



**UNITED
STATES
MILITARY
ACADEMY**

WEST POINT · NEW YORK

**The Second
Sol Feinstone Lecture**

**THE
MEANING OF FREEDOM**

by

**Rear Admiral
Jeremiah A. Denton, Jr.
USN**

2 April 1975

The United States Military Academy is pleased to sponsor an annual lecture series on the Meaning of Freedom. It is significant that this lecture program has been made possible by the generosity of Mr. Sol Feinstone, a dedicated American patriot whose commitment to the ideals of the American Revolution has led him to devote many years of effort, as well as considerable personal resources, to the collection of important letters, manuscripts, and books dealing with our heritage of freedom. His donation of these items to libraries and educational institutions will insure that the message which they proclaim will be preserved and transmitted to future generations of Americans.

Mr. Feinstone's abiding faith in a *brotherhood of free nations of free men* has found further expression in several lecture series which he has endowed in order to permit prominent Americans to interpret The Meaning of Freedom.

The U. S. Corps of Cadets and the staff and faculty of the Military Academy are pleased to recognize the generosity and loyalty of this great American for providing a living endowment in the defense of freedom.

THE MEANING OF FREEDOM

In my lifetime, I have learned enough about West Point — its principles, its purposes, and its graduates — to recognize that there is no more appropriate place than here to address the subject: The Meaning of Freedom.

My treatment of the subject will be based on an assumption. I have assumed that it would cause extreme disinterest if I were to engage in the exercise of reciting too many of the previously expressed meanings of freedom — beautiful though so many of those definitions are. We must begin with the knowledge that freedom, like love, is a many splendored thing and that no lecture can do it justice.

This talk is the second of a series on this topic. I believe the subject is so big and the series aspect of its treatment so important that each subsequent lecture should try to build on the previous talks. Thus, let us commence our initial approach on the subject tonight by examining a superb definition of freedom by the man who makes this lecture series possible—Mr. Sol Feinstone. It reads:

In the beginning there was the void of sameness; the spark of life made everything, and made everything different.

The stamp of sameness is the stamp of death.

Freedom to me means a social order based on individual freedom to live differently and to dream differently.

I dream of a brotherhood of free nations of free men.

Analyzing that definition, we find two main elements of freedom emphasized.

First, the right to be different, specifically to live and to dream differently. We note that the word “dream” includes, but poetically transcends, the verb to think.

Nowhere than in America has there been more variety in the kinds of life styles, the kinds of dreaming, working, playing, and dressing. The freedom for exercising that variety has been the key which has unlocked the innovativeness of this nation — producing historically notable innovations in politics, economics and

the technical sciences, as well as in the arts — especially in music. In Mr. Feinstone's definition, these freedoms are appropriately analogized with life, and their absence with death, and indeed freedom has given us our national vitality and underlaid the growth of our spiritual and material power.

The right to live and dream differently has an invaluable and sacred application to the abundance of religious beliefs which have flourished in the United States.

Not only is freedom of religion important, but the most fundamental principle of American Freedom itself, as conceived and built into our Constitution by our Founding Fathers, was the factor of religiosity. The United States was indeed founded as one nation under God, and the distinction between the precious and positive quality of the man of liberty on the one hand, and the empty and destructive nature of the libertine man on the other, is the distinction which verily defines freedom in the original American sense — indeed, in any favorable societal sense.

This distinction is made nicely in another splendid definition of freedom by a great soldier and great American, your former Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, who gave the first lecture in this series, and whose name and deeds are familiar here and so importantly associated with the subject. I quote his concept as he gave it on that occasion:

Freedom means the maintenance of order or a climate of stability within which a person may pursue or advance his individual dignity unobstructed, unimpeded and unfettered — except — except that he not interfere with the ability or right of any other individual to do the same thing.

His emphasis is essential to an understanding of the only kind of somewhat constrained individual freedom that can work successfully for long in our own free national social order, or in any free societal environment — national, tribal or familial.

Indeed, it is that idea which is the most important single ingredient of the progress of civilization.

It is that idea which is implied in the second of the two main points of Mr. Feinstone's definition. I refer to the last sentence of his definition which says, "I believe in the brotherhood of man."

For brotherhood means being cooperative, helpful, considerate and, most of all, loving — tolerance and understanding of other human beings though they think and act differently from us.

Such thought as this was in the forefront of the minds of our Founding Fathers.

George Washington, conscious of the potential danger of intolerance resulting from mutually perceived differences of the many strongly-held religious beliefs among our early citizens, mostly Christian, closed a letter to a Jewish friend with the following beautiful statement:

May the children of the stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants; while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the Father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us in all our several vocations useful here, and in His own due time and way everlastingly happy.

We who are Christians must remember that Judaism is the Father of Christianity. And we who enjoy the heritage of Judaeo-Christianity would do well to note that Islam shares Judaeo history down through the prophet Abraham.

All mankind, believing or not in Jesus Christ as God, admires His teachings which can best be summarized briefly as "Love God, love thy neighbor as thyself."

It would be good if all mankind would agree with Him when He defined the word "neighbor" in "love thy neighbor as thyself", by His parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable the loving and helpful neighbor was shown to be a foreigner, a person of different religious beliefs, and of a different color.

The main thing to respect in a man is not his degree of conformance to perfection as judged by our beliefs; instead, we should respect his earnestness of effort to try to be good, his effort to perceive God and His will, his effort to try to avoid abusing his access to freedom by over-indulgence of his desires at the direct or indirect expense of others and at the cost of his own self-degradation. In that sense we must love and respect Moslems, Buddhists, Confucianists and those of other faiths for their earnestness of effort

in that respect. We must love those of our own respective faiths whose behavioral imperfections are disproportionately and distortedly publicized

I do not think it necessary to try to gloss over the fact that I am a Roman Catholic. Needless to say, I believe in my religion, but I am aware that my religion is a faith, not a knowledge.

What I now regard as knowledge, as a result of many rather remarkable experiences in Hanoi, is that there is a God, and that my God answered my prayers. Further, what I believe to be the same God answered the prayers of Jews, Protestants, other Catholics, as well as Confucianists and Buddhists who happen to conceive of God in a different but similar way.

Why do I dwell so much on religion in this talk on freedom?

I dwell on it because before, during, and after my captivity, I have had the conviction, tempered like steel in captivity and rendered urgent by what I have found since my return, that too many Americans are forgetting what made this nation great, and are suffering from misconceptions of the meaning of freedom. They are losing their orientation — the orientation of the human species with respect to God, of the citizen with respect to country, of child to parent, of parent to child, of the places in society of law and order, sacrifice, and cooperation, and ultimately the relationship between international peace with the collective personal integrity of each citizen in each respective country.

In particular, I am shocked to find that too many of us are forgetting, in a repetition of an ancient and historical cycle, that people must make a special effort not to lose their spirituality in an environment characterizable as one of material surfeit. Surfeit tends to bring on a materialistic mentality which, ironically and justly, in many cases has caused the forfeiture of the wealth and, more importantly, the freedom of the people of that nation.

As most or all of you know, it is truly ordinary to ask and then to receive help from God under painful physical pressure. However, it is much rarer and nobler to rise to the occasion, to pray, and to behave conscientiously by virtue of our own intellectually self-generated pressures in a comfortable and affluent environment. I believe that such an effort is the only hope of this surfeited nation — the only alternative to rising from the ashes, if rising is possible,

after a great fall toward which the nation appears to be headed. When I call this nation surfeited, I hasten to recognize that there are pockets of real poverty in America. But having seen men in North Vietnam fight over empty tin cans, and having myself eaten human waste (boiled) in the hope of gaining some protein, I believe that there is much here that is falsely perceived as poverty and related to the desire to have what others have — things which are luxuries, not real necessities

Now, let me try to develop a definition of human dignity which is, I believe, at the heart of the meaning of freedom. Webster gives a number of meanings for the respective words: human and dignity. Some definitions differ sharply and even contrast with one another. Of extreme importance is that, since 1970, the dictionary definitions given for the word “human” appear to have changed in a vitally important way.

For now, allow me to discuss a few pre-1971 dictionary definitions for our purposes today.

First, the word “human” which comes from the latin *humanus*, akin to *homo*, a man. “Of, belonging to, or typical of mankind (the human race)”. Further “having or showing qualities, as rationality or fallibility, viewed as distinctive of such individuals.” Here the key aspect of man emerges.

This definition declares that among all known species of life only man has the power to do wrong. Plants and animals cannot do wrong. Plants have the capabilities of sustenance, growth and reproduction. Animals have these, plus sensitivity and instinct. But man alone also has rationality, with consequent fallibility. This combination implies conscience and intellect, and the history and feats of mankind, though full of examples of fallibility, also prove the almost incredible power of his reason and conscientious effort to avoid fallibility.

A code of conduct is also implied when one speaks of fallibility.

Until recently, to Americans that code was the Ten Commandments. But as the song says “Times, they are a-changing.”

Next word, “dignity” from latin *dignus*: One dictionary definition given, which we shall reject, is, “a high position, rank or title.” Let us use this one: “worthiness, proper pride and self-respect.”

Let us disqualify all other definitions regardless of their popularity. This disqualification includes denial of the idea that dignity is something that can be given to a person. Dignity, defined as worthiness, proper pride, or self-respect, has to be earned.

So, certain vogueish nostrums about "imparting" human dignity, or all people being "entitled" to human dignity, just do not make sense. What does make sense is a strong effort to impart to all human kind *the opportunity to earn* a sense of worthiness, proper pride or self-respect. In this regard, equality of opportunity for education is a legitimate, and as yet unfulfilled, goal even in this land of freedom. Further progress is still required in other areas such as achieving equal pay for equal work, irrespective of color or sex.

The questions of what a citizen is entitled to from the State, and what the State is entitled to from the citizen, are also directly linked to how we define human dignity.

In my personal opinion, the right answers are to be found only from arguments predicated on the proper orientation of man as a species subordinate to God, of citizens subordinate to State, of State responsibility to the citizen.

When Christ was asked by his enemies what he thought of the people of Israel having to pay taxes to the Romans, his answer was clear, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." The United States Army in Vietnam and the Charge of the Light Brigade, if not directly comparable, may both be sad, but glorious, examples of conformance with that dictum – and such readiness by armies to conform thus is the *sine qua non* of nation states. Peace is an ideal, but it takes "two to tango." No nation has done more to prove its interest in preserving peace. But we are forgetting that peace has a price in the face of raw aggression. We are forgetting that strength – not weakness – preserves peace. We are forgetting the sacrifice of those from whom we inherited not only peace, but the power and responsibility to try to preserve it. Not just peace in the sense of preventing fighting, but peace by promoting the betterment of life for people all over the world, including those in Communist countries.

Citizens, especially American citizens, owe much to their country. At this moment in our history's shifting tides I believe we, the

citizenry, are relatively overconscious of what the States owes to us. Unity behind our leader, whether Democrat or Republican, is certainly more needed now than destructive criticism. Familiarity with affluence has inverted the Mavlovian hierarchy of values among too many Americans, with security and sustenance assumed as rights to be afforded by the government while the citizen dabbles only with self-gratification.

We are tending now to ask too much recompense for too little output, which is the simple cause of inflation.

The Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, holds numerous statements about the need for all men to work for their living and for the well-being of their families. Helplessness, but not laziness, should receive hand-outs.

On the international scene there is much helplessness which cries out for us to do what we can to get the ignorant and hungry on their feet and self-sustaining as soon as possible. Such an effort, charitably conceived, would usually result in achieving material as well as spiritual gain for ourselves in the longer range of a decade or two.

But on the national scene we need now to remind ourselves that the performance of manual labor is a major source of human dignity, and that no nation can long survive without her citizens' willingness to do an honest day's work for fair wages. David Ben-Gurion once said:

We don't consider manual work as a curse, or a bitter necessity, not even as a means by making a living. We consider it as a high human function, as a basis of human life, the most dignified thing in the life of the human being, and which ought to be free, creative. Men ought to be proud of it.

Our school system, parental guidance, and the tremendous power of television must help communicate to our young what is unique and precious about the American way of life which places such high value on human dignity. How sad that the opposite trend seems to be the case.

It is self-evident, but not widely enough appreciated, that the American way of life has proved itself to be the best in the history

of the world. Measured in terms of economic prosperity there has never been another nation with so much accumulated power and goods, nor a nation with its power and goods so equitably (*not equally*) distributed among the masses of its populations. This pinnacle of material prosperity has been reached in spite of our not having the largest population, nor the most natural resources per capita, nor the greatest size of the world's nations. In addition to economic prosperity, the United States of America has been generally regarded, even secretly among its enemies, in spite of its imperfections, as a spiritual beacon that has gleamed with unique brightness throughout the world.

I have learned that, if asked to define the American way of life, individual Americans are likely to give markedly different answers. Many of the answers would contain such terms as "freedoms" of one kind or another, or "government by the people"; and, increasingly as the years go by, more and more of the definitions offered tend to include the term "human dignity".

In closing, let me try to grope even closer to the definition of the peculiarly American connotation of the word "freedom" by developing a rough definition of the American way of life.

Let us define the American way of life, or the United States form of freedom, in specific terms:

A democratic, pluralistic political order consciously exploiting individual motivation for material gain as the reliable prime mover of its economic system, which is free enterprise in principle and regulated by the political system only when and as necessary to guarantee application of the principle of love thy neighbor as thyself. The legal and judicial systems are based on the Ten Commandants.

More briefly, we can state it as an equation: America equals free enterprise, plus love of God and neighbor.

Consider this definition as generally analogous to a sort of chemical equation in which the interaction between free enterprise and love is a perpetually on-going process, with the product (the American way of life) undergoing constant change.

For example, the eradication of slavery was a terribly needed change, one of the many products of the on-going confrontation between that which free economics can lead someone or some group to want and that which majority conscience will permit by virtue of the love factor in the equation. Free enterprise is driven by the reliable desire for self-improvement, but includes freedom to raise flowers for beauty not profit. The love factor instills compassion for the helpless, the disadvantaged, and the needy; it includes regard for fair play even among power-equals; and it ensures consideration for minorities on the part of the mandate-empowered majority. In sum, the love factor, basic in the principles of our Judaeo-Christian and Revolutionary heritage, tends to keep free enterprise honest and empathetic in both the national and the international sense.

Going back to our definition and discussion of human dignity, which is the same concept our Founding Fathers embraced, we can see why this nation originally chose free enterprise as our basic economic system. They knew that more people would benefit from this system over the long term. Further, their consciousness of the true meaning of human dignity is why we chose to regulate that enterprise with the milk of human love as it was derived from the principles of Judaeo-Christianity. Thus, the accelerating corruption of the national concept of human dignity directly threatens the manner of exercising both the free enterprise and love factors, each of which is essential to our way of life.

We must reverse a swelling tide which is tending to cause national abandonment of the bedrock of principles upon which we base our version of the meaning of the terms human dignity and freedom.

How ironic that the very prosperity we earned through conformance to spiritual values is the root cause of our ever-expanding sense of materialism. Coping with prosperity has been a fatally difficult problem for a number of empires, nations and peoples; and, the end has always come by drowning in a sea of materialism and selfishness. Thus, the root cause of our problem is as old as Adam and Eve and is indeed identical to theirs. But the degree of our prosperity is so advanced that the degree of our national temptation to abandon that which made us great is also relatively severe. Beyond this severe degree of temptation, there is a new unprecedented operational aspect to our present day problem. There are

now fantastically prolific means by which these temptations are spread among our people and are conditioning us all to social acceptance of yielding to the temptations.

I refer to the television medium in particular and to certain other media which now exercise unanticipated, uncalculated and increasingly harmful power over our citizenry through redundant access to their minds, especially the minds of our children. There are many exemplary men and women employed in the industry; but, unfortunately, this power has more of profit-motivation than sense of national or moral responsibility in the manner in which it is so freely wielded. Sex is being sold as the invention of the devil, not of God; and it is not subject to God's rules. Violence vies with illicit sex in salability. I believe this new aspect of our "coping-with-prosperity" problem is now resulting in a downward step-by-step process, with each step being deeper and broader. The family, as an institution, is in the process of destruction and with it – so is the nation. This tide must be reversed as a matter of priority, and I am among those who shall try to reverse it.

While in Hanoi I planned to buy a piece of land on a pretty bay called Perdido Bay. I have bought the land and plan some day to build a little place on it with a rose trellis at the entrance to the walk. In Hanoi I thought up the name that would be inscribed on that trellis as the title of my villa. The name will be, "Perdido Y Encontrado". Lost and Found. It would go without saying that what was lost and found is freedom.

Yes, having lost it, I have grown to appreciate it more fully than before. I have seen the converse of freedom, not only from the perspective of one of many Americans who was treated badly by the Communist system, but from the perspective of one who sympathetically observed North Vietnamese suffering grossly and unjustly at the hands of their own government. I learned from personal contact what that system is, what it is based on, how and why it began, as well as the direct and indirect methods it uses to crush freedoms inside and outside its borders. What I have been talking about is what basically differentiates their system from ours.

Hopefully the entire country will learn enough of how horrible that other system is perceived to be by the millions who do understand its horrors and who have been fleeing to avoid coming under

that system at any cost. Hopefully we will experience a conscience-stricken reawakening if, and when, we look back on the unprecedented betrayal of our own principles. This betrayal is spelled out by our too general willingness to put the unambiguous, naked aggression in Southeast Asia in the "too hard file", and by our rationalizing that South Vietnam enslaved is preferable to allowing them to fight with the promised means to defend themselves, which they were doing so well until they knew that the help was being cut off.

We should also be shocked now by the clear story spelled out in our own over-crowded jails, our jammed psychiatric wards, our rising crime and divorce rates, our depreciating educational systems, the increasing number of illegitimate, abandoned, mistreated, bewildered children, and the tens of thousands of draft-dodgers. Hopefully from all of this we will be shocked into a new appreciation for the meaning, the source, the pricelessness, and the threatened transiency of America's freedom. Otherwise we may bitterly learn the truth of the warning of William Penn: "If men will not submit to being governed by God, they shall be doomed to be governed by tyrants."

We are members of this nation's most admired profession, the military. I think that to deserve this admiration, we now have not only the duty to defend this best of all Fatherlands, but the duty to speak out within our lawful limits and to give the kind of example that will preserve the honor which makes this country worth defending.

So, again, West Pointers, it is Duty, Honor, Country, but with new and urgently pressing connotations. God bless you and help you in your dedicated efforts.



ABOUT THE SPEAKER . . .

RAdm Denton is the Commandant of the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Va. He assumed command of the joint services school on January 25, 1974.

Born July 15, 1924 in Mobile, Ala. Married, seven children. Attended Spring Hill College (1942-43), received BS from U. S. Naval Academy (1946), MA from George Washington University (1964), honorary doctor of humane letters from Spring Hill College (1974). Service schooling includes the

Armed Forces Staff College (1958-59), and the Naval War College (1963-64).

Denton's initial assignment following graduation from Annapolis was aboard the USS VALLEY FORGE (CV-45). Was designated lighter-than-air Naval aviator in 1948; heavier-than-air aviator in 1952. Following a variety of flying assignments, Denton became the Air Defense Officer for the Commander Sixth Fleet in 1956, and served in various positions through 1962, until being named Executive Officer, and later Commanding Officer, of Attack Squadron SEVENTY-FIVE, home-based at Oceana Naval Air Station, Va. In 1964, he was assigned as Operations Officer for Attack Carrier Air Wing Five aboard the USS INDEPENDENCE (CVA-62), which deployed to the Tonkin Gulf. Began Vietnam combat flying as prospective Commanding Officer of Attack Squadron SEVENTY-FIVE. Was with this squadron, while leading air strike over North Vietnam, that Denton was shot down and captured in July 1965. He spent the next seven and a half years in captivity before being released in February 1973. Following repatriation, Denton was assigned to the Portsmouth, Va., Naval Hospital for recuperation. Was promoted to Capt. while a POW, and to Rear Admiral in April 1973. From May 1973 to January 1974, Denton completed work on the records of POW experiences while maintaining an office at the Headquarters, Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic Fleet (COMNAVAIRLANT). He then assumed his present position.

Denton's awards include the Navy Cross, Distinguished Service Medal, three Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars, Distinguished Flying Cross, two awards of the Air Medal, and numerous other decorations.

Sol Feinstone's Credo

Dedicated to

The Spirit of '76, a struggle of free men to remain free,

The immigrants who came after the revolution and helped build our
country in freedom,

The underprivileged of all races who, by uplifting themselves, will raise
all mankind to a higher humanity,

A brotherhood of free nations of free men.