

[6-8-1962]

II  
x

One day, Dr. Julius Stratton, President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a fellow member of the National Science Board, called to ask a favor. "I think I have a problem, Father Ted," he began. "We have the brightest youngsters in the country in our student body. They will be great scientists and engineers, the best in the world. But sometimes I worry about their values. I've introduced a new measure of humanities into the curriculum, but I fear it becomes overshadowed by the obvious excitement of science and technology. Now to the point. Would you come down this June and give them a good talk on values, the importance of being good human beings?"

This was typical of Jay Stratton. When he finished his doctorate in Physics at M.I.T., he spent a year at the University of Grenoble studying French and German literature. As a youngster, he had traveled the world as a radio operator aboard tramp steamers. He had also made a youthful exploratory trip down the Amazon in a canoe. He was and is a broad-gauged human being, a fine person. Anyway, I said yes and then the trouble began. How do you stress values to budding young scientists and engineers who are riding on the crest of the wave of the future, the best of a group highly respected and cherished in our modern society, happy at being just what they are?

I began the essay seven different times and tore up my efforts until I could find a formula that might work, or at least distract them from all that apparent success and adulation.

I stayed with Jay and his lovely wife, Kay, the night before the Commencement and tried out the talk on his delightful three daughters, all in their teens and unusually bright, Taffy, Cary, and Lorrie. They said it was okay, but without undue enthusiasm. As so often happens, I was no more sure the next day as to whether it had come off as I wished.

Two Summers ago, which was more than ten years later, I was attending a seminar on world development in Aspen, Colorado. One young Iranian computer expert was especially good in the discussion. At the coffee break, I made a point of meeting him. "Oh, I know you," he said, when I introduced myself. "You spoke at my graduation from M.I.T. I can still remember what you said. You really gave it to us about real values. I've never forgotten it."

After recovering, I had to be honest and admit to him that I had forgotten exactly what I did say, but here it is.