

'Freedom to ...' - America's Unique
Freedom, Arnaud C. Marts, 1956

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“Freedom to . . .”
—America’s Unique Freedom

By ARNAUD C. MARTS



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Chairman of the Board, Marts & Lundy, Inc.

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—America's Unique Freedom

IN America freedom is much more than escape from tyranny, important as that is. Our freedom is also the release of voluntary endeavors on the part of private citizens and groups of citizens which are unprecedented in human society.

Following are five sketches taken from life which typify this potent and unique manifestation of American freedom. First, from the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin:

“I turned my thoughts again to the affairs of establishing an academy. The first step I took was to associate in the design a number of active friends; the next was to write and publish a pamphlet entitled *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania*. This I distributed among the principal inhabitants gratis; and as soon as I could suppose their minds a little prepared by the perusal of it, I set on foot a subscription for opening and supporting an academy.”

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This voluntary act of a private citizen in 1740 was the first step in providing colleges and universities in the great state of Pennsylvania. It was not an act of a mayor, or governor, or legislator. It was the private act of a man with vision, Benjamin Franklin, and with the freedom to endeavor to make his vision come to reality. The academy he created is now the University of Pennsylvania, the first of 118 colleges and universities in that state. Recently the Ford Foundation has made gifts of \$210,000,000 to the 615 private accredited senior colleges, all of which were established and are still maintained outside the area of government support.

Another example: "Madame Chairman, I move that we take steps to obtain a charter from National Headquarters of the Girl Scouts of America to establish a troop in our town, in order to give our girls the advantages of this character-forming agency." It was a woman speaking at a meeting of the PTA, the action of a private citizen to improve her community. There are now 6,000,000 boys and girls enrolled in the youth programs of the voluntary organizations for character building that have been created outside of government.

Again: "Doctor, you and your fellow-physicians and surgeons need more and better hospital facilities in order to guard our health and protect our lives. I am a member of a group of business men who are

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ready to work and to give in an endeavor to add a wing of 25 beds to our hospital, if the medical profession requests it." A merchant is speaking, at the request of an informal committee of men who believe the local hospital facilities are not sufficient for the safety and health of their families. There are 3,500 voluntary hospitals in the United States which have been created in this way, and which take care of 7,000,000 sick each year. To these hospitals the Ford Foundation has recently given \$200,000,000.

"Look, Jack, will you join up with a bunch of us to form a fire company here in our village? That fire last week that burned Bill Jones out could have been stopped if we had had some hose and a pump instead of just buckets." There are thousands of these volunteer fire companies in all sections of the United States. In fact, all our fire departments were *originally* volunteers, even the present smart and highly trained fire forces of New York, Chicago and other great metropolises.

"My friends, have you noticed that there are a hundred families in small, modern houses in that new suburb south of the city line in a development called 'Hillside Acres'? They say there will be five hundred homes there within three years. And, as yet, there is not one single church or Sunday School. I wish we might subscribe the money to acquire some property there and establish an 'outpost' church, which

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could be taken over a little later by its members." It was the pastor of a downtown church in a growing city speaking, and his officers and members proceeded to subscribe the needed funds and to establish a new Sunday School and church plant in "Hillside Acres." There are 250,000 churches in the United States and every one of them was created on the voluntary initiative of private citizens, without seeking the permission or support of political authorities.

This characteristic, the "freedom to . . ." of the private citizen, has been noted with amazement by our visitors from other nations.

A century and a quarter ago a traveler and skilled diarist from France, Alexis de Tocqueville, wrote in his famous observations the following passage:

These Americans are the most peculiar people in the world. You'll not believe it when I tell you how they behave. In a local community in their country a citizen may conceive of some need which is not being met. What does he do? He goes across the street and discusses it with his neighbor. Then what happens? A committee comes into existence and then the committee begins functioning on behalf of that need, and you won't believe this but it's true. All of this is done without reference to any bureaucrat. All of this is done by the private citizens on their own initiative.

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions consistently form associations . . . to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct

churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes. . . .

The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.

Our body of laws is, of course, the backbone of our society. It is essential that we have our elaborate framework of regulations and rules which prescribe our public conduct, collect taxes for the institutions and agencies which our laws have created, and provide the police, courts and penalties to require observance of these laws.

But, with law and order established, we then proceed voluntarily to create and maintain those other great forces for betterment that will give fullness and character and meaning to our lives.

We use our "freedom to" build a new church or Sunday School building; our "freedom to" establish a library; our "freedom to" build a hospital; our "freedom to" create a YMCA or YMHA, or Knights of Columbus; our "freedom to" organize a labor union or a Chamber of Commerce; our "freedom to" do any number of useful things aimed at improving our living and working conditions, maintaining the health of our families, inspiring men and women, young and old, to lives of honor and truth and usefulness.

Over the years, private citizens of our "land of the free" have established over 500,000 such voluntary units of social betterment. Wherever there are even a

dozen families in a community we find evidences of this American characteristic. Churches, schools, hospitals, labor unions, chambers of commerce, Red Cross, youth groups, welfare societies, community chests, museums, hospitals, adult education classes; indeed, the roll call of this manifestation of the freedom of private citizens is a catalogue of nearly all the agencies and forces which minister to the social, moral, and cultural well-being of our Republic. We in America have been freed; indeed, we are both "free from" and "free to."

Just how did we acquire this characteristic freedom in America which is so incomprehensible to most other nations? Is it not profitable for us to refresh our understanding of the nature of our freedom in America from time to time? Otherwise, we may lament with Rudyard Kipling:

*All we have of freedom, all we use or know—
Thus our fathers bought for us, long and long ago.*

We know perfectly well what was in the minds of those men who wrote and signed the matchless prose of our Declaration of Independence concerning *from* what that historic act freed America. They were freeing themselves *from* "A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant . . . He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our peo-

ple, and eat out their substance. . . . He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. . . ."

As a consequence of this Declaration, and of the seven-year war which followed, our freedom *from* foreign tyranny was established so firmly that it has never since been breached successfully.

Fortunately for us, the men who established our Republic were as anxious to provide us with freedom *to*, as they were careful to free us *from* outer tyranny. They knew what they were about in this matter also, though many of us have forgotten it. They devised a form of government which diffused responsibility out to the very individual citizens. Thomas Hobbes, describing the philosophy of the men who wrote our constitution said: "Freedom is political power divided into small fragments."

Our first President, George Washington, had scarcely taken office under our Constitution in 1789 before questions arose in the Congress and among the people as to the actual extent of freedom which the Constitution provided for individual citizens in their own communities. Ten Amendments were drafted and submitted to the states. Ratified by 1791, they have come to be known as the "Bill of Rights." These amendments made explicit our "freedom *to*." Number IX and X stated:

IX. The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

X. The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States are reserved to the states respectively *or to the people*.

The original Magna Charta of the thirteenth century had been a blow for *freedom from* a tyrant. Here was our own Magna Charta for *freedom to*; the release of the initiative, and the enthusiasm, and the genius of the private citizen in America to achieve the utmost of which he was capable for his family, for his community, and for his fellow-men, without spur or check from lawful authority.

Here, for the first time in modern history, was the nobility of man and his very soul given the full confidence and freedom of government.

And the "common man" in America is using this freedom with nobility of purpose and with unprecedented zeal for creating a better world. We are currently giving voluntarily over \$6,000,000,000 per year to our voluntary endeavors, about as follows:

Churches and religious institutions	\$3,000,000,000
Colleges, universities, schools, and educational institutions	660,000,000
Welfare agencies	1,380,000,000
Hospitals and health agencies	540,000,000
Foundations (paid into)	180,000,000
Foreign relief	60,000,000
Other	180,000,000
	\$6,000,000,000

Not only do we, as private citizens, have the freedom to take the initiative in providing all these useful and costly services for the common good, but our government actually helps us in our voluntary endeavors, where such help is most appreciated—in our pocketbooks.

Under the present law we may deduct our gifts to general philanthropic causes up to 20% of our adjusted income; and we may deduct our gifts to churches, hospitals, and schools up to 30% of our adjusted income.

Why has government, so notoriously zealous in levying and collecting taxes, recently raised the allowable deductibility level of gifts to private agencies from the former 15% to the present 20% or 30%? (Any deductibility from taxes for such gifts is said to be completely incomprehensible to our friends in Europe.)

Is it not because our Congress and President be-

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