

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Commencement Exercises, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, Monday, May 30, 1966)

This is the time of year when graduates all over the country are treated to an enormous, and often unwelcome, load of free advice. Someone has remarked that free advice is worth what it costs. I suppose this is why there is nothing quite so transitory as a commencement address. It goes forth upon the early Summer air and is soon forgotten. However, it is a living and sturdy part of our academic folklore, so here you are and here I am. What can I possibly say that will be meaningful to you today when so many thoughts crowd your minds - some nostalgia for the past that is quickly slipping away, some euphoria, well deserved, for the moment at hand, and some hopes and apprehensions for the future yet ahead of you.

I would like to begin by suggesting that these are good times in which to live. You have all been subjected to enough history to make some comparisons. You might have been born, you know, in a completely different age. This is an interesting and not entirely useless speculation. Imagine yourself being born in prehistoric times, in a Malaysian rain forest, or a jungle of sub-Sahara Africa, or a Neanderthal cave in Southern France, or during the forty thousand years that early man made his trek in this hemisphere

from the Bering Straits to Tierra del Fuego. There were human beings like yourselves who lived and died during these prehistoric times. They had their challenges, but the main challenge then was to exist, and the life was as precarious as the flickering camp fires that were only pin points of light against an all-encompassing darkness. Cold and heat, ignorance and illness, superstition and hunger, a crude life and an early death were the order of the day. In a human sense, they existed rather than lived.

Of course, you might also have been born in historical times, in the fertile crescent of the Middle East, in China during the Ming dynasty, in Mediaeval Europe, or you might have lived during one of the great revolutions: The French, the Russian, or our own. These revolutionary ages would have faced you with a different set of challenges, challenges bound up with the conflict of ideas regarding the nature of man, the social, economic, and political order in which he might best live, and how such an ideal order is to be created by man.

Even if you had been born and lived then, rather than now, your life would have been dull and unimaginative unless somehow you really understood the times and learned how to help redeem the times. I suspect

that we understand the challenges of past ages better than the present which is all too close to us, staring us in the face. We all have 20-20 hindsight, whereas the truth of today is so close as to become most often blurred in our myopic vision.

I said before that ours is a good age in which to live, but now I would like to qualify the statement by adding that it will be good for you only if you can read the signs of the times, only if you can clearly perceive the real challenges that face all of us today. Perhaps I can heighten the excitement by suggesting that there have been few ages more revolutionary than our own. In saying this, I am really trying to separate the men and women among you from the boys and girls.

A lot of people are uneasy with revolution, which means that they would prefer to drift comfortably through their days without challenge or change. But I submit to you that the world today would not be any different from the prehistoric or mediaeval world unless men and women had risen to all of the new challenges and furthered revolutionary change.

Personally, I welcome change, not for its own sake, but because it is a sign of life in a non-eternal, imperfect world. Centuries without

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change were most often centuries of stagnation. Change, however, has not always been inevitably and automatically for the good of man or society. Some changes have indeed been ruinous, particularly when the change was not related to the changeless principles that give meaning and direction to human life. Will the changes that characterize our age be a force for good or for evil? It would be foolhardy to prophesy at this moment, but I hope to indicate that unless university graduates like yourselves become meaningfully involved in the change, there is no guarantee that ours will be a happier and more productive age than those of the past.

This brings us to the key question: Is ours really a revolutionary age and, if it is, what challenges does it bring? Attempting to answer both of these questions is the main thrust of my remarks to you.

In answer to the first question, I would venture that this is one of the most revolutionary of all ages of mankind -- mainly because we are in the midst of unprecedented changes, the rapidity of which change, and the magnitude of people affected by the change being without parallel in the history of mankind. Take the last point first. Has it ever occurred to you that the majority of all human beings who have ever lived are living

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today -- and that the numerical percentage of this majority rises each year? I have also remarked earlier that the human challenges during untold centuries was largely physical -- to exist -- as is still true of millions of people today. But, against the age-old background of the physical struggle for existence, there are new moral revolutionary ideas at work so that man's modern challenge -- your challenge -- far transcends the purely physical, which itself is undergoing a worldwide revolution through scientific and technological innovation. All in all, it makes for an exciting and highly challenging future -- if you can see it coming and if you have the courage and wisdom to participate in making the future what it might yet be.

I think it might be useful at this point to outline briefly a few of the important processes of change now in progress: specifically, the process of human emancipation, the process of human development, the process of technological innovation. All of these processes are, of course, inter-related and, to some extent, inter-dependent. All of them present new and unprecedented challenges to modern man. Each of them is at the heart of modern change; all will affect mankind for good or for evil; all are both

national and worldwide phenomena and each of these changes will take place with or without the participation of university graduates like yourselves.

First, the process of human emancipation. It is a startling fact that more nations have become independent political entities since the close of World War II than the total of existing nations prior to the war. About a billion people, a third of mankind, have passed from a colonial to a free status. If a new Rip Van Winkle, expert in the political, economic, and social situation of pre-war Africa, for example, were to awake today from a sleep begun in 1946, he would be bewildered by the existence of 36 new nations, many with new names, all with completely new aspirations and institutions. All this has happened in less than twenty years. Much the same story is true of Asia. In Latin America, the move to national independence came much earlier, but the new aspirations in Latin America are of post-war vintage, as is also the move towards new structures and new institutions there.

This modern process of human emancipation is not restricted to recent colonial peoples either. Here in our country, we had at our birth a series of marvelous documents stating in the main that all men are

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created equal. The ideals thus stated did not preclude the existence of slavery, though eventually we had a Civil War to settle the issue. A new federalist paper issued during the Civil War, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, seemed conclusive, but more than eighty years passed before we really began to do something about it. The last twenty years have seen a new emancipation come upon our Negro citizens, and they have actively participated in the process with rising crescendo in recent years. One might say that we have made more progress in the last ten years than in the ninety preceding, and more has been accomplished and will be accomplished with the Civil Rights Bill of 1965 than in the ten years preceding. You all know the cost in human terms: national shame, bloodshed, rising tensions. Despite it all, today we find ourselves at a new crossroads of emancipation, with new human aspirations, not unrelated to those of the people of the developing nations. In fact, we are just beginning to realize that we have in America an underdeveloped area within the most developed nation of the world and the moving force within is for a new human emancipation. This is indeed revolutionary.

I should add here a word or two about the present revolution for civil rights. Most revolutions have two phases. The first phase of the

civil rights revolution in America is, I believe, largely over. It accomplished and wrote into federal law the broad lines of what I would call a national conscience on civil rights, a broad national consensus on what every citizen could and should expect of his country and his fellow countrymen in the broad areas of voting, education, employment, housing, public accommodations, and the administration of justice. Many may still disagree with the consensus, but the national ideal, the law of the land is clear and is becoming ever more positive.

The second phase of this civil rights revolution is still largely before us, and more difficult, because it requires the passage from national to individual conscience in recognizing all these rights, and also involves the assumption by all Americans, Negro and White, of the long range responsibility of living what we profess: to make full, responsible, and intelligent use of these rights, to do in the privacy of each of our lives what we profess in public as Americans. The second phase is largely educational, while the first phase was largely protest. The first phase gave quick results. The second phase will call on all our religious, educational, and social resources to come to full fruition. And it will call for much more courage, patience, perseverance, and understanding.



The second phase must move family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood, city by city, state by state to accomplish on the local scene what has been proclaimed on the national scene. This is where each of you come in, as responsible, educated, individual human beings. This is why each of you is so terribly important. You may or may not have been among the chosen few who moved the first phase of this revolution. The second phase cannot move without each of you. You must become involved or the second phase will fail. \ More of this later for we must move on.

The second striking process of our times is that of human development. The process of human development is the age-old story of man's slow ascent from primitive caverns in the past and from modern slums today, always with the accent on escape from human misery. How many centuries has man's lot been one of ignorance, illness, hunger, alternating cold and heat, minimal shelter, marginal life and early death? Whatever the estimate, this much is certain, that there has been more effort at human development in our age than in all the ages of man's previous history. Moreover, there are more than twice as many people involved than there were a hundred years ago, and there will be double the present number involved a short forty years hence.

There have been more hungry people fed, more sickness cured, more minds educated, more houses built, more clothes manufactured, more books written, more studies made, and more groups formed to promote development in our age than in all the previous ages together.

Not that the problem of human development has been solved; for millions today development is still an aspiration and a hope. But never before has it been possible to even think of a solution on a worldwide basis. Now the process has begun, the concern is born and multiplying, the means are at hand, and something is beginning to happen. What will eventually result is still in question, as the solution to old problems always creates some new problems. The conquest of disease begets a population explosion.

The process of human development is as complicated as the man and the society to be developed. Economic development implies political development, and both presuppose education. Temporal development cannot override man's eternal concerns, or man's basic spiritual rights and obligations related to his long-range perfection and maturity as a person. Science cannot substitute for culture, nor the body for the soul in the course of development. The good man and the good society are not simple

realities. There can ultimately be no real human development without both of them, and neither can be purchased with money or voted into being or accomplished by technology alone. Again, in the process of human development, we have a movement of significant human change crying for an ultimate meaning and direction that can only come from the involvement of capable, concerned, and dedicated human beings like yourselves.

The third revolutionary instrument of change in our times is the process of technological innovation. Here again, as in the processes of human emancipation and human development, we do not have an absolutely new reality, but a process that is moving so precipitously and on so many different fronts at once that we are hard put to analyze its total impact on our times and ways. You all know the litany of change. Speed increased in a generation from a horse's gallop to a jet traveling through the sound barrier. And then when 3,000 miles an hour had been achieved a few years ago, astronauts suddenly went six times faster, both inside and outside their capsules. Communication advanced from a few miles span, to across the ocean, to around the earth, to 130 millions of miles into space to correct the course of the Mariner vehicle en route to Mars, where it made the first photographs of that planet and transmitted them back to earth.

Sound communication changed from code, to voice, to colored pictures. The new pictures of the moon were not ten or a hundred, but a thousand times better than the old. High energy studies since the war jumped from a few million to many billion electron volts. Astronomy enlarged its field by billions of light years in extent, and by a much wider spectrum of observation through radio telescopes. Biology descended to the molecular level and below. Lesers and semi-conductors are again revolutionizing communications and calculations. The developments of one decade in electronic computers reduced problem-solving time from weeks to hours to minutes to billionths of a second. Materials in common use today were unheard of ten years ago. New drugs appear so quickly that even the doctors are often bewildered.

One could go on, but the point should be fairly obvious that technological innovation has created and is creating a vastly different world. Nor is every innovation constructive. No matter how quickly the world's population multiplies, all the earth's people can now be destroyed in a matter of seconds and the earth itself made uninhabitable. The drama of human life has always contained great challenges, but today the drama is bursting through all its traditional limits. Life and death, war and peace,

freedom and slavery, virtue and vice, work and leisure, health and sickness, ignorance and knowledge -- each of these may have the same philosophical content, as indeed they do, but the span of difference, the inner relationship of time and space in the human equation, the intensity of tension and desire, the magnitude of consequences, the mounting urgency of meaningful human freedom and character and wisdom for survival have come upon us all with the suddenness of lightning flashing out of a darkened Summer sky.

We have only spoken of three revolutionary elements of change. There are many others. All of them are moving, moving ever more quickly, and most of them can best be described as explosive. The least that university graduates can do is to attempt to understand the intellectual content and the meaning of the ideas that lie at the heart of these movements, to plot, insofar as possible in the context of human understanding, where they are and where they should be moving; to see this world as it actually is, not as we would wish it to be by some nostalgic attachment to a more peaceful and stable past; and finally it would seem imperative that with growing understanding there should also be a growing involvement of university graduates, so that we may somehow guide this change into channels that are truly human, in the broadest sense of that word.

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I suppose that the relevant question now is: Are you willing to get involved? This, I take it, is a question that only each of you can answer for yourselves. Let me say here that it is not an easy question. I would not give you free advice on this occasion had I not become involved myself, over the last ten years, in all three of these revolutions: as a member of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, the National Science Board with your distinguished President, Dr. Rufus Clement, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Peace Corps. This involvement has cost me almost half the available time in every year. It spells study, effort, travel, and many short nights. But it has been enormously satisfying.

What about you? What strongly beckons graduates today is the secure life. You know what modern advertising promises the affluent, Negro and White: the ranch house, the martinis, and charcoal broiled steaks, the regular routine, the good pay, the fringe benefits -- these are the things you have earned by your years of education. The revolution will go on without you. You can have your comfortable life, your fun and games. But will this bring you the happiness, the sense of accomplishment, the fulfillment, the meaning of life that you really need? Will the modern

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revolution be the same without you? I don't think so, but I concede that you must answer this for yourself.

I should, in all honesty, tell you that one of the greatest disappointments of my life has been to encounter successful Negroes who are both insensitive to, and uninterested in, those Negroes who live on the periphery of the good life - which is the majority of their race. For Whites, this is bad enough; for Negroes, it is the mortal sin.

Let me say, and I admit that this is still free advice, that you need three realities in your life, at least, if it is to be meaningful and worth living in the days ahead.

The first is commitment. If you have not at this stage of your life discovered what is really worth believing, hoping for, and loving, you are uneducated. I trust you have elaborated a philosophy of life for yourself, and I hope you are willing to commit yourself to these values, these goals, that make life worth living. I won't tell you what I think they are, these values and goals; after all there is a limit to free advice. But I do have my own, and I am sure you have yours, even though you may not have consciously articulated them. All I can add today is: whatever you value, be committed to it, and let nothing distract you from this

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commitment. The uncommitted life, like Plato's unexamined life, is not worth living.

The second reality I commend to you is compassion. Compassion means that you suffer with all who suffer, the hungry, the ignorant, the poor, the homeless, the hopeless, the sick, all those who suffer injustice, all who need understanding and help. This is a large order. But you are those privileged few who have been educated, and knowledge is not just knowledge, but power, power to help those who need help.

Of course, you can use your knowledge to help yourself, and only yourself. Many do this, but not the compassionate. In modern parlance, the compassionate get with the revolution to promote human equality, human development, and to use the new science and technology in both of these causes.

Our Lord once said that we must lose our lives to gain them. The compassionate lose themselves in helping others, but in a real sense, they are the only moderns who really learn who they are, what they cherish, what makes their lives rich beyond accounting.

The third reality is consecration. I realize that this is a



religious term, but I am sure that you will indulge me thus far. Consecration means that we take gifts we have from God and give them back in service. You know your own gifts better than anyone else. You are free to use them as you will. I cannot tell you that you should use them to make the world better, although I think you should. Whatever I think, you must make the decision, and only you can. I can only say that your gifts are a precious heritage, and that mankind today needs such gifts if human equality, human development, and the promise of science and technology are to become a reality and not a frustrated hope.

Commitment, compassion, and consecration. Three words, these are the sum of my free advice. May I close with an example that comprises all three.

A year or so ago, while visiting the Peace Corps project of the Indiana Conference on Higher Education, I met a young couple, Joe and Pat Simoni, in Los Andes, a small town in central Chile on the road to the famous ski resort of Portilla, just below the pass over the Cordillera between Argentina and Chile. I had known Joe and Pat before. Joe had graduated from Notre Dame and went on to do a Master's in Business Administration, at Columbia. Pat is a nurse.

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Both Joe and Pat were looking for larger meaning in their early married life. They volunteered for the Peace Corps and trained at Notre Dame the Summer before last. In Los Andes, they were doing many things that needed doing, organizing cooperatives and credit unions and beginning health programs. In their free time, they are helping rehabilitate an ugly slum on the outskirts of Los Andes, on the invitation of the slum dwellers themselves who somehow believed that two young Americans could work this modern miracle, or at least show them how. The work was well under way after a few months.

Many people go up the beautiful, rugged road to Portilla, most of them seeking enjoyment. They do not see the slum, it is just off the main road. If they did see it, and could see Joe and Pat working there, they might think them foolish or wasting their time. But Joe and Pat told me that these were the best years of their lives, that their life together would always be richer for their present poverty, more secure because they chanced this present insecurity. And I think they are right.

Commitment, compassion, consecration -- wherever you go, whatever you do, these three values are sturdy companions along the way. And may God bless all of you, always.

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