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Fight for Freedom Address, April 19, 1941

Henry W. Hobson

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Fight For Freedom -- Address -- April 19, 1941

The Rt. Rev. Henry W. Hobson

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A moment in history has come when we must either fight for our freedom or lose it. I speak tonight from a station only a few miles from the spot where 166 years ago a little band of seemingly ill equipped men faced a similar moment -- for they too had to fight for freedom or lose it. They dared to fire the shot that was "heard around the world." They dared because within their souls was the belief that God had made them to be free men. Free to speak -- Free to write -- Free to listen -- Free to worship -- Free to govern themselves and determine their own destinies. The battle of Lexington, which we celebrate on this Patriots' Day, was our forbears' answer to dictatorship in the moment of crisis when freedom hung in the balance.

Tonight in another such moment, when man's right to be free is again attacked by gigantic forces, I speak to you on behalf of The Fight For Freedom Committee. Those who present this call to you the people of America do so because we believe -- First, that freedom is worth fighting for. Second, that for us to say that Hitler's defeat is essential to insure man's freedom is a cowardly and immoral position unless we are willing to face the dangers and sacrifices which others are suffering in this struggle for freedom. Third, that it is dishonest to engage in a wholesale material support of those fighting to defeat the dictator aggressors, who seek to enslave man, without facing and admitting the fact that we are in this war. Fourth, that unless we act now, with a recognition of the fact that we are at war and a readiness to do whatever is necessary to make certain Hitler's defeat, we shall lose the present war. Furthermore we shall have to contend, with far greater odds against us, in a future war on the Atlantic, the Pacific, and in the Americas. Those who would deny this fact, and lull you to sleep with a sense of false security using words that have lead millions into slavery, are not as wise as Hitler and Goebbels who face facts when they say "this war is a decisive battle between two enemy worlds." They know that we are part of that world which believes in freedom, and must therefore be subjected to insure a victory for dictatorship. But they are scornful of our part in the conflict because they think that we are so fearful of war that we will follow the example of the other victims of Nazism and postpone action until the aggressors are ready to turn their attack upon us. The only chance we have to prove that they are wrong is to awake to the fact that we are already at war. Hitler wants us to stay asleep, and counts as his allies those who tell us that we are not at war and that we can retain our security by avoiding any act of hostility. He knows that we can never attain our objective until a recognition of a state of war unites us against him, and that the longer it takes us to come to this recognition the better his chances are for victory.

No one hates war more than I do. I have seen, and experienced in my own mind and body in 1918, a good many of those horrors which the isolationists, appeasers and defeatists paint so vividly for us.

They can't tell me anything about war. These groups which seek to scare us by their descriptions of war would also have the country believe that those of us who take the Fight For Freedom position are, to quote one of their leaders, a "gang of warmongers -- building a new and more vicious organization". -- They have branded us as "Judases" who seek to "betray" our country. They accuse us of wanting to send the sons and husbands of American women to their deaths. The truth is that those who have joined in urging that we must fight for freedom now, stand in the tradition of those patriots for whom we give thanks today, who loved freedom so fully that they were ready to sacrifice themselves to win a victory for the cause they served. The fight then was against a dictator king. The fight today is not for Britain, or for any other political regime, but against a dictatorship which threatens our country, as it threatens the world, because it denies the right of man to live as a free child of God. Only when we decide as a nation that our freedom is a great heritage which is worth fighting for, can we overcome our lethargy and our fears, and find that unity of purpose, and courage of soul, which will enable us to continue in that way of life which expresses the truth that "all men are created free and equal".

We, like those who fought for freedom 166 years ago, deplore the death of sons and husbands, but we would rather die ourselves and have our sons die, than to follow a course which we are convinced would condemn a far greater host of sons and husbands to die in future years. We believe that from the standpoint of the destruction which war brings, the way of the isolationist will be far more devastating in its effect than the course we urge. For following the isolationist way we would be left alone to face the final onrush of aggression from all sides in total war. We believe that if you want to get a true picture of the dead end of the isolationists' road you can take all their description of what war is, multiply it tenfold, and then add the background of an enslaved people. For this way leads not only to the greater loss of life, but to the destruction of courage, faith, the spirit of sacrifice, heroism and loyalty -- to the quenching of what Robert Sherwood had called "man's unconquerable aspiration to dignity and freedom and purity in the sight of God."

Troubled Christians have asked me how I as a minister can urge that we face the fact that we are involved in war. I assure you that my decision has not been made lightly, or without most careful thought about what I feel to be my Christian duty. People talk to me about the alternate way of "spiritual resistance." When a man denies God and blasphemes against God's Spirit, and then goes forth to destroy God's gifts to man, I dare not hide behind such words as "spiritual resistance", because in so doing I give him a free hand to achieve his evil purposes. Force in a moment of emergency is at times the only weapon which will prevent evil from triumphing over right when we are faced by one who has made himself impervious to the action of God's Spirit.

I have taken my stand because I believe that Hitler, and the forces he has marshalled in his violent aggression against all mankind, have chosen that state of blasphemy against the Spirit of God which makes any

appeal to them on a spiritual basis ineffective. I therefore favor the use of force, as the only weapon available, to bring about their defeat. Further since I believe that Christians cannot be primarily concerned with their own safety, I can see no virtue in the Christians in America trying to avoid sacrifice and suffering while others are engaged in a death struggle against a common enemy. Nor can I see any merit in a Christian trying to save his life while others are dying to maintain the essential values upon which our free life depends. Peace is one of these values, and I favor using force to oppose and defeat the totalitarian onslaught because I am convinced it is the way which will best lead to the good of ultimate and lasting peace for our country and the world.

The Fight For Freedom Committee has no political affiliations, no connection with any group or special interest in society. Those who have joined represent every phase and area of American life. Widely separated in our activities we are bound together by one supreme longing to have our country meet the present crisis with reality, courage, honesty, and a loyalty to those ideals upon which the future existence of our nation depends. We believe that the present world conflict is an irreconcilable struggle between dictatorship and freedom, and that if dictatorship wins in the present area of the conflict, there will be little hope for freedom anywhere. We therefore represent all citizens who share our convictions that this is our fight for freedom in which we must play our full part.

It is impossible over the radio to give the long list of names of those who have formed the Committee, however, it should be known that the Honorable Carter Glass, Senior Senator from Virginia, is our Honorary Chairman. We asked him to serve because he stands for the qualities in our national life which have made it true in the past that Americans would not make terms with tyranny or run from danger. In response, Senator Glass breaking a lifetime rule, wired:

"Because of the great principles involved and the desperate situation in which we find ourselves, I am putting aside the considered practice of a lifetime to lend my name and whatever strength I may have to the work of the Fight For Freedom Committee."

We who issue this call have set forth in definite form certain of our convictions. We want you to know where we stand and we invite those who would stand with us to send in their names. You may do this by sending your names either to me in Cincinnati, Ohio, or to the New York office of The Fight For Freedom Committee, 1270 Sixth Avenue, New York City. I present the statement upon which we have agreed.