What the U.S.A. could do for the World

A Lecture delivered by

SCOTT NEARING

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What the U.S.A. Could Do for the World

By SCOTT NEARING

IN THIS SERIES OF LECTURES we have been talking about the position of the United States. At the start I raised the question, What is likely to happen to a community when a group of businessmen undertakes to make public policy? We have examined that question from a number of aspects and I suppose we can sum up the result of our discussion, first in a theoretical, and then in a practical fashion.

In a theoretical fashion, we can say that our study of the economic and international position of the United States would indicate that businessmen in power tend to damage the economy, run it into a jam, subordinate public weal to private profit and involve the nation in competitive developments which inevitably lead to war. Then, if we turn to the actual record, we find that the United States, within a period of thirty-five or forty years, participated in two general wars, was involved in one long decade of depression and now is apparently tottering on the verge of another collapse. So our theoretical examination and our historical review bring us to the same conclusion, which is that, when businessmen make policy, in the old phrase, "ruin impends"—*look out!*

I would like, in this connection, to read a short paragraph from an article written by Henry L. Stimson and published in *Foreign Affairs,* October 1947. Says Mr. Stimson:

> "Only two years ago, we triumphantly ended the greatest war in history. Most of us then looked forward eagerly to the relative relaxation of peace. Reluctantly we have now come to understand that victory and peace are not synonymous. Over large areas of the world we have nothing better than an armed truce; in some places there is open fighting; everywhere men know that there is as yet no stable settlement. Close on the heels of victory has loomed a new world crisis."

That is a statement of disillusionment by one of the high-ranking political leaders of this generation and, I think, a very good summary of the situation in which the American people find themselves. They

thought that, under the leadership they accepted and followed during the last thirty or forty years, they would enjoy progress, peace and prosperity. They are forced now to abandon these hopes and realize that the present leadership will bring depression, war, uncertainty.

The difference between Mr. Stimson and the majority of people in the United States is that Mr. Stimson now recognizes this to be the situation and talks about it, while many of the people don't yet know what is going on. It is too bad that Mr. Stimson wasn't broadcast every half-hour over radio networks. His statement, instead of being broadcast to the whole American people, appeared in a magazine read only by political scientists and a few other folk interested in this specialized direction.

I think we can answer the question very generally in a few words—

Don't trust business leadership in the making of public policy.

I WOULD LIKE to raise another question. I haven't time to discuss it tonight, so I will just refer to it in passing. If we can't trust business leadership to make public policy in the public interest, in how far can people trust themselves in a society founded on graft? I began four weeks ago by reading a series of advertisements which said that the American people have more automobiles, telephones and radios than any other people in the world and are therefore the most blessed among mankind. How much truth is there in this? Can we define a high standard of living as one which supplies the greatest amount of material possessions? In other words, can we worship Mammon, serve our selfish material interests and continue to be a great people? We will reserve that question for another time. I just throw it out in passing because we can't just glibly turn to the business community and say, "You business makers have done us a bad turn." Very likely we shall have to recognize the fact that any group of people anywhere which concentrates its attention on satisfying its selfish material desires will probably land about where the United States is going to land in the not-too-distant future.

WELL, we will go on and talk about our subject for tonight, which is, *What can the U.S.A. do for the world?* I am going to divide the answer into two phases—some things that can be done in the United States and some things than can be done abroad.

What Can the U.S.A. Do for the World Within Its Own Boundaries?

We can answer that in general by saying, It can provide an example of the way things should be done; it can set an example to the rest of the world. We are often prone to criticize the fellow next door and not be too particular about our own dooryard.

I. I want to begin by indicating three or four ways in which the people of the United States can make a contribution within the United States. The first I have already indicated—by re-evaluating our value scales, what things are important in the national life in terms of the national goal. Mr. Truman has grown fond of saying, "We must be strong, we are mighty," etc. Now, that general relationship of ideas revolves around the theme that might makes right and, if we are mighty enough, we are pretty sure to be right. This is a declaration which, when stated by Nazi or Japanese leaders, we repudiated. Therefore, in handling our own domestic situation, we have of necessity to repudiate that same idea in the United States and say to Mr. Truman and those who hold for this idea, "Wait a moment—hold on—the important thing is, not that the United States should be rich or well armed; the important thing is that the United States should be right." That, of course, marks a divergence in approach; these two paths lead in more or less opposite directions.

When I say the United States should be right, I mean it should recognize and follow certain abstract conceptions of what it means to be right. For example, to do justice between individuals and between racial groups within the United States; to maintain equality before the law for those who are rich and those who are poor, those who are white and those who are black; to do simple justice. This simple justice can be done by weak or poor people and, conversely, people can be very rich and very strong and not do simple, wholesome things. To carry that one step further, a relatively poor and weak people can set for itself a pattern of life which is based on neighborliness and sympathetic understanding, with the emphasis on basic human relationships. A rich and powerful people can set up a life which is essentially dehumanized, human contacts being thrust aside by the desire to get rich, gain power, prestige or something else.

In this connection, I would like to remind you that probably no man in the United States is rich enough or powerful enough to win

a place in history like that occupied by Mahatma Gandhi, who gave up all his wealth and lived among the humblest people. In other words, simplicity in life is perhaps a way of being great, whereas wealth and power—and the spirit that goes with wealth and power —are very possibly ways of self-destruction.

Now all this, of course, is familiar to those of you who have gone to college and studied philosophy and ethics. But I would say that one of the things the United States could do in setting an example to the rest of the world is to work out value scales which represent the highest, the most exalting and ennobling that men know. If you go back and read the great thoughts of the great men of the past, they are almost unanimous on this theme: that wealth and power and prestige are probably disadvantages, rather than advantages—liabilities, rather than assets. And all this boasting about radios, telephones, automobiles and the like is just vainglorious talk, because none of these things make great peoples and great nations. Great peoples and great nations may be rich or poor; it is the products of human genius that make nations great. If these products of human genius are forthcoming, a nation is great; if the sciences, philosophies and arts are ignored, then a nation may be rich but it can't be great. So much for this first point, which is academic reasoning of a sort and yet fundamental to any consideration of what a people like the United States can do for the benefit of other people.

2. The second point I want to make, bearing directly on what we have been saying these last four weeks, is that, if the people of the United States are going to make a contribution to the rest of the world, they have got to take over their own economy; they must collectivize their economy. That means, they must take the making of policy out of the hands of the business class. You cannot do this by legislation—the antitrust laws show that—because those who control the source of income, the means of wealth, are always in a position to circumvent legislative action. If we are going to modify our position in the United States, as we hope to, so as to provide world leadership, the first practical essential is that modern economy should be recognized in law for what it is in fact. Our transportation, communication, mining enterprises, etc., are public enterprises—staffed by large numbers of people, with large numbers of consumers dependent upon them, and in a position to exercise great influence in the making of policy. They are public enterprises in fact and must be made so in law.

By taking over private economy and making it public economy, we shall eliminate the power of what we call the vested interests—those who control the jobs on which the majority depend for livelihood and who can determine economic policy, the kind of stupid policy in which they are now involving us. The vested interests will be eliminated to the degree that their economic base is destroyed by measures which reduce inequality in the United States, economic and social inequality, and minimize exploitation. These results are essentially desirable results in terms of social justice and, if worked out, would provide an example for the rest of the world as to how a modern economy should be handled.

So I say, outside of point one, which was revaluation, our first consideration in the United States must be the conversion of private industry, private ownership of jobs, into public economy, or collective economy.

3. The next contribution we can make is to repudiate the doctrine of superiority, to stop teaching children that this is "God's country," that we are God's chosen people and that the other peoples of the world are inferior because they live outside the United States. Queen Wilhemina made a broadcast this week in which the most important single sentence was, "The time has come when nations must recognize that they must deal with each other on a basis of equality." That truth is worldwide and in the United States it is capable of intensive application. In order to maintain their superiority, people have to keep attempting to outwit the other fellow and always fear that the other fellow may outwit them. They must try to get ahead of him and, if necessary, beat him down. We, on the contrary, must recognize the essential equality of people before the law and before the bar of society.

4. I think also it is necessary for us to repudiate the principle of acquisition and to say that, after the age of six or seven, for a child to collect pebbles in a pail, or for an adult to collect yellow pieces of metal in a box is a sign of arrested development. Instead of teaching that the way to get on in the world is to collect as much as possible, we must recognize that, at a certain stage of life, possessions become a burden. This is the Hindu attitude. At a certain stage of his life, a Hindu householder disposes of all his possessions and spends the declining years of his life trying to live as well as possible, no longer depending on what he has, but turning to what he is. Repudiate the whole principle of acquisition as a standard

of success, teach children not to think they are superior—and certainly not because they have more green or yellow or red chips than other people in the neighborhood.

5. In the next place, we must exalt the common weal over the private weal. Instead of trying to take care of Number One, instead of insisting on our private interests first, we must insist on public interests first—the doctrine that the interests of the whole are more important than the interests of any part.

6. Finally, in this list of social adjustments that we might make, I would say we should set up a community which makes possible a balanced, orderly, beautiful and harmonious life—a life in which people can live with equanimity, with confidence and with a high sense of security and stability I mentioned the other night here that this year about 400,000 people in the United States will die of heart disease. The doctors say that one of the reasons why this disease has increased three-fold in destructiveness in the last fifty years is because of the tensions and anxieties and worries and fears under which the American people constantly live.

I have just witnessed an outstanding example of this. I was in Philadelphia yesterday and in Washington today and in both cities I saw black headlines, GREEK REDS ORDERED TO KILL AMERICANS. Here is a deliberate attempt to stir up hatred of the Reds, fear of the Reds, anxiety about the Reds, tension between us and the Reds. This has been the official policy of the State Department for the last eighteen months; those highest in policy-making in the United States have deliberately set out to build up fear and anxiety and hatred as part of public policy. This, of course, is a minor item, but I mention it because we have been living through it in the last twenty-four hours.

Instead of trying to build a harmonious life, we do everything to keep people stirred up and anxious. Instead of enabling people to live calmly and serenely, we keep them on pins and needles most of the time. All of you have watched lately the snow melting on the streets of Washington. I suppose you have also watched with a certain amount of interest the prices of cotton and corn and wheat slipping and sliding during the last two weeks. I would say that this letting nature take its course in one case is just as stupid and inexcusable as in the other If you are going to have snow in the city, you should get out and clean off the pavements. If your price structure gets out of adjustment, do what the Russians did on De-

cember 16th—adjust relations between excessive purchasing power and scarcity of consumer goods. The rational procedure is to think ahead and meet a situation as an engineer would. What we are doing we call "free enterprise"—hit-or-miss—you sit around and wait and watch the snow melt, and you watch the commodity markets move hither and yon, and you worry about the situation, unable to do anything about it. This is not the way to build a harmonious life.

LET ME SUMMARIZE this part of what I want to say in this manner: If the American people want to make a contribution to the world, one of the things is to put their own house in order and set an example of the way a community should look and the way a people should live Some parts of the world are very beautiful and well ordered—and some parts are full of tin cans and other such things. It seems to me there is no excuse for having a single ugly building in the United States, any more than there is an excuse for having an unsanitary building. There is no excuse for having people corralled in public transportation facilities as they are all over the United States. There is no excuse for the hurry, tension and hurly-burly of life, of which the United States is one of the most scandalous examples. The fact that we have automobiles and telephones and radios is no answer whatever to the problem of life.

And so I pay my final respects to our advertising friends and go on.

What Can the U.S.A. Do for the World in International Relations?

THE SECOND CONTRIBUTION that the American people could make to the world is in foreign relations, international relations, that tangle and complexity of tension which has created such great anxiety all over the world. I suppose all people who read the papers or listen to the radio feel extremely anxious about the immediate future possibilities. The scientists tell us that weapons of destruction are more effective, more destructive than ten years ago and the papers play up the kind of thing they did today in Philadelphia and Washington in regard to the Greek situation. Matters of this kind are creating widespread, worldwide anxiety.

I don't say that it is possible at this moment, this year, to call together a world constitutional convention, draw up a rational constitution for the world, have that constitution accepted by the nations of the world and have a world government set up and functioning within the next twelve months. Neither do I believe,

however, that we have to go on in the way we are going—particularly always saying the other fellow is to blame. After the recent fiasco in London, when the Big Four ministers got together and then gave up and stopped talking, each side pointed a finger at the other and said, "They are to blame." They adjourned and let it go at that. This butters no parsnips. Such an act gets nowhere—simply postpones the inevitable agreement or disagreement. I am not going to talk about Russia or the Reds in Greece or in Yugoslavia. I am going to suggest some things that the United States could do now in regard to the international situation and I am going to begin with a very simple example.

When the U.S. oil interests found out that there was oil in Arabia, there were several things they might have done. One was to stake out a claim and make the necessary legal arrangements and political commitments and say, "This is our oil and we intend to keep it and, if you don't like it, we will fight about it." This is the line the United States has followed in Arabia. This policy will lead to another war; it has in the past and it will in the future.

Instead of following that policy, it seems to me that the U.S. experts, having found that there was oil in Arabia, could then have said, "We have discovered an important natural resource, on which most of the world is dependent. We propose that the United Nations set up in its Economic and Social Council a special department which shall take title to this property, or take a mandate over it, and then proceed to develop and distribute the oil which the territory contains." The first method is a unilateral action—"we saw the oil first, we got it; it is ours and, if you don't like it, come and fight." The other method says, "Here is a resource that is important to mankind; we propose that the United Nations make it available to mankind." I am suggesting that the United States take that type of action which makes international control and utilization of world resources, rather than national ownership and control, the pattern for the future. You can say, if you like, that the U.N Economic and Social Council has no such authority—then give it the authority. You can say, "It has never been done." My answer is, "You always have to do a thing the first time; there never has been a time when human beings had the whole future pattern laid out." I am saying that the richest and best armed nation, the best placed nation, is the nation to begin that kind of pattern.

ANOTHER ITEM in this connection: The United States is the richest and best armed nation on earth. We recognize the fact

that armament in private hands is not a means to peace and security. It has been obvious for a long time that armed states got into war because they were armed. When our neighbors across the sea, Germany thirty or forty years ago, were well prepared and well armed, we said, "That is what happens—you go around carrying a gun, you get into trouble and you proceed to use it." The United States is now the best armed nation in the world; the United States is, therefore, best prepared to say: "We are now ready to turn over all heavy armament to a responsible United Nations authority. We are not proceeding with our own private arms plans and our own private arms equipment. We are prepared to turn over all arms to a responsible United Nations authority."

Again, this would be a substitution of collective for unilateral action. Instead of trying to enrich itself and make itself more powerful, the nation would turn from riches and power and recognize that the wellbeing of mankind is more important than the wellbeing of any one nation and that peace and security can be secured only when a world authority holds a monopoly of military equipment.

The United States is in a better position than any other nation to take this stand with regard to oil and with regard to armament. Until some country does step out and take that position, we shall continue to fight about oil and other resources and we shall continue to use the heavy arms we have whenever our interests are threatened.

In general, the United States should, as a matter of policy, cease, whenever possible, to act individually and unilaterally and should insist, whenever possible, that world action be collective action, that the handling of world problems be delegated to a world authority and that each nation confine unilateral action to its home territory. In the home territory, the United States is entitled to act. Within the United States, in interstate matters, the states are not entitled to act; that power is vested in the national government. Likewise in international matters, no nation is entitled to act.

I can't guarantee that in the next twelve months a world authority like that will be set up—I think not. But, in the meantime, every time a policy decision is made, it can be made either in terms of individual sovereign rights or in terms of international peace and wellbeing. For example, if the Greek situation is as was indicated tonight by these dispatches, if a new crisis is threatening in Greece, where American military personnel are arming and training and equipping and organizing and planning military action—doing every-

thing but direct participation in combat—if this situation has arisen, then the issue is not between the United States government and the guerrilla forces, or between the United States and Greece, or the United States and Albania, or whatever other government is involved. The rational action is for the United States to take this matter up with the United Nations and secure some kind of action by the United Nations.

You can go behind this to March 1947, when a decision was made. This decision should never have been made. It was a matter for international action, not for intervention by one nation. But the mess having been created and the danger now arising in Greece, the logical next step is to throw this matter into an international tribunal. If the United Nations cannot provide that tribunal, if it is not a competent international authority, then the next step is for the United States to demand that the United Nations Charter be amended in such fashion that the United Nations *can* function effectively, and whatever powers are necessary to maintain peace and security in the world should be exercised by the United Nations. It should be the business of the United States to work, in season and out, to see that these powers are vested in the United Nations. If Mr. Truman and the State Department and other policy-makers were as anxious to get effective collective action as they are to protect oil interests and to stir up animosity toward Eastern Europe, we would get an effective United Nations.

If the United Nations can't do the job, strengthen its Charter until it can function. Many of you will say that the United Nations will never function. I would go beyond this and say that the United Nations was designed *not* to function, just as was the League of Nations. If that is true, then the next step is for the United States to take the leadership in calling a world constitutional convention and having a world constitution drafted which will be effective in providing international world authority.

This line of thinking thrusts upon the United States, as the richest and best armed nation, an immediate responsibility for doing something about the international situation. I am not suggesting that what we do will be effective in the next twelve months. If we achieve these results in fifty years, we shall be doing well. In the United States itself we have been working one hundred and fifty years toward setting up an effective government and there are still things to be done, we still have places to go. A beginning on the international problem was made in 1899 at the Hague Conference,

but we still have a long way to go to create an effective international government. If we are interested in the collective welfare of mankind, it behooves us to apply our energies to that task and work unceasingly on that job until peace and security are assured by the establishment of an effective world authority.

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IF A PROGRAM LIKE THIS were followed, if the people of the United States cleaned up their own backyard, reorganized their economy, reorganized their social outlook, revamped their social standards and reformed and internationalized their foreign relations, then I think certain conclusions could be drawn.

1. The people of the United States would be better off than they are now. I don't say they would have more telephones and radios, but they would be better off. Because I think the people of the United States are not well off now. They may have beautiful houses and clothes and still be unhappy, frustrated, ill adjusted. The standards of wellbeing would be raised.

2. These readjusments, which would be very expensive in material wealth, in social concern, in individual effort and collective effort—these expenses would nevertheless be much less than the expense of fighting another war. The last war cost over a trillion dollars in materials and labor power, not to mention the millions of lives lost. The kind of program I am suggesting would be much less expensive than another war. Mr. Truman wants to spend eleven billion dollars getting ready for the next war. The program I am suggesting would cost billions but the cost would still be less than that of a war program.

Henry Luce and a number of people who are of his way of thinking want the United States to dominate and police the world. My guess is that we have in the United States a considerable minority who would like to see the United States dominate and police the world—not conquer or own the world, but tell people all over the world what to do. A senate committee has decided that it would be a good thing to set up a special cabinet officer to tell the sixteen Marshall Plan nations what to do. It is a very gratifying thing to be able to sit at a desk and tell millions of people what to do. Napoleon got a kick out of that. It has at all times been a temptation to some people to push other people around. It gives one a sense of power to be able to send people to happiness or misery,

liberty or death, but I should regret it if the United States were in a position to tell sixteen nations what to do—or to tell any people outside the United States what to do. World policy must be made collectively, not individually and unilaterally. I should regret to see Mr. Luce and his American Century group gain positions where they could make policy in the United States.

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I HAVE BEEN TRYING to outline some things which the people of the United States could do to make a contribution to the world.

In domestic affairs, repudiate the leadership of big business—not only eliminate the personnel, which is incidental, but repudiate the principle embodied in the present advertising campaign, that the American people are well off because of automobiles, radios, telephones. Revalue our standards of what is good and what is bad.

Internationally, stop acting individually and unilaterally and begin acting internationally and collectively.

These changes can take place only over a long period of time, but *you and I can begin them tomorrow in our own lives.* We can repudiate the principles and practices which are advocated in the department stores and newspaper advertising. We can repudiate the telephone-radio-automobile-gadget attitude to life. You can say to yourself, "I am through with that kind of life; in principle it is bad, in practice it is devastating to individual and community; from now on, I am having nothing more to do with it." You don't have to wait for the millennium to reorganize your own life. The State Department doesn't have to wait until a perfect world federation has been set up. The next time an issue comes before the State Department—and one comes up every day—this government can either act as it has been acting, or it can turn definitely toward collective international action and insist that the agencies be set up that will make that international action possible.

Some Excerpts from the Question Period:

Q. Do you mean that these changes will take place after a war, and that war is impending?

A. I don't suggest that war is impending. I say that the chances are 80-20, or 65-35 or 85-15, or overwhelmingly great.

Q. After that, will the world become an orderly place?

A. No, I think the world will be a desert, brigands will rule and people will be pushed around. The chances of a peaceful, orderly world are extremely remote. That is why I urge that you and I begin tomorrow to revamp our lives and that the State Department make every effort to change its policy.

Q. If we take the leadership toward establishing a world authority, what is your position if Russia refuses to participate?

A. If the United States takes the leadership, the Russians would probably participate. If they want to create a new problem, let us say we will meet that situation when it arises. The Russians have been, since their revolution, most insistent upon *this very thing*—the setting up of a collective world and a world authority. I imagine that, if the United States would reverse its present policy and turn its attention to building a secure and peaceful world, the Russians would be among the first to cooperate.

Q. If the United States turned its munitions over to the United Nations, what use should the United Nations make of these munitions?

A. The United Nations will have to have enough police power to maintain order and enough munitions in the hands of its police to maintain order. World order can never be maintained if the world is made up of armed sovereign states, each armed better than the United Nations. Monopoly of arms must be vested in a world government. We hope it will not need to use them, but there is a possibility that police action will be necessary.

Q. How could we collectivize our economy?

A. We could take over as they did in Russia—or as Lincoln did about slavery, by "a stroke of the pen"—or as Great Britain is trying to do—the Bank of England gave owners of bank stock government bonds in exchange. I am in favor, as a matter of general policy, of doing the thing in a way which will create the least possible friction and present the fewest possible obstacles to getting the job done.

Q. Couldn't the same kind of "tin god" arise under a socialized General Motors as under a private General Motors?

A. Of course. There are a number of answers to that. There is the old answer of eternal vigilance. Another is to have an organization controlled, in part at least, by the workers in each depart-

ment—industrial democracy within the organization. Let those inside select the personnel and help make policy.

Q. How much effect do you think the propaganda of the last two years has had on the American people?

A. After traveling around the country quite a bit, I would say that it has had a very profound effect. It has created a degree of anxiety and concern, tension, fear and hatred that has not existed in the United States except twice in my memory—in World War I and World War II. All the psychological conditions for war have been established. I don't believe everybody has swallowed the propaganda, but the general attitude of America has been effectively modified. I was in Germany when Hitler did the same thing in the same way—the same tactics and exactly the same result. The result must be the same in any community where people depend on sources of information which are in the hands of the people who are making policy.

Q. What is the truth behind the Palestine fiasco?

A. I suppose the most important truth behind it is that Palestine happens to be in the hottest of hot spots. Oil, the Dardanelles, Suez, and trade opportunities center in the Eastern Mediterranean. No matter who is in Palestine, the Palestine kettle bubbles. The Jews are a very small group—if they were millions and had guns they would win respect from the State Department. The people who have population, etc., are the Arabs. In the power-politics game to checkmate Russia, the effective local group is the Arabs. Irrespective of commitments, the Arab League is the group with which Mr. Bevin has to work to keep Russia from coming to power in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

The question of partition raises an interesting issue. Can anybody go into Palestine or India or any place and carve a territory up and say, "On the left side of this line is territory A and on the right, territory B," and make the decision stick? The United Nations is going to find this difficult. The carving up of territory into individual states is probably a matter that should be adjusted the way it was adjusted in the United States. Maryland, Virginia, etc., have control over local schools, police force, etc., but interstate currency, transportation, commerce, etc., are vested in national authority. That same rule should hold in the world—central authortiy over international matters, local control over local affairs—without any attempt to distinguish along racial or national lines.

In the United States today we have a militant minority that has been largely absorbed into Rotary Clubs, the Methodist Church, parent-teacher associations, etc., on which the government relies to put the Marshall Plan across. It is our job to get this militant minority lined up on the left, in diametric opposition to Truman, Marshall, the NAM, the Chamber of Commerce and all other representatives of the dying capitalist order. You may call it communist, socialist or any other word, but what we need in the United States today is a *militant organized minority on the left.*

The other day I was asked to talk to a group of clergymen on *The Duty of the Christian Ministry in Our Time.* I changed it to *The Opportunity of the Ministry in Our Time.* I said: "I never make a speech when I am among talkers, so I will just say three things. (1) We are living in a period of transition, when a new order is being born and an old order is dying. This will probably change the whole face of human society. (2) Proclaim the glad tidings of the new order. (3) If you do that, you will lose your jobs, you may lose your liberty, you may even lose your life." One of the ministers said, "That is a pretty bleak outlook." I replied, "Calvary was a bleak place."

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