

Walters, Raymond
"Courage for the Era to Come"

Convocation address

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"COURAGE FOR THE ERA TO COME"

Address by Dr. Raymond Walters
President, University of Cincinnati

Ohio State University Commencement

December 19, 1947

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduates of the December Class, Alumni, Students and Friends of Ohio State University.

In increasing measure the colleges and universities of Ohio have come to look to Ohio State University for leadership in various educational fields. Indicative of this appropriate and valuable trend was the concerted manner in which all of our educational institutions cooperated with Ohio State in the post-war problem of finding facilities for the returning ex-service men. No state has had a more creditable record, I believe, than Ohio in providing educational opportunities and this huge and vital task was handled under the capable direction, as Chairman of the Governor's Commission, of the President of Ohio State University.

We of the second largest institution in Ohio, the University of Cincinnati, share pride in this good work especially because President Bevis is a double-barreled alumnus of U.C., both Liberal Arts College and College of Law.

In addressing you members of the December 1947 graduating class, I ask your permission first of all to extend my congratulations and felicitations to your parents in this audience. As a father of three sons (~~one of them teaching in this Faculty~~), I know how happy and deeply stirred mothers and fathers are when their children do well.

And you have done well, you graduates, as the diplomas you are shortly to receive will attest. I congratulate you.

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I shall talk to you briefly this afternoon on a topic close to your hearts: your future and one quality you will especially need in meeting it.

When he was in Cincinnati about a year ago, America's eminent poet and seer, Robert Frost, declared that wisdom is "the greatest of virtues" but that there is another virtue which he sometimes thought greatest and which he would certainly rank "second-best," - the virtue of courage. It is the golden virtue of courage that I shall stress this afternoon.

Since it is the part of wisdom to have a reasoned basis for our attitudes and acts, I shall try to suggest rational reasons why you seniors can face our common troubled future, if not with serenity, nevertheless with brave hearts. For though you should lose your goods, though you should lose your life, you may still triumph.

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Let us begin with an examination of our fears. The opposite of courage is cowardice. Since cowardice often has a pathological tinge, and I am no psychiatrist, I shall not attempt to discuss it. My layman's comment is that modern psychiatry can do a great deal for the patient tormented in spirit, particularly if backed up by religion.

The normal opposite of courage is fear. Would you join me in guessing that the only person who feels no fear is an uninformed and unimaginative person? (Not such as the likes of us?)

On this globe we call Earth, whirling through space which may be infinite (the 200-inch telescope at Palomar may give evidence as to infinity); in a world cauldron still seething from war and threatening to boil over into the horror of atomic warfare; in a

nation where selfishness and intolerance are all-too prevalent; in an economic situation where uncertainties and dangers beset us; - in such an earthly habitat and in such a time as this, how can you of the Class of December 1947 avoid feelings of fear!

You will observe that I am not painting a roseate picture. Our first step must, I believe, be the realistic one of looking facts in the face without the soothing syrup of spurious optimism. No escapism for us to romantic novels, murder mysteries or the movies! Such things we are entitled to read or see only after we have contemplated the full bleakness of the most pessimistic lines I know: Shakespeare's:

"Life is a tale told by an idiot; full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

~~Well,~~ *Well, life* do you fear life may be just that? ~~Life may be that~~ but it needn't be!

I shall summon other testimony to disprove it, including Shakespeare's truer:

"How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
That has such people in't."

Since you must face your fears, you graduates should know that you can conquer them by the critical judgment called wisdom and by the habit of stout heartedness we call courage.

Here, to fortify you in wisdom and in courage, are a few practical exemplifications of both:

This whirling Earth - will it collide or burn out or prove merely a speck in the lifeless depths of infinite space? One answer to that you will find in the scientific generalization on a tablet at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago. The tablet reads:

“Under the great celestial firmament there is order, independence and unity.”

Will the world's cauldron inevitably spill over into war, as some prophets are foretelling? To the question, Is war with Soviet Russia inevitable?, I recently ventured the opinion, in addressing University of Cincinnati students, that, if we are strong as a military power - with an adequate intelligence service, great sea power, dominating air forces and a highly trained but not necessarily a huge army - the Soviets will be wary about attacking and risking the military might of the atom bomb and other destructive devices. I have heard General Bradley, the new Army Chief of Staff, say that he by no means regards war as inevitable. There have historically been two periods in which the human race had relative peace: (1) the Pax Romana, which was kept by the strength of the Roman rulers and the force of their legions; (2) the Pax Britannica, in which, thanks to the British fleet and the neutrality of small nations, a balance of power was maintained from the fall of Napoleon to World War I. We are reminded by the historian, Charles Beard, that it is a generalization of history that, when it got dark enough, you could see the stars. Well, it is surely dark enough now for us to see the stars which proclaim the truth of the UNESCO preamble: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed".

If we can avert war for a considerable period, forces can be brought into action which can avert the friction and pressure which have led to past wars. I mean the lack of economic goods and their faulty distribution. Science and technology can in time duplicate,

on a world-wide scale, the miracles which have raised our standards of living in the United States. Avoid war and time will work on our side to make the folly of strife clear even to the Soviets.

You graduates of December 1947 can help meet international fears by doing what you can in 1948 (and each citizen can contribute to public opinion) toward the success of the United Nations organization and of the Marshall Plan concept of helping Europe to help itself.

As to our American social order, there are undoubtedly abuses and wrongs of which we should be ashamed. There is hope as long as we are ashamed and cry, each of us, Peccavi. Is there any better way for each of us to meet our fears about racial clashes, religious prejudices and the whole dark brood of class animosities than for each of us in our daily lives and contacts to be the good neighbor of Christ's parable?

Regarding the economic situation, it is manifestly impossible, for the scope of this address, to outline so broad a field and the fears it arouses. You will do well to take realistically into account, in your choice of life work and in your planning, the hazards of specific professions and of business ventures, and the ups and downs of economic prosperity. But it is an unfounded fear, I think, which regards as inevitable nation wide financial cataclysms just because such have occurred. Paul G. Hoffman, President of the Studebaker Corporation, said recently: "I am amazed at the number of people who take it for granted that we must have another major depression for the simple reason that we have had great depressions in the past . . . This line of thinking has been encouraged by a vast outpouring of literature by prophets of doom." Mr. Studebaker

agreed with the editors of the magazine, Business Week, who reviewing "a gloom book", wrote: "Don't be a sucker and resign yourself to the economic fate which they [the authors] portray as inevitable. If we mess up our economy again . . . it will be largely our own stupidity." The opposite of stupid is the concern to provide against mass unemployment shown in the realistic and intelligent study of industrial management through the Committee on Economic Development. Economic depressions are not usually produced by storms, plagues, crop failures or what the insurance policies call "an act of God." I maintain that any man-made problem can be solved by man - if he uses intelligence, skill and goodwill. With the wealth of food and goods which science, scientific agriculture and technology can supply in the era ahead, there will be enough for all and more than enough of leisure. Indeed it will be a problem of education to inculcate better than in the past the student's imagination and zest for what Socrates called "the good life."

* * *

What shall we say about the good life for each of you graduates?

It should assuredly mean success in your work, so that you may have the fortifying sense that you are pulling your weight in the economic boat for yourself and the family you will establish.

No better antidote for your fears, no better spur for your courage on the side of personal competence has ever been given, to my knowledge, than the words of America's great psychologist and philosopher, William James of Harvard. He said to his generation and he says to you:

"Let no youth have any anxiety about the upshot of his education, whatever the line of it may be. If he

keep faithfully busy each hour of the working day, he may safely leave the final result to itself. He can with perfect certainty count on waking up some fine morning to find himself one of the competent ones of his generation, in whatever pursuit he may have singled out. Silently, between all the details of his business, the power of judging in all that class of matter will have built itself up within as a possession that will never pass away."

* * *

On the side of personality, some of you graduates may be apprehensive, with fears that you are too short, or too tall, too fat or too thin and that you are quite lacking in glamour. There is encouragement for each of you who so feel that history abounds in great and noble service performed by some individual who had just your physical deficiencies but who made up for them by the power of personality and character. Personality is simply that sense of vitality which ^{marks} makes a man or a woman, giving us the feeling that he or she meets life not passively but actively. Character means stability and loyalty to the best the individual knows.

Beware of books on personality and articles purporting to teach you how to turn on personality like a floodlight to sell something or other - or yourself.

As to character, I believe the less you think about personal goodness, the better. Concentrate rather on the goodness of your work, performing it promptly, thoroughly, honorably. If you do this in many individual pieces of work, then promptness, thoroughness and honor will quietly but surely build themselves into your character, your way of life.

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Spiritual courage for the future? You can obtain it by calling upon the wisdom of the past from those two well-springs which have fed our western civilization: the Hellenistic and the Hebraic cultures.

Typical of the Greeks at their heroic best is their old epigram which will sing its way into your hearts today:

"A ship-wreck sailor, buried on this coast,
Bids you set sail.
Full many a gallant bark when we were lost
Weathered the gale!"

And then, representative of the ancient Hebrew doctrine at its best, you will hear the trumpet call of Isaiah:

"Strengthen, ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of fearful heart, Be strong, fear not."

Finally, with healing power, come the words of Jesus:

"Let not your hearts be troubled . . . My peace I give unto you."

~~And this, ladies and gentlemen of the graduating class, is~~
that this peace
~~the peace of God~~ which passeth all understanding, *may be yours*
at Advent-tide is my wish for all of you.
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