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CHURCHILL, FDR, AND IKE

Lessons in Leadership and Faith from Partners Who Won World War II

Churchill, FDR, and Ike: Lessons in Leadership and Faith from Partners Who Won World War II

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*Editor's note: This is a condensed version of Dr. Smith's December 2019 lecture.
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Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Winston Churchill were three of the most important leaders of the Anglo-American community and the world in the 20th century. Today, I will briefly describe the faith and leadership styles of these three towering statesmen.

FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT

Franklin Roosevelt greatly expanded the scope of the federal government, substantially increased the power of the president, built a coalition that enabled the Democratic Party to be a major political force for the rest of the century, helped develop a new conception of foreign policy based on collective security and international aid, and helped make the United States a major player in global politics—a position it continues to occupy today.

Several of those who knew Roosevelt best claimed he was “a deeply religious man.” Roosevelt was a vestryman for almost 40 years and half of this time he was the senior warden of St. James Episcopal Church in Hyde Park, New York, a position he held the entire time he was president.

Roosevelt frequently urged Americans to pray, expressed appreciation for others' prayers for him, and included prayers in his addresses. He set aside Sunday, September 8, 1940 as a day of prayer and exhorted citizens to beseech “the Ruler of the universe to bless our Republic, to make us grateful for our heritage and firm in its defense, and to grant to this land and to the troubled world a righteous, enduring peace.”

Emphasizing the power of prayer as a weapon during World War II, the president proclaimed New Year's



Dr. Gary Scott Smith

Day 1942, Thanksgiving Day 1942, and New Year's Day 1943 as days of prayer to "solemnly express our dependence on Almighty God." Roosevelt's most famous prayer was the one he composed and then read during the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944. He appealed to people of all faiths to join him in prayer as the Allies began the final push to liberate Europe and defeat the ungodly Axis powers.

Roosevelt was convinced that God was deeply interested in and directed the universe and that as president he was an agent of God. His faith that God oversaw the world and that people were not controlled by any form of determinism—economic, racial, historical, or geographical—made him very sanguine about human potential and progress.

In the final analysis, Roosevelt's faith seems to have been simple but sincere. While he was not very concerned about the intellectual or devotional aspects of Christianity, he appeared to be genuinely moved by biblical stories, episodes of Christian history, moral ideals, and occasionally by worship experiences, ranging from singing Methodist hymns to participating in the Episcopal liturgy. Although he sought to use the teachings and historical record of Christianity to motivate Americans to pursue courses of action, he seemed to be personally inspired as well. He experienced a brief crisis of faith after contracting polio, but thereafter he seemed to maintain a steady belief in God's power, goodness, and love. He frequently spoke about God's providence, saw himself as carrying out God's purposes, and insisted that America's success ultimately depended upon its people seeking God's guidance and striving to do His will.

DWIGHT EISENHOWER

Although Dwight Eisenhower did not join a church until the second Sunday after his inauguration in 1953, the general has often been considered one of the most religious presidents in American history. Several factors contributed to this assessment. He attended church regularly, proclaimed national days of prayer, invited Billy Graham and other influential clergymen to the White House, and helped establish the Foundation for Religious Action. His speeches contained more religious rhetoric than almost any other president, and he repeatedly called for a spiritual revival and a moral crusade against the nation's ills.

Eisenhower insisted that soldiers and clergymen had an identical purpose—to defend "the dignity of man and, therefore, the glory of God." His positions during World War II required him to make extraordinarily difficult strategic decisions and to order hundreds of thousands of soldiers to risk and often sacrifice their lives, which prompted Eisenhower to reexamine his purpose in life and his relationship with God.

After joining National Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C., Eisenhower attended faithfully, regularly gave money to the church, occasionally sent copies of his pastor's sermons to staff members and helped lead a campaign to fund the congregation's new \$20 million building. While Roosevelt was sometimes criticized for going to church infrequently, Eisenhower was widely applauded for attending faithfully. As Roosevelt had done, he held a special religious service the mornings of his two inaugurations.

In one of Eisenhower's first speeches as president he told Americans, "your prayers for divine guidance on my behalf are the greatest gift you could possibly bring to me." It was widely noted that all his cabinet meetings opened with prayer, usually silent, but occasionally led by cabinet members. Each year of his presidency, Eisenhower proclaimed a national day of penance and prayer. He spoke at several national prayer breakfasts.

Eisenhower shared Roosevelt's profound respect for the Bible, but he was more knowledgeable about its teachings. He read the entire Bible twice before the age of 18. As a child he memorized the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and other portions of scripture.

In July 1955, Eisenhower traveled to Geneva, Switzerland to implore the Soviets, British, and French to develop more positive, peaceful relations and reduce weapons. Because the people of the free world believed in a supreme being and the Golden Rule, he argued, they were committed to promoting justice, respect for others, and peace. Before leaving for Geneva, he exhorted all Americans to go to their places of worship on their next Sabbath day and pray for peace, which would demonstrate to the world "the sincerity and depth of our aspirations for peace."

By repeatedly referring to God, religion, and spirituality in public addresses, arguing that spiritual revival was essential to national renewal, worshipping regularly, and supporting religious groups and activities, Eisenhower encouraged Americans to deepen their spiritual life and improve their moral practices.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

The accolades accorded Winston Churchill are seemingly endless. He allegedly almost single-handedly slayed the dragon of totalitarianism and saved Western civilization from the diabolical plans of Adolf Hitler. As a British journal succinctly stated when he died, "we are a free people" because of Churchill. Not only did this indispensable man preserve the West's culture and institutions, but after World War II he foresaw and warned the world about the communist menace. Numerous historians have hailed him as the

greatest person of the 20th century. In a BBC 2002 poll, Churchill was named the greatest Briton of all time—beating out William Shakespeare and Charles Darwin.

When scholars and popular writers have discussed Churchill's religion, they have presented him in very different ways—as a traditional Anglican, a conventional Christian, a “God-haunted man,” a deist, a secularist, a skeptic, a “stalwart nonbeliever,” an agnostic, “a lifelong freethinker” and a “critic of organized religion” who possessed a “somewhat murky” religious faith, a proponent of the “Religion of Health-Mindedness,” and even a potential convert to Islam. Churchill's faith is difficult to decipher in part because he usually kept his religious views private and personal.

Churchill was not religiously devout or personally pious. At no time in his adult life did he attend church services regularly. Despite intellectual doubts about Christianity that persisted throughout his life, Churchill valued the Christian faith and frequently drew on its resources, especially when facing great trials and troubles. For Churchill, as for American founders such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, Christianity's message and benefits were more important than whether the biblical accounts and creedal claims were literally true. Churchill, even during his most skeptical years when he was in his early 20s, had a profound sense of his own personal destiny, but who or what he believed determined his destiny—God or fate—is ultimately unclear.

After he became prime minister in 1940, Churchill's use of religious rhetoric increased substantially. Many of Churchill's most memorable wartime speeches are laced with biblical terminology and references to God. The faith of many political leaders becomes stronger in times of crisis, and Churchill's unconventional faith grew deeper during the dark days of World War II.

The friendship between Churchill and Roosevelt was based primarily on their common goals, mutual admiration, and personal trust. They also, however, shared the same Anglican/Episcopal faith, although Roosevelt was considerably more devout and much more frequently articulated biblical rationales for his policies and actions.

Between 1939 and 1945, Churchill and Roosevelt spent 113 days together and exchanged about 2,000 letters. Some of their letters and recorded conversations refer to aspects of their common faith. After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Churchill told Roosevelt, “This certainly simplifies things . . . God be with you.”

Roosevelt frequently mentioned his belief in Jesus, even calling him “our Lord” and affirming His bodily resurrection. Most 20th century politicians in both Britain and the United States including Eisenhower, by contrast, said little publicly about Jesus. Churchill, in his voluminous political statements, said almost nothing. Many of these other politicians did privately discuss their beliefs about Jesus but not Churchill. In his nearly 10 million published words, Churchill rarely mentioned Jesus. The five million words of his speeches contain only a single reference to Christ.

Churchill clearly was not an atheist. He referred to God numerous times in speeches, books, articles, and private letters. Calling Churchill an agnostic is also problematic considering his many public and private references to and affirmations of God. Especially telling is a letter he wrote to Clementine in 1928. Winston complained to her that their son Randolph’s “present phase is rabid Agnosticism” and that Randolph strove to defend this “dismal position.” Although he never referred to himself as such and had no relationship with the denomination, Churchill is perhaps best defined as a Unitarian. He believed in God and saw the essence of religion to be promoting upright morality and social service, but he did not affirm the deity of Christ.

LEADERSHIP

Having discussed the faith of Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Churchill, I conclude with a brief discussion of their leadership. Scholars rank FDR, Eisenhower, and Churchill as three of the greatest leaders of the 20th century. What traits made them outstanding leaders?

- 1. Communication:** They were excellent communicators. Roosevelt used his communication skills to shape public opinion and create grass-roots support that helped pass legislation in Congress. Eisenhower carefully crafted his words to hit the right note. Eisenhower rewrote his speeches to the point of driving his speechwriters crazy. Churchill was one of the world’s greatest speechmakers.
- 2. Optimism:** All three of these men displayed great optimism, no matter how dire the situation was. One of Churchill’s chief attributes was his capability to inspire people in the midst of very ominous circumstances.
- 3. Inspiration:** Eisenhower spent significant time with his troops to motivate them to fight. Eisenhower was convinced that he could get others to perform to the best of their ability by believing in them. He understood that a leader is only as strong as those in his command.

4. **Decisiveness:** All three men led decisively.
5. **Curiosity:** Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Churchill had curious minds and were eager to learn more. FDR encouraged feedback from the public and those in the White House. Eisenhower understood that his greatest resource was not his own genius but the genius of his team. He wrote: “Always try to associate yourself with and learn as much as you can from those who know more than you do, who do better than you, who see more clearly than you.”
6. **Confidence:** These three men were confident in their abilities, positions, and decisions. This enabled Churchill to stand almost alone in warning the British about the dangers of Hitler in the 1930s. It led FDR to ignore his closest advisors on some major issues, including the support the U.S. provided to Britain before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.
7. **Persistence:** They overcame significant personal adversity—Churchill had to deal with distant and aloof parents and many accidents and illnesses; FDR had to grapple with the polio he contracted at age 39 that rendered him paralyzed below the waist.
8. **Openness to new experiences:** All three learned much from their varied experiences.
9. **Personal charisma:** Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Churchill had magnetic personalities.
10. **Courage:** They all took bold action and demonstrated great courage.
11. **Sociability:** Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Churchill developed cordial relationships with colleagues, staff, and other world leaders.
12. **Empathy:** They all displayed the ability to empathize with fellow citizens, to show that they cared about them and wanted to help them.
13. **Eisenhower displayed a paperweight prominently** on his desk that had a Latin inscription meaning “gently in manner, strong in deed.” This reflected his philosophy and style.
14. **Humility:** After the Allied victory in World War II, Eisenhower was a great hero who could have written his ticket, but he remained humble.

- 15. Never attack people personally:** Eisenhower avoided criticizing people personally. Churchill's approach was the same on a personal level. In his long career, "replete with political, and sometimes personal, antagonism he suffered many bruises and the scars were sometimes deep," his private secretary John Colville contended, "but he seemed incapable of bearing a grudge."
- 16. Responsibility:** Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Churchill took responsibility for their actions.
- 17. Delegation:** All three men effectively delegated tasks and authority.
- 18. Enthusiasm:** Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Churchill all exuded enthusiasm.
- 19. Promotion of the common good:** All three were concerned first and foremost about the public good rather than private interests.
- 20. Sense of humor.** All three men valued and employed humor, especially Roosevelt and Churchill. In the early years of World War II, before the United States entered the war, the White House phone operator received a call late one night from the assistant director of the Port of New York who claimed that he urgently needed to speak to the president. Thinking that perhaps he had news of German ships approaching New York, she transferred his call to Roosevelt. The assistant director said, "Mr. President, the director of the Port of New York has just died, and I want to know if I can take his place." Despite being aroused from a sound sleep, Roosevelt replied, "Well, if it is okay with the funeral director, it is okay with me." Among Churchill's many witty comments, his exchange with Lady Nancy Astor is best known. Astor declared, "Winston, if you were my husband, I'd poison your tea." Churchill responded, "Nancy, if I were your husband, I'd drink it."

*Note: If you would like to view the entire lecture by Dr. Smith, please visit:
www.faithandfreedom.com.*

STUDENT FELLOW SPOTLIGHT



Alexandria L. "Alex" Halton '20 is a senior at Grove City College majoring in entrepreneurship. After living across the United States as a military kid, she currently calls Colorado Springs,

Colorado home. Alex is involved on campus as a member of the Women of Faith ministry group as well as the GCC Homecoming Committee. Additionally, Alex is active in the entrepreneurship department, including working for her favorite professor and the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. During summer 2019, she was given the opportunity to intern at The Heritage Foundation, engaging with donors from across the country in their Development Department. After graduation, Alex hopes to pursue a career path that offers an intersection between business and politics.



Philip St. Jean '21 is a junior at Grove City College pursuing a major in economics with a minor in philosophy. On campus, Philip serves as the director of marketing and production editor for

the Grove City College Journal of Law and Public Policy. Through these positions he oversees the marketing of the journal as well as the production of the physical journal. Philip also serves as a freshman resident assistant for Hicks Hall, creating a safe and comfortable environment for new students. Over the summer of 2019, Philip worked as an intern at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University for their Equity Initiative. After college Philip hopes to spend some time working in the private sector while saving for law school.

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FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN LEADERSHIP SERIES

RIVERS CLUB – PITTSBURGH, PA

- March 10** **“USS Indianapolis: Faith and Leadership in Uttermost Parts of the Sea”**
with Lynn Vincent, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author
- June 2** **“Religious Freedom and Today’s Supreme Court: How the Founders’ View is Critical to All Our Liberties”**
with Randall Wenger, Chief Counsel, PA Family Institute
- September 22** **“2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections”**
with Salena Zito, national political reporter
- December 1** **“The Mind of Madison: Civic Virtue and Effective Citizenship”**
with Jay Cost, political historian and journalist

OTHER EVENTS

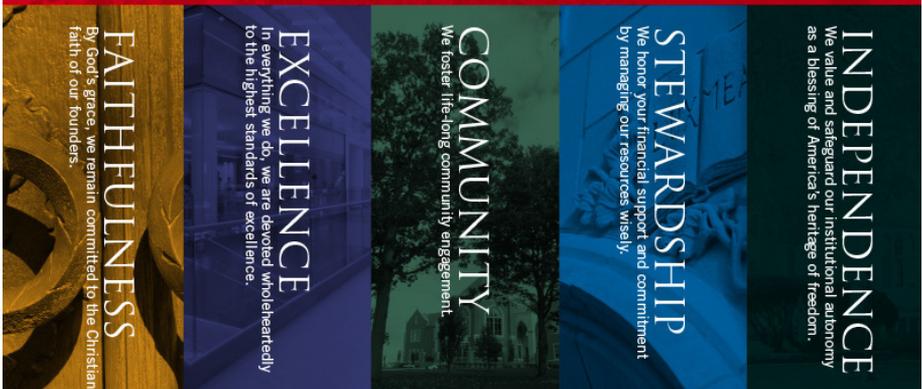
- March 17** **“Global Deinstitutionalization: Reforming Orphanage Care into Family-Based Care”**
with Dr. Lisa Hosack, associate professor of social work
- April 2 & 3** **Annual Conference – “The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism”**
with Michael Medved, Rachel Bovard, Dr. Jay Richards, Dr. Anne Bradley, Morgan Zegers, Dr. Paul Kengor and more

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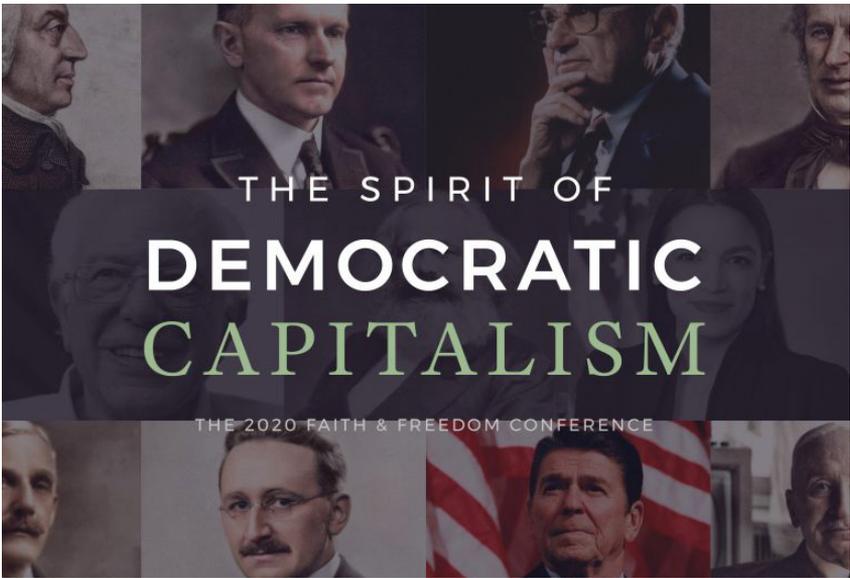
By God's grace, we remain committed to the Christian faith of our founders.
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INDEPENDENCE



APRIL 2-3, 2020 • GROVE CITY COLLEGE

“Democratic socialism” is all the rage nowadays. Its advocates often hasten to add that they are not socialists but democratic socialists, even as the flagship group, the Democratic Socialists of America—whose members include the likes of popular congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—claim the title of “the largest socialist organization in the United States.”

Sadly, many Americans are not shying from the socialist label. For nearly a decade now, younger Americans—especially Millennials—have been telling pollsters that they favor socialism over capitalism, and a striking new poll by Gallup in May 2019 reveals that four in 10 Americans generally prefer socialism, with 43% saying socialism would be a “good thing” for America.

Clearly, some form of socialist or “democratic socialist” spirit is blowing.

But long before this modern trend, there was a counter-spirit: what the late Michael Novak called The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism. That deeper current runs back to the beginnings of this nation, its founders, and their commitment to the foundations of a free society.

Novak insisted that the free market should never exclude morality. At the time of his book’s publication in 1982, one reviewer praised Novak for articulating “a moral theory and a theological base for the implicit ideals of democratic capitalism,”

showing it to be the “spiritually and morally commendable alternative to the collective and compulsive ethic of socialism.”

Novak, of course, was hardly alone in thinking this way. Nonetheless, his memorable title speaks to us as particularly relevant considering the prevailing zeitgeist in America today. At a time when a spirit of democratic socialism is spreading, we feel it’s a good time to recall the spirit of democratic capitalism.

In this *spirit*, the Institute for Faith & Freedom at Grove City College invites you to our annual conference: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism. This important conference will once again be held on the beautiful campus of Grove City College on April 2-3, 2020.

To find out more about the conference or to register online, go to faithandfreedom.com/2020-conference



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