

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Commencement Exercises, Saint Louis University, Saint Louis, Missouri, May 31, 1969)

"Your young men see visions and your
old men shall dream dreams." (Joel, 3,1)

Today's Commencement brings to a close the brilliant year-long Sesquicentennial observances of this University. I have previously sent my best wishes and prayers. Today, I am grateful and proud to join in the fellowship of this University, with all its past glories and future hopes. Needless to say, I am especially grateful to your Board and its Chairman, Mr. Daniel Schlafly, to your distinguished President, the Dean of all Catholic university presidents, Father Paul Reinert, S.J., and to the faculty and students, too, for the honor of joining you.

One has little choice in the subject of a commencement address this year. There is one over-riding concern which will undoubtedly be voiced at hundreds of Commencement Exercises. It is difficult to avoid this concern, nor should we. It has many names and you have heard them all, many times over, maybe too much: student unrest, the generation gap, the alienation of youth, participatory democracy, S.D.S., black power, new fascism, legislative backlash, the end of university freedom and autonomy, thunder from the new left, over-reaction from the right, administrative spinelessness or hawkishness, law and order, faculty defection, presidential fatigue, revolution of the young, the new barbarism -- and so many other names that express different facets of the same national and, indeed, international concern regarding the university and young people today.

We have all seen and heard the story, and have all experienced our own version of the total phenomenon so many times that one wonders whether anything new can be said about it, whether the problem will get better or worse, whether anyone really understands what is happening, whether it may pass away, hopefully with Vietnam or, if not, what we should do about it besides waiting, worrying, and hoping.

I strongly believe that the concern needs much more than the kind of peripheral attention that we give to it as a nation. We are too caught up in techniques that are improvised here and there to deal with this or that particular manifestation of the problem, as it emerges in different forms, with new focus or emphasis on different campuses. We are altogether too concerned with mere methods of maintaining law and order in the university, without being equally concerned about the greater achievement of justice and equality of opportunity in our times, which is at the very heart of this problem. Without this latter concern on the part of adults, as well as young people, law and order are not possible in the university or in the world beyond. Law and order are not the same as status quo. For a university community, law and order must be the matrix, the environment within which greater human values are achieved, values that validate law and order and make it worthwhile.

Peace is possible in the university only if the university is true to itself and its honorable role as the intellectual critic of the world beyond it, concerning itself with the quality of life today, the priority of national values, the burning issues of war and peace, human

rights, equality and justice for all, the abolition of poverty in the midst of affluence, the eradication of hopelessness and hunger in a land of promise and plenty. All of these burning issues are even more cancerous across all the good planet earth, to the deep dismay of so many young people who have been awakened, intellectually and morally, within the university community, who have been taught to ask the hard questions and not to blink at the truth, however unpleasant, and, of course, who have been encouraged to do something to make their lives and the life of their times more just, more meaningful, more honest.

I do not say this to justify many of the disorderly, boorish, violent, or even vicious things that students have recently done in the name of good causes. I do not say that all young people are thirsting for justice and anxious to work for a better world. Many are, however, and they are vastly more numerous than the few that seek the destruction of the university and society. It is in the interest of these concerned students that I suggest that we need a new and imaginative national program that will give our young people a legitimate outlet for their deep concerns, a means to take their idealism seriously, an opportunity to practice generosity in good causes, and, ultimately, a legitimate and meaningful participation in the society that they do want to improve -- and to be taken at their word, seriously, in all of these protestations that we are hearing.

Such a program would be worth more than a thousand techniques of riot control because, hopefully, it would render such techniques unnecessary. A whole new series of options -- besides riot and violent

revolution -- must be opened to our young people who will be half of our total population by next year.

Without presuming to give a total answer to the problem, here is a four-point national program that could be inaugurated by next September, if we wish to respond seriously to youthful concern, instead of offering them more adult rhetoric.

1. The President and the Congress could declare that, for the first time in the history of any nation on earth, all those young people who wanted further education beyond high school would have it available. This presumes that the young people involved have the ambition, the energy, and the concern to get themselves accepted into some form of post-high school education or training. It also assumes that the nation looks upon its youth and their education as its most important investment for the future of America. For those young people who need financial assistance, it could be made available in the present forms of grants, loans, and work-study programs. The full details for this first suggestion have already been elaborated by the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education in America. The total federal cost involved is only one-seventh of federal tax share of the annual increase in our Gross National Product. In dollars, it would be a small percentage of what we are presently spending in Vietnam. The total expenditure would be more than recovered by the future income taxes of those so educated, who would likewise be removed forever from the world of welfare and frustration.

2. For those so educated by any form of federal assistance, require a minimum year of National Service. I am not suggesting here

an enormous new agency or boondoggle, but a simple plan. Allow the student to pick the time, the place, and the condition of his service to others, here or abroad. Allow the widest interpretation of service to others needing help. Allow it in existing government programs, such as the Peace Corps or Vista, in secular or religious groups, formally or informally organized here or abroad, in the inner city or Appalachia, or in the university itself. All that would be required is that the student have approved by his academic dean the program of service proposed. The government need only record the name of the student, his supervisor on the program, his dean's approval, and, ultimately, a pass or fail mark on his efforts by his program supervisor.

Depending on the length and success of this service, the government could then cancel a portion of the student's loan and, more importantly, could allow this service to substitute for his draft commitment.

3. Because of the great educational value of National Service programs, this option should be open to all students who wish to substitute it, with equal time requirements, for their obligation of military service and the draft.

Some will immediately and instinctively object to this suggestion as being non-patriotic and catering to youth who do not want to serve their country. Perhaps it is a measure of the present confusion that we do not see that patriotism is service to our country and this is precisely what I am suggesting, and suggesting as well that there are many ways of being patriotic besides military service, however honorable that is.

We take the draft as the standard and only form of obligated service, but for about 90% of our national history, there was no draft. In 1939, there were 150,000 in the Armed Forces, 600,000 in 1950 with Korea in the offing, and 3,500,000 today, of whom about one-seventh are in Vietnam.

The nation now has unusual domestic and international human obligations, many of which can only be met by generous voluntary service outside the military context. As Pope Paul VI has said so well, the new name for peace is human development. Yet young people, who believe this, would like a real option for service, even in a nation that spends over seventy billion for the military and less than two billion for human development all over the world. Are their priorities so wrong, and ours so right?

Too many students in higher education today are lost and aimless and confused. They have been on an educational, highly-competitive treadmill for as long as they can remember. They do not really know themselves, their lives lack real meaning, and they resort in frustration to myriad forms of escapism and often useless activism. As the good Lord said, we have to lose our lives to find them and ourselves. The whole educational endeavor, indeed our whole country and its quality of life, would be enriched if students were free, at any appropriate time, to take a break and commit themselves to the service of others in need -- in any way that would fit their student talents and interests. The time of service would allow them to find themselves, with all their strengths and weaknesses, to reconsider the direction of their lives

and education, to understand more deeply the complicated social problems that surround us and the very real difficulty of improving the social structures in the interest of justice. The period of service would also teach them that there are no instant answers to the agonies of our times, but that personal commitment, earned competence, and real service are at the beginning and at the heart of all social reconstruction. They might even learn that it is easier to criticize the establishment than to be a part of it. One cannot be told or taught these things; a student must have the opportunity to experience them and learn for himself. The result would certainly make for a more compassionate America, a new peaceful revolution for justice in our times. Education itself would gain, for students could better appreciate how important it is, how central to personal growth and the social betterment. There is nothing like playing the amateur in a difficult role to appreciate professionalism and competence, whether climbing a mountain, flying an airplane, or curing the ills of a slum.

This third suggestion is expressed much better in existential terms by one of our graduating seniors at Notre Dame. Mike shared with me his letter to his parents who apparently had questioned his joining the Peace Corps. I quote three paragraphs of that letter:

"The reasons why I am going into the Peace Corps are very personal and varied. The decision came as a result of thought and self-examination on many levels. Probably the deepest reason is that I wish to devote two years of my life at this time to other people through a program

which will help men who are not as fortunate as I am. I have learned very much at Notre Dame during the last four years, and I have learned very much from you and others who are very close to me. The biggest thing I have learned is that one must be true to himself if he is ever to be happy in this world. Being true to oneself sometimes dictates that one do things which seem at first to be mistakes. But if that person truly knows himself and what he is capable of doing, the decision will be a correct one -- no matter who might possibly try to point out weaknesses in the plan of proposed action. I have learned from many of the teachers whom I love and respect the most at Notre Dame that sacrifice and a certain amount of suffering are mandatory if one is to be sensitive to give and receive truth, love and beauty in his life. On the deepest level, then, this is the sacrifice which I am now making.

"My ultimate goal in life is to be happy by helping to make it possible for others to be happy. I think that this can be done by me in teaching, public service, and maybe even politics eventually. I think that the two years of relative removal in the Peace Corps will enable me to make a decision on this which I can live with.

"One other reason for my positive decision on the Peace Corps is the nature of the country and project to

which I have been assigned. I will be sent to Ceylon (which is an island of 11 million people located just off the southwest tip of India in the Indian Ocean), and I will be working in community development, public health education and teaching. The country is plagued by a disease called filiarisis, which is a form of elephantiasis or a terrible swelling of the glands all over the body. The people in Ceylon are being grossly disfigured for the rest of their lives, and some are even dying. The real tragedy is that the disease can be eliminated by simple inoculation. This is what I will be doing there. I will be involved with the inoculating, but even more, with the program of public education which will tell the Ceylonese about the threat and about the solution to it. I will also work in the villages, helping to set up community projects and schools. All of this appeals to me very much, and the possibilities for helping these people are unlimited. Also, the possibilities for the Ceylonese to help me become a better person are unlimited. I think that I will be a much deeper individual for having experienced another culture and for having helped our brothers in Ceylon."

4. My fourth and last suggestion is to grant the vote to all young people at the age of eighteen, or nineteen at the latest. There is some good legal opinion that this can be done by Congress without a

Constitutional Amendment. Many reasons persuade me that this new option would improve the quality of our political leadership and promote responsible political participation on the part of young people. Besides, if they are old enough to serve and die for their country, they are old enough to participate in choosing its leadership.

Recent political history has taught us that young people, even without the vote, can enliven political campaigns and sharpen the substantive issues involved. If they had the vote as well, then their valid questions would have to be answered by the candidates. One may well argue against politicizing the university -- since it must be an objective, free, and autonomous critic of society. But who can argue against politicizing the nation. Here, apathy and unconcern for the common good, slowness of reform, sluggish efforts to revitalize our institutions and national programs: these are the problems that really strangle progress. Young people can bring new annual inputs of energy, idealism, and generosity to these problems. They would be an effective remedy for the tired blood and organizational arteriosclerosis that characterize our political parties on most levels.

With the active involvement of young people, I could foresee a greatly needed reordering of our national and international priorities, a new moral concern for the quality of life in our country, and a bridging of the generational gap where it is most effectively bridged -- by young and old working together, educating each other, suffering together the pangs that must ever accompany the rebirth of all that is good in America. Why exclude young adults from the promise of our national motto: e pluribus unum?

May I conclude by admitting that my four-point program is not a panacea for all the malaise that America and its colleges and universities suffer today. But it does provide new and exciting options that might well turn our present crisis around, and put the emphasis on opportunity rather than repression, on constructive rather than destructive initiatives, on real answers rather than improvised palliatives. While I am getting to an age when I cannot speak for the young, I am sure that this four-point program does speak to the great majority of them. It speaks to all their better instincts, to their hunger to be a real part of this nation and its institutions, to their yearning to contribute something meaningful to mankind in need, and, ultimately, it speaks to their own most inner human need to be someone worthwhile, to live a life of value, to dream of a new tomorrow that they might help build today. Who not give them this chance?