Rev. Michael J. bp.
Convocation address
Commencement Address

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Graduation Day must be always referred to as a day of destiny. The speaker for the occasion must emphasize that the decisions and actions of this hour will affect the happiness or misery of generations and inevitably the peace or desolation of nations. In his best oratorical style, the Commencement Day speaker must advise the audience that a tide in the affairs of men is manifestly at its flood; that it is a time for choosing and choosing rightly; that if liberty is to endure, if harmony among peoples of the earth is to be achieved, if civilization is to stand - then these Graduates and their fellows throughout the land had better get to work - and fast.

Unfortunately, there is more truth than rhetoric in such a charge today. Evil forces are at work among us. They are in established power over wide areas of intellectual and moral influence. They are exerting a power to advance the fraction of and they work with driving energy. Mistaken theorists have joined with heartless tyrants to convince millions that the peace of mankind may be the fruit of wild turmoil; that common prosperity may be won by cruel injustice; that the way to build up the conditions beneficial to mankind is a way of universal destruction.

To such an inverted philosophy, whole nations and great parts of nations, are solidly and enthusiastically committed. The struggle of saving and destructive forces is already joined. It is for the educated men and women of this day to align themselves, with clear minds and enduring wills, to the ranks of those who stand for justice and freedom and the saving of all that is worthy in the achievements of our race. This then, is the moment to which the lines of Lowell aptly apply:

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side."
And the decision, my dear Graduates, must not be delayed. There is so little time. Surely we have our challenge here and now and unmistakably. Nor is it a challenge to be met with reluctance or gloom. It is a privilege to live in a day that is fraught with tremendous issues. It is an honor to have a noble part in shaping the destinies of the world. We should go to our task with spirit. If the forces of Falsehood can muster interest, tireless devotion, and even frenzy, those of Truth should certainly manifest a greater, more effective, more enduring power. What a shame to our manhood and womanhood, if citizens, who have enjoyed the advantages of full schooling, of opportunity for reading the lessons of history and weighing with scholarly acumen the sharply drawn issues of the hour, should serve the cause of darkness rather than enlightenment, of Falsehood rather than Truth.

It is clear that our beloved America must play an important part in this hour of high destiny. We should have built, for the inspiration of the world, a tradition of freedom; we who have given to the nations the best working model of democracy; we who have detested the grinding evils of totalitarianism and have called for the sacrifice of our citizens to repel its evils, have the place and power to give to the world now the guidance it so greatly needs. America can give of its rich bounty to help those who are determined to advance the frontiers of human freedom. America can do more. The moral and spiritual contributions which America can make to the other nations of the world should stir all of us to a braver spirit of devotion to our national principles and glorious traditions.

We thank God for His great mercies while we bow our heads and strike our breasts in humility and penitence for our known national sins. We confess in all sincerity that on our shield of national honor are blots of racial and religious bigotry, economic prejudice, greed, and intolerance. We acknowledge an alarming lack of integrity in individual and in social life; a revolting debauchery in family life and a grievous loss of loyalty to God and to religion among great numbers of our citizens. But we have our virtues, too. For the most part there is a generous practical tolerance towards all men, a capacity and general desire to work; a deep earnestness to assist the distressed and unfortunate, and a willingness to exercise
forgiveness and charity. Above all, there is in the American people a strong, deep, universal and genuine desire for peace. We stand before the other nations of the world in this time of grave international crisis not in the role of a self righteous, neighbor-judging Pharisee, but as a sincere people who humbly beg God's mercy and seek a way of justice and love for all men.

We shall not save our nation and the world by committing to statesmen and to political theorists, be they ever so skillful and learned, the problems that we all must face. No Committee of citizens, and even no United Nations assembly, will accomplish anything of lasting benefit without a solid and truly national effort, involving the rank and file, to build up character, to cultivate decency, to work for the reign of justice. Boards and committees can but manage what they have. They can only make surface adjustments. But the high character of a people, its noble interests and ideals, its sane principles of action, its sound morality, its honesty and piety in recognizing God and His law, - these are the things that count in establishing peace and justice on earth. All too clearly we have experienced the evils and sufferings which come to individuals and to society from men of bad will. We have lived through years of war and its consequent grief because of men who did evil gladly and were encouraged and supported in the doing by the so-called best minds and the most ardent patriots.

Until man faces the fact that he comes from a Creator into a world provided for his essential needs, a world in which he is to work, not against the manifest law of his being, but in accord with that law, - until man recognizes God and his duty to God, and, in consequence, his duty to fellowmen, the images of God, it is vain to talk of curing social ills, - domestic, national or international, - and of making the world a better place to live in. Sanity tells us to put first things first; to acquire a true perspective; to be realists in the complete sense. Until America takes up her first duty of religion, she will be powerless to secure full harmony at home or to give effective cooperation in the movement for world peace which she is basically qualified to lead.

It is not just to put the blame for all our national and international
deficiencies at the door of our universities and colleges. Schools and processes of education are definitely limited in their contribution to personal and social welfare. There is no special magic in the word "education" insuring society against injustice, greed, racism, violence and the numerous present day obscenities which make life for millions of our fellows a cruel and ugly experience. There is no special virtue in an educational process which sets out to convince man that he is no better and has no more dignity and worth than a crawling insect that goes from one annihilation to another. Education can do certain things but it seems to me that we have put it in the superman class and have proclaimed its never-failing efficacy to produce in the individual and society the reforming qualities of true nobility. It seems to me urgent that our great educational enterprises, and the devoted scholars who direct them, should try to correct the over-balance in emphasis which education has attained in the modern state. In social and individual matters, the classical and Christian tradition, the tradition, let us say, of Aristotle and Aquinas, recognized three distinct sciences: the science of Ethics, which had to do with the proper good of every man; the science of Economics whose proper object was the welfare of the family; and the science of Politics whose proper object was the good of the organized community, the city or the state. The effect of these disciplines was to limit as well as to sanctify the rule of law and the individual law-giver and to put all activities of life in a true focus. While men were to render to Caesar the things that were Caesar's, they were at the same time obliged in their lives and consciences to secure for God the things that were God's. That medieval teaching should strike us as especially wise against the modern resurrection of the absolute and totalitarian power of the state. Our nation has looked to education as almost the sole means of unifying and stabilizing conflicting cultures. A democracy must of necessity depend much on education and therefore there must be an abiding concern that education at least does not thwart or undermine the spiritual and moral basis of the citizen nor the welfare of the state.

Your education at this University, built and maintained by the sacrifices of the citizens of Ohio, has prepared you to engage in many skills and disciplines. The citizens of Ohio are proud of this great institution and of the work so ably directed here by the President and Faculty. Paramount among the many things you
have learned here is not simply a vast knowledge of facts or detailed information on practical ways to do material tasks. These, indeed, are necessary. In a complex economic society many must be equipped by our universities with elaborate technical abilities essential to our industrial system. But this alone is not the purpose of education nor the full desire of the citizens of Ohio in reference to the University.

Nor, I am certain, has this been the intention of your professors and teachers here. For while they have dedicated themselves to instructing you in knowledge, they and we citizens, - who are depending so much on you for the future welfare of our State and Nation, - are anxious, too, that you have acquired understanding.

Universities and schools generally have been charged with concerning the students too much with the amassing of facts and not enough with understanding. To be aware, for example, of the facts of the Declaration of Independence, to be able to recite the preamble that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, to have information on the background of the Declaration and the way it came into being, this indeed is knowledge of facts. But it is not understanding, which is the grasp of principle behind the array of facts. Some who have been educated to the facts of our Declaration of Independence violate its principles. Real understanding of the right to life guaranteed here is not simply a question of historical data. It is the intelligent awareness and delicate sensitivity that wherever the life of one man, - be he young or old, strong or weak, bright or dull, of whatever color and race, - whenever the life of that one man is threatened without justly grave cause, then all mankind has been affronted and must rise in his defense. A man's right to liberty is only truly understood if he grasps his solemn duty to observe in his freedom the rights of all his fellow citizens. He only has the right to be free who willingly obeys just laws for the common good.

Only with such understanding is a man truly educated as an American and truly capable of the leadership which his college or university degree thrusts upon him.

Understanding in turn implies wisdom. Wisdom is like the wrist to the fingers of the individual arts and sciences. It coordinates them and relates them one to another.
Wisdom enables men to work together for the common good in mutual respect and appreciation. Your education we hope has been marked by the wisdom of God's knowledge and love wherein we recognize our fellowmen not merely as citizens but as brothers and wherein we recognize God as our common Father.

Knowledge, understanding and wisdom make up much of the valid process of education. Some of our best and greatest citizens have acquired those brilliant qualities in humble tasks and far from the stimulating experience and association of a University Campus. But for the most part we have to look to our schools to instill in youth the desire for learning and the ambition to do a just service to society. That is the minimum that we should expect. For I think we would all agree that the end of education goes farther than mere learning and a desire for community service. Its purpose is to produce a good citizen, a good man. These go together. Moral uprightness in the American tradition always has been associated with religious teaching and living. If state supported schools by constitution or statute are kept from teaching or fostering religious principles it does not follow that they should become agencies hostile to religion and subversive of morality. Theoretically, indeed, it would seem that any normal man could sit down and think out for himself the moral principles whose application to life's problems would insure decent and purposeful living. Practically, however, as the record shows no people has ever kept a clear and firm hold on moral principles except through the guidance of revealed religion. Wherever religion is crushed by persecution, ignored by custom, or atrophied by neglect, men in the mass gradually lose their hold on moral principles and lose, as well, appreciation of the ideals of the good life and the good society which are the heritage of our endangered Western Civilization. It was in that tradition that the founders of our Nation wrote the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, with its proclaimed purpose to establish justice and the Bill of Rights with its specified safeguards for the liberties of the individual citizen.

Unfortunately, this religious tradition and the institutions founded on it officially and generally are without honor in the great Universities of our Country. In chairs of philosophy, professors of renown discount the idea of natural human rights and advocate a positivist conception of law, - a conception which makes law not essentially
an ordinance of reason but merely a dictate on the part of the sovereign state. Skepti-
cism in philosophy and unbelief in religion have come full circle and are breeding in
law, in education, and in sociology theories which if logically applied would sap the
foundations of our free institutions and open the way to absolutism in whatever form
circumstances favor.

To prove that these ideas are false in themselves is the work of a philosopher.

The man in the street, however, can make a just appraisal of them in their effects.

"By their fruits you shall know them." The awful events of the dark years through
which we are living provide a tragic test of the religious tradition which created our
society and of its importance as an element in true education. The traditional theory
of Western Civilization that law is an ordinance of reason and the totalitarian theory
that law is a dictate of will backed by force stood against each other on every battle-
field of the South Pacific and the Western Front. They have faced each other across
the conference tables in London, Paris, New York and Lake Success. Every totalitarian
leader of a police state, represents in action the philosophy that law is a dictate of
sovereign will backed by force. Every citizen, great or small, who, in defense of
freedom and human rights, has become the victim of such tyrants' ruthless might, repre-
sents the concept of law as an ordinance of reason.

There in brief is the crisis of this hour. Many of you men and women served
in the Forces of our Country which three years ago this very day were making bridgeheads
on the coast of France, battling fiercely for small islands in the Pacific, or marching
triumphantly into Rome. The nation demanded much of you then. You served it well. I
believe it deserves even more of your courage and ability and integrity now. The peoples
of the world cannot be so morally and mentally deficient as present day political and
social trends seem to indicate. You must work hard to insure the better, happier society
for which men of good will long most earnestly. The task of every citizen today is to
work for peace, to promote justice, and to foster among all men the Charity of Christ.

It is my privilege and duty to congratulate you, the honored Graduates of this
University, on your present achievement and to bid you God-speed in your life work. May
you be doers of the word of truth and not hearers only, - and may you be blessed in your
indeed. God grant that through you America may achieve the greatness that should be hers
and that mankind, through a truly great America, may be aroused to follow the way to
human freedom and to accept the grave duty of establishing among all Nations a permanent
glorious peace.