

ADDRESS, ST. MARY'S PARISH  
ST. MARY'S CITY

March 27, 1966

I am deeply pleased to be here this morning in this ancient seat of worship to observe the founding nearly three and a half centuries ago of our beloved Maryland. It is an inspiring experience always to visit this hallowed spot where the first Marylanders landed in 1634 to establish what became known later as "the land of sanctuary" and in our times as "the Free State."

I should like to discuss with you during this morning prayer service a topic which is meaningful to all Marylanders, and particularly to the Marylanders who are privileged to live in this delightful area of our State. The subject, "tolerance and religious freedom," has appropriateness in both time and place. No other spot in America can lay claim more rightly to being the birthplace of religious tolerance and religious freedom than can St. Mary's City. For it was here that Cecilius Calvert, described by the eminent historian Bancroft as "among the most wise and benevolent lawgivers of all ages," planted the seed of religious liberty and freedom in the new world. It was here, in 1649, that the General Assembly of Maryland passed what it called "an Act Concerning Religion," which became a landmark in the annals of religious freedom, not only in America but in the entire world.

If the place is appropriate, so is the time. For the week that has just come to an end was celebrated in Maryland as an anniversary of the founding of the colony—at this spot in 1634. And regarding fitness of subject, your pastor has reminded me that the Scripture lesson prescribed by your prayer book lectionary for this Sunday—Passion Sunday—is from 1: Peter, dealing with the persecution of Christians in the early church.

One of the brightest episodes in the history of Maryland—was when the Assembly of Freemen met here in St. Mary's City and enacted the law which has come to be known as the "Maryland Act of Religious Toleration." The law has been appropriately called the first altar of religious freedom built in the new world. Although, as we know, its grant of freedom of conscience was limited in some of its aspects, and although subsequently the freedom it extended was abolished, the legislation nevertheless was a bold and noble gesture for liberty and toleration. The inspiring and courageous deed by the little band of freemen, writing the laws under which the new colony would be governed, has