

**FDR's Vision of Liberation**  
**a dialogue between Paul Sparrow and Bruce Chilton**

The most influential among modern presidents, Franklin Delano Roosevelt has eluded attempts to categorize him according to political ideology. His pragmatism is legendary, but his deep, long-lasting initiatives, imitated by politicians on the Right as well as the Left, were more coherent than simple expediency can explain. They were generated from a specific vision he held of what it means to be human, and of how the American people in particular have honored the religious dimension of their common life. From his writings and speeches, his conversations and letters, he left behind clues of his own spirituality: a moving force behind the New Deal.

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**Speech to the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America** [December 6, 1933]

Christianity was born in and of an era notable for the great gulf that separated the privileged from the underprivileged of the world of two thousand years ago — an era of lines of demarcation between conquerors and conquered; between caste and caste; between warring philosophies based on the theories of logicians rather than on practical humanities. The early churches were united in a social ideal.

We recognize the right of the individual to seek and to obtain his own fair wage, his own fair profit, in his own fair way — just so long as in the doing of it he does not push down or hold down his own neighbor. And at the same time, we are at one in calling for collective effort on broad lines of social planning — a collective effort which is wholly in accord with the social teachings of Christianity.

Toward that new definition of prosperity the churches and the Governments, while wholly separate in their functioning, can work hand in hand. Government can ask the churches to stress in their teaching the ideals of social justice, while at the same time government guarantees to the churches — Gentile and Jewish — the right to worship God in their own way. The churches, while they remain wholly free from even the suggestion of interference in Government, can at the same time teach their millions of followers that they have the right to demand of the Government of their own choosing, the maintenance and furtherance of “a more abundant life.” State and Church are rightly united in a common aim.

**Letter to the Clergy of America** [September 23, 1935]

I am particularly anxious that the new social security legislation just enacted, for which we have worked so long, providing for old-age pensions, aid for crippled children and unemployment insurance, shall be carried out in keeping with the high purposes with which this law was enacted.

**Dedication of the St. Louis World War I Memorial** [October 14, 1936]

We in America do not build monuments to war. We do not build monuments to conquest. We build monuments to commemorate the spirit of sacrifice in war — reminders of our desire for peace.

**Letter to the World's Christian Endeavor Convention, Melbourne** [June 15, 1938]

What this weary world most needs is a revival of the spirit of religion. Would that such a revival could sweep the nations today and stir the hearts of men and women of all faiths to a reassertion of their belief in the Providence of God and the brotherhood of man. I doubt if there is in the world a single problem, whether social, political, or economic, which would not find

ready solution if men and nations would rule their lives according to the plain teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

**Radio Address to the Democratic National Convention** [July 19, 1940]

All that I have done to maintain the peace of this country and to prepare it morally, as well as physically, for whatever contingencies may be in store, I submit to the judgment of my countrymen. We face one of the great choices of history.

It is not alone a choice of Government by the people versus dictatorship.

It is not alone a choice of freedom versus slavery.

It is not alone a choice between moving forward or falling back. It is all of these rolled into one.

It is the continuance of civilization as we know it versus the ultimate destruction of all that we have held dear—religion against godlessness; the ideal of justice against the practice of force; moral decency versus the firing squad; courage to speak out, and to act, versus the false lullaby of appeasement.

But it has been well said that a selfish and greedy people cannot be free.

**Letter to the Jewish Education Committee** [December 16, 1940]

Our modern democratic way of life has its deepest roots in our great common religious tradition, which for ages past has taught to civilized mankind the dignity of the human being, his equality before God, and his responsibility in the making of a better and fairer world.

**Message to Congress on the State of the Union** [January 06, 1941]

I have called for personal sacrifice. I am assured of the willingness of almost all Americans to respond to that call.

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.

The first is freedom of speech and expression — everywhere in the world.

The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way — everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want — which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants — everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear — which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor — anywhere in the world.

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