of his inauguration as President? Would a Communist have received academic honors from the principal Catholic institution of learning in the United States? Would the Chancellor of that institution, who is also the head of the oldest Catholic diocese in the United States, have addressed to a Communist the words that I have just quoted from the academic citation? Indeed, the charge of Communism directed at President Roosevelt is the silliest, falsest, most cruel and most unjust accusation ever made against a President in all the years of American history. It is no wonder that Mr. Roosevelt’s voice was vibrant with indignation when he declared in his Syracuse speech: “I have not sought, I do not seek, I repudiate, the support of any advocate of Communism...”

More frequently, however, the ugly accusation takes this form: “Roosevelt may not be an out-and-out Communist, but he shows ‘communistic tendencies’.” This charge is more cowardly and more dishonest than the first because it is clothed in the language of vagueness and deception. What are “communistic tendencies?”

To be sure, those who make this milder accusation pretend to offer some sort of proof. Their alleged evidence takes two general forms: First, some of Roosevelt’s principal advisers and most prominent supporters are said to be Communists; second, many of his policies are described as communistic. Let us calmly analyze these two assertions.

The two advisers of President Roosevelt who have been most frequently cited as “Communists”, are Professor Frankfurter of the Harvard Law School, and Dr. Tugwell, head of the Resettlement Administration. I have known Professor Frankfurter for a great many years and I can say with the utmost confidence that he is no more a Communist than is Governor Landon, or Senator Borah, or Senator Glass. I have never seen a sentence quoted from his writings or speeches which shows any trace of Communism. He has been teaching law at Harvard—which is not a conspicuously radical institution—for upwards of twenty-two years. Although thousands of students have been “exposed” to his teaching, the American Bar Association has never stigmatized any of these Frankfurter alumni as communist members of the legal profession.

Dr. Tugwell has been so widely misrepresented and vilified that many Americans have come to picture him as either a Communist or at least a very dangerous radical. As a matter of fact, he is neither. His economic and social opinions have been expressed in more than one book and in more than one speech. Perhaps the most damaging statements ever attributed to him are that America is in need of industrial reforms, that the poor must obtain higher standards of living, that we must have a better distribution of wealth and income and that these beneficent changes can most effectively be brought about by the co-
operative action of farmers and laborers. These proposals are no stronger than the demands of Pope Pius for a more just distribution of wealth and a comprehensive organization of all the economic classes.

So much for the President’s advisers who have been called Communists. The two prominent supporters who have oftenest come under the same designation are Sidney Hillman and David Dubinsky. They are prominent members of a labor group which is working actively for the re-election of Mr. Roosevelt. What are the facts with regard to their alleged Communism?

Sidney Hillman was never a Communist nor even a formally enrolled member of the Socialist Party. It is authoritatively reported that he voted for LaFollette in 1924, for Smith in 1928, and for Roosevelt in 1932. David Dubinsky resigned from the Socialist Party last April. Far from having communistic sympathies, he has consistently and successfully fought Communism in the labor union of which he is the head. The New York Times for September 28, 1936, contains a letter from Samuel Klein, who is the Executive Director of the employers’ organization in the industry which embraces Mr. Dubinsky’s union. Speaking for his fellow-employers, Mr. Klein declares: “We can state categorically that Mr. Dubinsky has been a most vigorous and effective opponent of the communist, or left wing, element in our industry.” He further testifies that the communist influence in this industry was finally overthrown completely by the leadership of Mr. Dubinsky.

Therefore, the assertion that President Roosevelt is closely associated with or supported by prominent Communists is utterly without foundation, as is the charge that he is a Communist himself. Both accusations are ugly, cowardly and flagrant calumnies. They are violations of the Eighth Commandment. The reputations of Roosevelt, Frankfurter, Tugwell, Hillman and Dubinsky are as dear to them as your reputations are to you and mine is to me. Those who have called any of these men Communists are under strict moral obligation to make restitution; that is, to restore insular as they can the good names of Messrs. Roosevelt, Frankfurter, Tugwell, Hillman and Dubinsky.

The principal measures upon which is based the charge of communistic tendencies are probably the NRA, the AAA, the Labor Disputes Act, the Holding Company Act, the Securities Exchange Act, the Social Security Act and the law taxing the undistributed surpluses of corporations. Not one of these laws is communistic or even socialistic, or even tending toward Socialism or Communism. The NRA closely resembled the occupational group system for the organization of industry which is advocated by Pope Pius XI. The main difference is that the Pope’s program was the more radical and realistic of the two; for it would give more representation to labor than did the NRA. In the AAA the chief aim was to bring about fair prices for the products of the farm, and this was in accord with the Pope’s recommendation for a “reasonable relationship between the prices obtained for the products of the various economic groups; agrarian, industrial, etc.” The Labor Disputes Act simply makes effective the right of labor to organize, a right which was strongly proclaimed by both Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI. The Holding Company Act and the Securities Exchange Act aimed to prevent that excessive economic domination which is condemned by the Holy Father. The taxation of undistributed surpluses is in conformity with the ethical principle that taxes should be levied in accordance with ability to pay. Finally, it should be obvious that insurance against unemployment and old age is an elementary measure of social justice.

The sum of the matter is that these and several other enactments of the New Deal constitute moderate measures of economic reform which were long overdue in the United States. They are mild installments of too long delayed social justice. If they are denounced as communistic, it is simply because this is the most damaging epithet that can be hurled against them by the bene-
ficiaries of social injustice. Today in America, as in every other great industrial country, the opponents of necessary and just legislation for the weaker economic classes, endeavor to discredit these measures by fastening upon them labels which frighten the timid, the ignorant and the uncritical. It is a very ancient but, in the long run, a very stupid device.

What about real Communism in the United States at the present time. The alarm which has become so vocal and so blatant within the last six months is out of all proportion to the facts. Not one national or state labor union is dominated by Communists. The members of the Communist Party in this country do not exceed 100,000. To declare that the "Communist-minded" persons amount to 20,000,000 is to utter an assertion that is not only incapable of proof but is, on its face, ridiculous. Probably all the "Communist-minded" will vote for Browder, the Communist candidate for President. I am willing to predict that he will get less than 150,000 votes, probably less than 100,000. While I am in the forecasting mood, let me hazard the prediction that considerably less than 2,000,000 persons will cast their ballots for Mr. Lemke.

A considerable part of the excessive trepidation about Communism in America is due to reckless propaganda, manufactured by notorious newspapers. Another part has its origin in the unspeakable excesses and atrocities committed by Communists and Anarchists in the deplorable conflict now raging in Spain. Timid, undiscriminating and ill-informed persons with too active imaginations, transfer the bloody scenes of that conflict to our own land. They are misled by the sympathy which the Spanish Communists are receiving from certain self-styled liberals in the United States. The latter are credited with much more influence than they really possess. Many of them are the victims of misinformation and false inferences. Just as some innocent Americans are induced to believe that Roosevelt is a Communist, so a great many well-meaning American liberals have been deceived into thinking that the present Spanish government is liberal and Republican. The truth of the matter is that the government has been unwilling or unable to control the anti-religious, communistic and anarchist elements of the Spanish population. The revolution began the middle of last June. During the three months immediately preceding that date, 160 churches were burned, attempts were made to burn 251 other churches. 10 Catholic publishing plants were destroyed and 33 others were attacked; 260 persons were killed and 1,287 injured. No solid hope could be entertained that the government would restore order or protect the rights of Catholics. It is no wonder that the decent elements in the community revolted. Thank God, they now seem likely to be successful.

In passing let me say that I detest all forms of the Totalitarian State. They are all anti-democratic and destructive of human rights. Happily there is no present danger that any form of totalitarianism will get established in the United States. Those timid Tories who see Communism just around the corner—where, by the way, prosperity was lurking from 1929 to 1933—are quite as mistaken as those frightened liberals who think that Father Coughlin is going to set up a Fascist State the day after the election.

However, let me say frankly that if I had to choose between Russian Communism and Italian Fascism, I should without hesitation take the latter because its despotism is less comprehensive. Italian Fascism exhibits less disregard for individual rights than Russian Communism, and it shows more consideration for humanity’s dearest possession; that is religion.

The devastating success of communistic and anarchistic doctrines in Catholic Spain presents a lesson and a warning to the people of America. One of the principal reasons why these destructive movements became so strong in that country was the long neglect of the working classes by their rulers in both Church and State. Let me cite some sentences recently written by a very
distinguished and very competent authority, Rev. Wilfrid Parsons, S.J.:

The great tragedy of Spain was that in the nineteenth century the working masses apostatized from the Church, as Pope Pius X once remarked. And, it is well to remember, it was poverty, destitution and injustice which made them apostatize.

They got to hate the Church because they hated the friends of the Church, who exploited them and whom the Church did nothing to rebuke or correct. The words of Pope Leo XIII 45 years ago went unheeded and his great encyclical Rerum Novarum was neglected.

The lesson of all this for us is that we should meet the evil of Communism not merely by denouncing it, and not at all by stigmatizing as communistic all fundamental reforms. We must attack the main causes of Communism. Among these are poverty, insecurity and inequitable distribution of wealth and income. Failure to remove these evils will do more to strengthen Communism than all the propaganda and all the "boring-in" methods of the organized Communist movement.

In the words of a recent issue of an able American Catholic newspaper: "The inequities in our economic society are infinitely more dangerous than are all the professed disciples of Marx and Lenin." In his great encyclical, Pope Pius XI warned the world that unless serious efforts are made "with all energy and without delay" to correct the gross inequalities of distribution, "let nobody persuade himself that the peace and tranquility of human society can be effectively defended against the forces of revolution!" As Mr. Roosevelt said four years ago and repeated in his Syracuse speech last week:

To meet by reaction that danger of radicalism is to invite disaster. Reaction is no barrier to the radical—it is a challenge, a provocation. The way to meet that danger is to offer a workable program of reconstruction.

Not the least of President Roosevelt's achievements is that he set up an effective check to the spread of Communism and other varieties of destructive radicalism. If he is defeated for re-election and if his policies are discredited Com-munism will enter upon a period of rapid growth and widespread influence in the United States.

In the remainder of this talk I shall address my remarks particularly to the wage earners. I shall call their attention to my championship of their cause for upwards of half a century, and to my intense and long continued study of economic and labor problems.

For many years I was denounced as a Socialist by reactionaries and retainers of plutocracy. In those years, Socialism was about as terrifying a designation, or epithet, as Communism is today. So, I can understand fully how Mr. Roosevelt feels. Some fifteen years ago a distinguished priest urged a certain rich man to give some of his superfluous wealth to the Catholic University of America. The rich man replied: "I won't give a cent so long as the University keeps that dashed Socialist, John Ryan." Other prominent men and women of my faith, who did not go so far as to call me a socialist, referred to me and treated me as a "dangerous radical." Some of them do so yet. On the other hand, the labor leaders of the country have unanimously regarded me as their friend and advocate.

However, sympathy is not enough; friendship is not enough; advocacy is not enough. There is needed also knowledge and competence. Under this head let me recount some personal history. It is now forty-five years since I began to publish articles on economic questions. That takes us back to the year in which Father Coughlin was born. It is more than thirty years since I published my first book, entitled "A Living Wage." At that time Father Coughlin had not yet entered college. That book of mine was the first publication in this country which placed the laborer's moral right to a living wage upon a solid basis of principle, fact and argument. Since it appeared I have written at least half a dozen other books on economics, labor and the ethical aspects of our industrial system. I have published hundreds of articles in magazines and encyclopedias and made hundreds of speeches on
these subjects. A few days ago I began my thirty-fifth year as a teacher of these subjects in the classroom.

In the light of this experience, I say deliberately to the laboring men and women of America that Father Coughlin’s explanation of our economic maladies is at least 50 per cent wrong, and that his monetary remedies are at least 90 per cent wrong. If the latter were enacted into law they would prove disastrous to the great majority of the American people, particularly to the wage earners. Moreover, Father Coughlin’s monetary theories and proposals find no support in the encyclicals of either Pope Leo XIII or Pope Pius XI. I think I know something about these encyclicals myself.

Toilers of America, I implore you not to permit yourselves to be misled. Do not let yourselves be persuaded that your votes can throw the presidential election into the House of Representatives. That cannot happen unless Mr. Lemke carries at least one state. Where is he going to find that state?

I implore you not to abandon your tried and competent champions in public life. Do not turn your backs upon those Congressmen who have consistently, valiantly and effectively fought your battles; for example, Jim Mead of Buffalo, Pat Boland of Scranton, Arthur Healey and John McCormack of Massachusetts, and several of your other friends whose re-election is opposed by Father Coughlin. Above all, I appeal to you not to vote against the man who has shown a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of your needs and who has brought about more fundamental legislation for labor and for social justice than any other President in American history. If he is re-elected he will continue the fight with superb courage and unrivaled skill, until he has placed these beneficial laws and still other beneficial laws upon an enduring foundation. In this critical hour, I urge you to use every effort at your command among your relatives, friends and acquaintances in support of Franklin D. Roosevelt.