PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW

There is one distinct advantage in addressing a mid-year Commencement at the University of Michigan. When, in the fashion of all commencement speakers, I remind you that you are about to go out into a cold, cold world, I am sure that this admonition is not only figuratively, but literally true.

Whatever else might be said, this ceremony today is indeed a milestone, a crossroads, or at least a historical point in time during which you consciously or unconsciously measure yourself against the future. For most of you, I presume, the time of formal preparation for tomorrow is completed, and from now on something new and different, and presumably more exciting will fill your days, or at least so you hope.

Let me suggest that whatever lies ahead tomorrow, these few moments today provide a good time for reflection upon a few of the deeper realities that so easily escape us in our busy every day endeavors, but, even so, do not cease to be of paramount importance in the direction and meaning of our lives tomorrow.

Did you ever stop to think that a hundred years ago you were nothing, if not a thought in the infinite mind of God of someone who could be and would
be some day. A hundred years hence you will, I believe, still be someone, somewhere, although for all that, only a statistic or a memory here or there. Between these two focal points you live, well or badly. You affect the world and some few or many of the people in it, well or badly. You spend your days, these future days left to you, doing significant or trivial things. And when it is all mixed up, one might say, as on television, this is your life.

The important consideration this afternoon is, I believe, to have some conscious goals that will govern your days ahead. That they be conscious goals in the least that might be asked of your education. Andrew Melieu once wrote that "the educated man is to be discovered by his point of view, by the temper of his mind, by his attitude towards life and his fair way of thinking. He can see, he can discriminate; he can combine ideas and see where they lead; he has insight and comprehension. His mind ia a practiced instrument of appreciation. He has the knowledge of the world which no one can have who knows only his own world or only his own task." (Andrew Melieu on Education, Harper and Brothers, 1908)

That is the alternative to this picture of a conscious, intelligent, discriminating view of your life with all its opportunities, challenges, and
possibilities: The alternative is an uninformed, unconscious, passive point of view that is at the mercy of every wind of passing fancy - the ship without a rudder, the unquestioning, uncommitted person who drifts through life.

In earlier days, this latter attitude might have survived more easily in a world less full of tensions, issues complicated, more stable and less changing. But today we face a situation that demands education and the fruits of the educated point of view, not just to get along, but to survive. In earlier days, you could be born a peasant, live a peasant life, and die a peasant death. We have the picture of the Inca who were born in an unchanged stratified society on the high plains of the Andes. Or of the Africans who for centuries were born, lived and died within the radius of a few miles of jungle. We even have periods of slower social change within the history of our own Western cultures: A Renaissance that took a few centuries, an Industrial Revolution that took a few more. But now within a lifetime there can be witnessed the coming of electricity, automobiles, airplanes, telephones, radio, television, electronics, atomic power, fusion and fission, jets and rockets, satellites and many space probes. There can also be witnessed a world whose external parts now are only split seconds apart by modern communications devices, and yet a world where millions of people refuse to
ommunicate with each other, and even threaten daily to destroy each other. And you live in a world of great inequality which will give rise to even greater tensions. Ten per cent of the world's population living on the North American continent have 75% of the world's income. And if you want to change the figures around, 75% of the world's population receives no more than 10% of the world's income. Many of these people work longer and harder than we do. The twenty largest underdeveloped countries produce over half of the free world's industrial raw materials; but they themselves consume less than 1% of what they produces. Do not think of this as mere money or wealth, but of the things that wealth makes possible: food, clothing, shelter, medicine, education. Or in a broader context, the reasonable material situation in which basic human dignity can be a reality and not a tragic fiction or an unfulfilled dream. Recall that half of the world's population goes to bed hungry every night; that half of the world's children never eat milk or medicine, that half of the people on the North American continent have never slept in a bed.

This then is the world that the educated person, the person with compassion and insight must face: a world of explosive technological change, a world of grown, even human inequality and rising tensions, a world, that to compound the complications, has had more net increase of population in the last fifty years than there were people existing on earth in the Eighteenth Century, a world that has
used more natural resources in the past 10 years than in the whole history of
the world before that.

So you wonder then that I say to you that the least one might expect
of your years of education is that you face the remaining years of your life in
such a world with conscious goals that will give a dimension of significance,
meaning and depth to your life. When I say goals, you might substitute other
equally valid words; ideals, convictions, or values. I care not what words you
choose, but I am sincerely concerned that you consciously and conscientiously
subscribe to some deep-seated and intelligent convictions regarding the direction
of your life in the years to come.

While it may seem selfish at first glance, I think you might begin by
asking yourself what you want out of life. At least this defines a goal. There
are no search of goals presented to you today. Most of the visible goals, however,
are hardly worth more than a passing glance, if that Andrew Wilson wrote of the
essential man has any validity in your life. Take a quiet look at the goals that
emanate from Indiana House - they are pleasant to the touch, the taste, the eye
but by any ultimate standard they lack substance. You would not be alone in our
country if you wrote them your total life goals: the ranch house, the sleek sports
car, the Ivy look, the sophisticated vacation spots - in a word, the easy, comfortable life of security. Other nations have gone this way before us, and in Arnold Toynbee's sense, gone is the word. They exist no longer.

As I say, there is something wrong in comfort, pleasure, sense satisfaction, material security, make no mistake, by themselves, as the philosophers say, but something terribly wrong if this Madison Avenue picture of life becomes your total goal in the days ahead. If you think that these things alone can satisfy you and totally motivate your days tomorrow, then you cannot truly discriminate, you do not really see where this motivation is leading you, your knowledge of life and of the human situation today is na"ive, and your insight is tantamount to blindness. Let me add something else which is not really original: you can, in fact, choose material goals as the end-all of life, and you can achieve them in small or large measure, but you will not be really happy, for man does not, indeed cannot, live by bread alone. We can ignore the spiritual dimension of our lives, but we ignore this at our own risk, and at the price of bartering the best for that which may be good, but infinitely less important and even less satisfying in the total picture of a human life.
At this point, I may next aptly refer you to the magnetic and personal
words of Christ, our Lord: "A man must lose his life to gain it," or again, "It
is better to give than to receive." May I suggest that the spiritual goals of
life fall within these categories: they involve giving rather than receiving,
they seem often to mean losing one’s life, whereas in fact they fill a man with
happiness and satisfaction beyond the capacity of any food or drink or material
pleasure. Do you think that Albert Schweitzer is unhappy at Lambaréné, in French
Equatorial Africa, because he might have been a professor at a great German uni-
versity? Do you think that Dr. Thomas Dowley is unhappy caring for the abandoned
sick in Laos because he might have had a lucrative practice on Park Avenue? Do
you think that your professors are unhappy here at the University because they
might be making more money in industry? No, these people, and all people who have
dedicated themselves to a higher cause have in a true sense gained their lives by
losing them, have found more joy in giving than in receiving, have lifted themselves
to the height of that to which they have devoted themselves.

All of you cannot give in equal measure, but wherever you go, whatever
you do, there are unchanging facts of human nature that will inevitably bear upon
the meaning, significance, and importance of your lives in the days that lie ahead.
To repeat what Frederick Douglass said of the educated mind: "He can see, he can discriminate, he can scrutinize ideas and see where they lead; he has insight and comprehension."

Here then is your basic problem. The world is changing rapidly and will change even more explosively within your lifetime. The changes will be heightened throughout the world and, especially, in our country, as we are at the center of world instability at this time. What insight and comprehension will your life reflect? What impact will it have? What goals will continuously give your life meaning and direction in the days to come.

I have not made my vote for giving, for dedication, for ideals, values, and goals that transcend the good, for your own exclusive comfort, pleasure, and personal security. These are some of the values and ideals that the present condition of men, the state of the world, and the whole historical process seem to demand of educated people.

I would first remind you, the values that characterize the academic community in which you have been living: the high and continuing goal for truth, on every level, by every legitimate means. Commitment to these values was given at our universities, indeed our whole educational system. Here is the basic value of the scholar who have enlightened the minds of men and led them in the path of
vices. Here is the continual struggle of truth against error, the war against the blind forces of ignorance, prejudice, passion. No one of us is fully educated until we die. Only by lifelong commitment to truth, only by daily learning truth, can we rise above the vast army of those who feel instead of think, the great mass of those who accept all of their opinions and ideas, tailor-made from the columnists, announcers, and even from the TV newscasters and cartoonists, unthinkingly, uncritically, and blindly. Lifelong commitment to the pursuit of truth—only can hope to live a reasonable life in any measure without the value of the mind and of things intellectual at the very base of living.

From there is the love of beauty in all its traces. Human commitment to this value has given us all the artists who have brightened our days with music, our dwellings with sculpture and painting, who have illuminated our human situation with poetry, drama, and literature. The world is full of man-made ugliness and only a sense of discrimination can recognize the matchless beauty, God-made and man-made, that like sunlight brings bright flowers to blossom in the savage and brutish of this world. The lowest minimum of this value is to show instinctively that which cheapens human life, human love, and the rich captivity of a world that mirrors God's perfection.
Then there are the great moral values that really need commitment today:

the passion for justice. For example, that engenders respect for law and order, basic human rights, all of the blessings of civilization that are made possible by intelligent freedom under the law, by personal integrity of life. Utter commitment to this value has given our great lawyers, jurists, legislators—those who have given our world a dimension of order and rule that reflects the eternal law of God by way of natural law, divine and human ordinance. There are many today who seek rights exclusively for themselves, but only obligations and immense servitude for others. There are those who want to be a law to themselves, in whose lives justice to others and respect for basic human rights are nothing but a mockery or a special preference of those who happen to have been born with a white skin. Passion for justice will or will not be a value in your life. If it is, it will enable you and others; if it is not, injustice will degrade everyone and you, too.

One might pass from these personal values that give meaning and significance to your life to other values that somehow give your life a total direction that is significant or trivial. Something that is of first need in the world today is a capacity for dedication, sacrifice, and hard work geared to excellence of
performance. These values are in direct opposition to the current spirit of
our age that panders to security, ease and mediocrity. Try to think for a moment
of any single advance that was made in our history by indolence, by the safe
rather than the adventurous way, by the shabby, meandering performance. Whatever
you do in the days to come, you may be sure of this one basic fact of life: your
life will be as significant as those things to which you dedicate your days. To
high dedication one must also join high performance worthy of this dedication.
Without high dedication and excellent performance in every age, there would have
been no great religious or educational leaders, no outstanding scholars, artists,
statesmen, scientists, doctors, lawyers, businessmen or engineers, no, not even
any good husbands or wives, fathers or mothers. There is no substitute for dedica-
tion, sacrifice, and excellence of performance. There is no easy way to achieve
that which is worthwhile and first-rate.

You will note that all of these values or goals that I have been
calling to you are of a spiritual order: the abiding quest for truth, the
appreciation of beauty, the passion for justice, the capacity for dedication,
sacrifice, and a personal commitment to that which is excellent. Consequently,
I would at long last commend to you a final value: respect for that which is
spiritual, that which transcends the body, its pleasures and its comforts. It
is in the spiritual order of our mind and will that we are made in the image
and likeness of God, and it is in respecting and using these higher qualities
of our nature that we best serve God, and man too.

In respecting God and the order which He has made, we are trusted to
ourselves and to our common mankind. I might add that in commitment to these
spiritual values we are most likely to fill our days tomorrow with the kind of
activity that seeks for true human happiness, satisfaction, and significance,
both in time and in eternity.

A famous alumnus and former President of the University of Michigan,
Mr. Alexander Grant Bowens, once expressed all this as the aim of the University
in preparing students for the future:

"In my view, the University's main objective is the conditioning of
young people in the values of society ... the University must find and develop
aptitudes, but no one can be a good doctor or lawyer (for example) unless he has
some understanding of the world and his place in it. The University should be
concerned with the well-rounded development of every individual who enrolls, and
see the student in three dimensions - the spiritual, mental and physical."

I do not worry about the physical or material side of life. It is on
close to all of us that our biggest problem is to keep it in perspective with
the mental and the spiritual order which gives our lives their ultimate dimensions
of depth and meaning.

Keeping faith with the total promises of our lives is the greatest
endeavor of the days ahead. No one of us should be ashamed to pray that our
lives tomorrow might always reflect the direction, the significance, and the
depth that commitment to intellectual and spiritual values alone can give them.

To this end, I suggest to you today the well-known and simple prayer
of St. Francis of Assisi:

"Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace; where there is hatred,
let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there
is sadness, joy.

"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled,
as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."