



Ronald Reagan

Address to the National Religious Broadcasters



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Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you, Brandt Gustavson, Dr. Ben Armstrong, and ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. Thank you all very much.

I'm going to depart from what I was going to say, or begin with here, for just a moment to tell a little story. And I hope Pat Boone won't mind. I'm going to tell it on him.

Some years ago when there was a subversive element that had moved into the motion picture industry and Hollywood, and there were great meetings that were held. There was one that was held in the Los Angeles Sports Arena. 16,000 people were there, and thousands of them up in the balcony were young people.

And Pat Boone stood up, and in speaking to this crowd he said, talking of communism, that he had daughters -- they were little girls then -- and he said, "I love them more than anything on Earth." "But," he said, "I would rather" -- and I thought, "I know what he's going to say and, oh, you must not say that." And yet I had underestimated him. He said, "I would rather that they die now believing in God than live to grow up under communism and die one day no longer believing in God."



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There was a hushed moment, and then 16,000 people, all those thousands of young people came to their feet with a roar that you just -- it thrills you through and through.

Well, I thank you all very much. This is a moment I've been looking forward to. I remember with such pleasure the time we spent together last year. Today I feel like I'm doing more than returning for a speech; I feel like I'm coming home.

Homecoming -- I think it is the proper word. Under this roof, some 4,000 of us are kindred spirits united by one burning belief: God is our Father; we are His children; together, brothers and sisters, we are one family.

Being family makes us willing to share the pain of problems we carry in our hearts. But families also come together in times of joy, and we can celebrate such a moment today. Hope is being reborn across this land by a mighty spiritual revival that's made you the miracle of the entire broadcasting industry.

I might say your success and my celebrating another birthday about this time of year are both a source of annoyance to a number of people.

Let me set the record straight on your account: The spectacular growth of CBN [Christian Broadcasting Network] and PTI [PTL - Praise the Lord] and Trinity [Trinity Broadcasting Network], of organizations that produce religious programs for radio and television, not to mention the booming industry in Christian books, underlines a far-reaching change in our country.

Americans yearn to explore life's deepest truths. And to say their entertainment -- their idea of entertainment is sex and violence and crime is an insult to their goodness and intelligence. We are people who believe love can triumph over hate, creativity over destruction, and hope over despair. And that's why so many millions hunger for your product -- God's good news.

In his book, "The Secret Kingdom," Pat Robertson told us, "There can be peace; there can be plenty; there can be freedom. They will come the minute human beings accept the principles of the invisible world and begin to live by them in the visible world." More and more of us are trying to do this. George Gallup has detected a rising tide of interest and involvement in religion among all levels of society.

I was pleased last year to proclaim 1983 the Year of the Bible. But, you know, a group called the ACLU severely criticized me for doing that.

Well I wear their indictment like a badge of honor.

I believe I stand in pretty good company. Abraham Lincoln called the Bible "the best gift God has given to man." "But for it," he said, "we wouldn't know right from wrong."



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Like that image of George Washington kneeling in prayer in the snow at Valley Forge, Lincoln described a people who knew it was not enough to depend on their own courage and goodness; they must also look to God their Father and Preserver. And their faith to walk with Him and trust in His Word brought them the blessings of comfort, power, and peace that they sought.

The torch of their faith has been passed from generation to generation. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever."

More and more Americans believe that loving God in their hearts is the ultimate value. Last year, not only were Year of the Bible activities held in every State of the Union, but more than 25 States and 500 cities issued their own Year of the Bible proclamations. One schoolteacher, Mary Gibson, in New York raised 4,000 dollars to buy Bibles for working people in downtown Manhattan.

1983 was the year more of us read the Good Book. Can we make a resolution here today -- that 1984 will be the year we put its great truths into action?

My experience in this office I hold has only deepened a belief I've held for many years: Within the covers of that single Book are all the answers to all the problems that face us today, if we'd only read and believe.

Let's begin at the beginning. God is the center of our lives; the human family stands at the center of society; and our greatest hope for the future is in the faces of our children. Seven thousand Poles recently came to the christening of Maria Victoria Walesa, daughter of Danuta and Lech Walesa, to express their belief that solidarity of the family remains the foundation of freedom.

God's most blessed gift to His family is the gift of life. He sent us the Prince of Peace as a babe in a manger. I've said that we must be cautious in claiming God is on our side. I think the real question we must answer is, are we on His side?

I know what I'm about to say now is controversial, but I have to say it. This nation cannot continue turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the taking of some 4,000 unborn children's lives every day. That's one every 21 seconds. One every 21 seconds.

We cannot pretend that America is preserving her first and highest ideal, the belief that each life is sacred, when we've permitted the deaths of 15 million helpless innocents since the Roe versus Wade decision -- 15 million children who will never laugh, never sing, never know the joy of human love, will never strive to heal the sick or feed the poor or make peace among nations. Abortion has denied them the first and most basic of human rights. We are all infinitely poorer for their loss.

There's another grim truth we should face up to: Medical science doctors confirm that when the lives of the unborn are snuffed out, they often feel pain, pain that is long and agonizing.



This nation fought a terrible war so that black Americans would be guaranteed their God-given rights. Abraham Lincoln recognized that we could not survive as a free land when some could decide whether others should be free or slaves. Well today another question begs to be asked: How can we survive as a free nation when some decide that others are not fit to live and should be done away with?

I believe no challenge is more important to the character of America than restoring the right to life to all human beings. Without that right, no other rights have meaning. "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of God."

I will continue to support every effort to restore that protection including the Hyde-Jepsen respect life bill. I've asked for your all-out commitment, for the mighty power of your prayers, so that together we can convince our fellow countrymen that America should, can, and will preserve God's greatest gift.

Let us encourage those among us who are trying to provide positive alternatives to abortion -- groups like Mom's House, House of His Creation in Pennsylvania, Jim McKee's Sav-A-Life in Texas, which I mentioned to you last year. Begun as a response to the call of a conscience, Sav-A-Life has become a crisis counseling center and saved 22 children since it was founded in 1981.

I think we're making progress in upholding the sanctity of life of infants born with physical or mental handicaps. The Department of Health and Human Services has now published final regulations to address cases such as Baby Doe in Bloomington. That child was denied lifesaving surgery and starved to death because he had Down's Syndrome and some people didn't think his life would be worth living.

Not too long ago I was privileged to meet in the Oval Office a charming little girl -- tiny little girl -- filled with the joy of living. She was on crutches, but she swims; she rides horseback, and her smile steals your heart. She was born with the same defects as those Baby Does who have been denied the right to life. To see her, to see the love on the faces of her parents and their joy in her was the answer to this particular question.

Secretary Heckler and Surgeon General Koop deserve credit for designing regulations providing basic protections to the least among us. And the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association of Children's Hospitals have now affirmed a person's mental or physical handicap must not be the basis for deciding to withhold medical treatment.

Let me assure you of something else: We want parents to know their children will not be victims of child pornography. I look forward to signing a new bill now awaiting final action in a conference committee that will tighten our laws against child pornography. And we're concerned about enforcement of all the Federal anti-obscenity laws.

Over the past year, the United States Customs Service has increased by 200 percent its confiscation of obscene materials coming in across our borders. We're also intensifying our drive against crimes of family violence and sexual abuse.



I happen to believe that protecting victims is just as important as safeguarding the rights of defendants.

Restoring the right to life and protecting people from violence and exploitation are important responsibilities. But as members of God's family we share another, and that is helping to build a foundation of faith and knowledge to prepare our children for the challenges of life. "Train up a child in the way he should go," Solomon wrote, "and when he is old he will not depart from it."

If we're to meet the challenge of educating for the space age, of opening eyes and minds to treasures of literature, music, and poetry, and of teaching values of faith, courage, responsibility, kindness, and love, then we must meet these challenges as one people. And parents must take the lead. And I believe they are.

I know one thing I'm sure most of us agree on: God, source of all knowledge, should never have been expelled from our children's classrooms. The great majority of our people support voluntary prayer in schools.

We hear of cases where courts say it is dangerous to allow students to meet in Bible study or prayer clubs. And then there was the case of that kindergarten class that was reciting a verse. They said, "We thank you for the flowers so sweet. We thank you for the food we eat. We thank you for the birds that sing. We thank you, God, for everything." A court order of a court of appeals ordered them to stop. They were supposedly violating the Constitution of the United States.

Well, Teddy Roosevelt told us, "The American people are slow to wrath, but when their wrath is once kindled, it burns like a consuming flame."

I think Americans are getting angry. I think they have a message, and Congress better listen. We are a government of, by, and for the people. And people want a constitutional amendment making it unequivocally clear our children can hold voluntary prayer in every school across this land. And if we could get God and discipline back in our schools, maybe we could get drugs and violence out.

I know that some believe that voluntary prayer in schools should be restricted to a moment of silence. We already have the right to remain silent -- we can take our fifth amendment.

Seriously, we need a new amendment to restore the rights that were taken from us. Senator Baker has assured us that he -- we will get a vote on our amendment. And with your help, we can win, and that will be a great victory for our children.

During the last decade, we've seen people's commitment to religious liberty expressed by the establishment of thousands of new religious schools. These schools were built by the sacrifices of parents determined to provide a quality education for their children in an environment that permits traditional values to flourish.



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Now I believe that some of you've met with my advisers to discuss the situation of religious schools in Nebraska. We have all seen news accounts of the jailing of a minister, the padlocking of a church, and the continuing imprisonment of fathers of students. This issue of religious liberty has arisen in other States. The question is how to find a balance between assuring quality of education and preserving freedom for churches and parents who want their schools to reflect their faith.

These cases have mostly proceeded in State courts. A number of State supreme courts have reached decisions that moderated the effect of State regulations on religious schools. Last week, a panel appointed by the Governor of Nebraska concluded that the State's regulations violate the religious liberties of Christian schools.

I'm a firm believer in the separation of powers, that this nation is a federation of sovereign States. But isn't it time for the Nebraska courts or legislature to solve this problem by a speedy reconsideration? I hope some way can be found to resolve the legal issues without having people in jail for doing what they think is right.

Within our families, neighborhoods, schools, and places of work, let us continue reaching out, renewing our spirit of friendship, community service, and caring for each other -- a spirit that flows like a deep and powerful river through the history of our nation.

I made a point last year which some of our critics jumped on, but I believe it has merit. Government bureaucracies spend billions for problems related to drugs, alcoholism, and disease. How much of that money could we save, how much better off might Americans be if all of us tried a little harder to live by the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule? I've been told that since the beginning of civilization millions and millions of laws have been written. I've even heard someone suggest it was as many as several billion. And yet, taken all together, all those millions and millions of laws have not improved on the Ten Commandments one bit.

Look at projects like CBN's "Operation Blessing," Moody Bible Institute's "Open Line" radio program, inner city -- or the radio program, "Inner City," I should say, in Chicago, and the work of Dr. E.V. Hill of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Los Angeles. They show us that America is more than just government on the one hand and helpless individuals on the other. They show us that lives are saved, people are reborn and, yes, dreams come true when we heed the voice of the Spirit, minister to the needy, and glorify God. That is the stuff of which miracles are made.

Our mission stretches far beyond our borders; God's family knows no borders. In your life you face daily trials, but millions of believers in other lands face far worse. They are mocked and persecuted for the crime of loving God. To every religious dissident trapped in that cold, cruel existence, we send our love and support. Our message? You are not alone; you are not forgotten; do not lose your faith and hope because someday you, too, will be free.

If the Lord is our light, our strength, and our salvation, whom shall we fear? Of whom shall we be afraid? No matter where we live, we have a promise that can make all the difference, a promise from Jesus to soothe our sorrows, heal our hearts, and drive away our fears.



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He promised there will never be a dark night that does not end. Our "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." He promised if our hearts are true, His love will be as sure as sunlight. And, by dying for us, Jesus showed how far our love should be ready to go: all the way.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

I'm a little self-conscious because I know very well you all could recite that verse to me.

Helping each other, believing in Him, we need never be afraid. We will be part of something far more powerful, enduring, and good than all the forces here on Earth. We will be a part of paradise.

May God keep you always, and may you always keep God. Thank you very much.