

IN QUEST OF ENCOUNTER

"I live for tomorrow. I can scarcely wait until it comes. To be sure, yesterday was interesting. Of course, today is the immediate challenge, but tomorrow is for the plans, for the dreams, and for the reaching up." With those arresting words Lewis B. Seltzer, editor of the Cleveland Press, begins his book entitled THE YEARS WERE GOOD.

"For the dreams, and for the reaching up"--that is the distinction between animals and men. Man was made with an outlook, an upreach and a capacity for dreams. Therein lies his opportunity for great good or great evil. Man becomes either a bane or a blessing.

DREAMS FOR SALE! What an impractical thought for this day of hard relentless realism. This is a day for isotopes--not ideals; a day for blind obedience, not an enlightened conscience, a day when men must fight for bread, not faith; a day shrouded in atomic gloom, but no room for dreams. This is a day, according to the worldly wise, when truth is on the scaffold and tyrants mount the thrones.

I am not unmindful of the hard facts of life. "Life is real, life is earnest," sang the poet. But he also measured his words and continued:

And the grave is not its goal,
Dust thou art, to dust returneth
Was not spoken of the soul.

You can bind the hands of free men, but their minds cannot be shackled. You can plunge their bodies into cavernous dungeons, but their souls will not be so imprisoned. The qualities of imagination, of faith, of dreams unfulfilled--these mark men and women of any age who are not undaunted by circumstances, but dare to face them.

More than sixty years ago, Theodore Roosevelt said:

I preach to you, my countrymen that our country calls not for a life of ease, but the life of strenuous endeavor. The twentieth century looms before us big with the fate of many nations.

If we stand idly by...if we shrink from the hard contests where men must win at hazard of their lives and at the risk of all they hold dear, then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world,

We are face to face with our destiny and we must meet it with a high and resolute courage. For us is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty; let us rather run the risk of wearing out than rusting out.

These well may have been prophetic words. The philosophy they announce is just as sound for our day as it was a half-century ago.

Class of 1962, you are being thrust into a brand new world; different even from ten years ago. America is on the threshold of her most exciting era. Scientific achievements have harnessed the atom and sent satellites whirling into outer space. But our enthusiasm must be tempered with deep concern. For whether these secrets, so recently unlocked, will be turned to good or evil lies in the minds and hearts of men. That is why I challenge you to seek an encounter with life. Meet life head on and let the faith, the courage, the idealism of your Christian commitment infiltrate into every area where your influence lies. The late John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State, recently said:

Our nation, from its beginning, has been sustained by the Christian principles of its people. To continue the vitality of this tradition, I cannot stress too strongly the importance of our young men and women being educated in these Christian principles. Through Christian education our future leaders will carry on their responsibilities with moral strength and fortitude.

It has been intrepid souls--men and women who were not afraid to encounter life and give it the best they had--that have brought the world to its peaks of achievement. They have brought new light to the world which has been passed to succeeding generations. Henry Ward Beecher exclaimed:

We should so live and labor in our time that what came to us as seed may go to the next generation as blossom, and that which came to us as blossom may go to them as fruit. That is what we mean by progress.

The "boy orator from the Platte" took his place in the life of his country. Broad shouldered, staunchly built, his voice boomed out against the injustices of his day. His foes said he was a dreamer, impractical. But when he stood on the platform of a great political convention in 1896 and declared:

You shall not press down on the brow of labor this crown of thornes;
you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.

He so electrified the voting delegates that they made him the standard bearer of the party.

Three times William Jennings Bryan carried the banner to the rank and file of the American people. Three times he was defeated for the presidency of the United States. But within ten years of his death his biographer wrote that a larger number of reforms which he had espoused during his lifetime had been incorporated into the law of the land than any other single statesman had achieved in the history of America. He met life. He encountered it. He made his contribution to history.

But what of our day? Never before in the history of mankind have the brute forces of oppression laid such a heavy hand on millions of our fellow men. Never in the history of our world have we had such a demonstration of military might that could bring mass ruin and destruction to a whole nation within a few hours. Never has the fight for freedom been so pronounced as it is this moment. And never has the age-old struggle continued with so narrow a margin on the side of human liberty. A few years ago it was Europe that had her baptism of fire and blood. Then Korea--and who knows where the next issue will be joined. Dare we plan and dream in a day like this?

Sarah Williams in "The Old Astronomer" declares with unusual insight:

Though my soul may set in darkness,
I will rise to perfect light.
I have loved the stars too fondly
To be fearful of the night.

A man went into a retail store to purchase a compass. The clerk replied to his question, "We have compasses for drawing circles, but not for going places." How typical of our age of confusion! Like a whirlpool, plenty of motion but no progress. Stephan Leacock's description of the man who "mounted his horse and rode off in all directions" is pertinent to our day. In our chaotic life with its sick hurry, its divided aims, its goalless vision, we

See all sights from pole to pole
And glance, and nod, and bustle by;
And never once possess our soul
Before we die.

Aimless speed is characteristic of our generation. The time has come when we need to displace the speedometer with a compass. Not the kind that goes around drawing circles, but the kind that gives us our sense of direction.

Class of 1962, you have been given the Christian perspective amid these halls of learning. You have been taught that while all men must play their parts on the stage of history, back stage there is a Power, a Force, a Personality--God, Himself, who will bring to ultimate triumph the forces of righteousness. He has given to the souls of men the power to lift, to build, to dream, to engage the encounter so that avarice and greed and hatred and war may be challenged by the noble ideals of Christian brotherhood and peace.

Clarence W. Hall, executive editor of Christian Herald, tells the story of his encounter several years ago in the Middle East with Abdul, a Christian waiter in a small inn near Bethlehem. Abdul and his family of five had fallen upon rough times. Before the United Nations partition of Palestine he had been a successful merchant in that part of Jerusalem which now belongs to Israel.

Driven out, he had lost everything except his indomitable spirit.

Abdul was discussing the tensions and pressures so current in Palestine then and now. Hall says they stood in the Shepherds' Field where the song of the Angels was heard. After a period of quiet but meaningful silence, Abdul said, "Many people say there's no guiding star these days for either Arabs or Israelis. They are wrong. Stars are for those who look upwards. If we keep looking long enough in the right direction a star will appear and it will lead us one day to peace."

When the United States goes to the conference table with that kind of Christian spirit and vision, a new day will dawn for international relations. I challenge this graduating class: Here is your chance, even in the atomic age, to begin your quest for encounter. Let us pray God that He will call some from among this student body to be dedicated Christians, so prepared that they can stand in the halls of Congress or at the world conference table and lead our nation and the world out of its darkness toward the light.

In the world of science--there, too, we need the Christian witness. I think of Dr. R. E. Wilfong, technical superintendent at the DuPont plant in Kinston, North Carolina, where dacron polyester fibre is manufactured. He earned his degrees the hard way: Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry. He now stands among the top scientists in his field.

He is, however, first and foremost a dedicated Christian. While a member of our church at Greenville, he helped to start a home mission work 32 miles from his home. Listen to his advice when asked about young people who want to go into the field of science.

Secure a good basic education in one of our Nazarene colleges and then take graduate work in one of the strongest universities in your chosen field. Take plenty of math and don't forget that a scientist must be able to read well, write well, and speak well.

Listen to his testimony, and I quote,

I know God is the great creator of the universe, the supreme Intellect, He who has spoken into existence the wondrously harmonious laws that govern His creation from the movement of the planets and galaxies to the duplication of the sub-microscopic viruses. But I also know Him in the way I met Him at an altar of prayer as my Heavenly Father, who is compassionate, loving, kind, and concerned over our trials and problems. Through the gift of His son my sins have been forgiven and through the work of the Holy Spirit my entire being has been cleansed and consecrated to His service.

If our turbulent world can have more men and women of committed faith in the field of science who are willing to engage life from the Christian point of view you can't hold back the dawn.

Likewise, it may be said about George Reed, graduate of one of our colleges and now a member of the National Parole Board in Washington, a man so committed to God that he works earnestly in the church and Sunday school at Washington, D. C., but a man so trained and experienced that he speaks before groups of honored and learned men. The same dynamic story comes from behind the paneled door of Dr. Orval E. Bowers, registrar at Northeast Missouri State Teachers' College; from the bustling marts of trade Gordon Olsen builds a business dedicated to God and the church; from the fabulous city of New York, Olive Tracy, research consultant of the Columbia Broadcasting System, lives her testimony day by day; and Howard Hamlin, noted surgeon of Chicago, is first and foremost God's consecrated medic.

I cite these illustrations to point up the fact that not only centuries ago, not even in the days of your grandparents alone, but here in today's confused and beleaguered world men and women are living noble Christian lives, penetrating the culture in which they live with integrity, honesty, and Christian faith.

The conflict that is raging in many parts of our world is largely symptomatic. It is the result of the "conflict of ideas" which tug at the hearts and minds of men. Jesus said to His disciples, or rather of them, "They are not of this world, even as I am not of this world." That is another way of saying that values for them were not based on the low levels of life, but rather on the heights of eternity. It is this other "worldness" that comes into sharp contrast with the "earthiness" of our time. It is these deep and abiding values of which the Master spoke--unmistakable certainties--that make your work in life eternally significant.

It is for this reason that men and women are still pushed into life by their ideals and dreams; challenged to face the sordid, seething confusion we call "our day and generation." While it is true that the depths of human depravity have not been fathomed, yet it is equally true that the heights of human personality have not been scaled save by One, our Master and Lord, in whom the divine human encounter was perfected.

So at this commencement season, graduates of '62, I ask you to face not the late afternoon of a generation that has far spent itself, but I challenge you to lift your eyes to the dawn of another day--your day. May it please God, under the impact of a clarified vision, fortified by the Christian ideals you have received in your home, in your church, and on this campus, impelled by the dreams which surge through your soul, to give you courage, wisdom, and strength to make out of our world tragedy a noble triumph.

In this thrilling enterprise you will not be alone. The companions of yesterday which have given us our heritage and your comrades of today which join you in the fray will help you cry your wares.

Beyond that, there stands One in battle dress by your side, eager to join the battle and help you achieve the victory. Edwin Markham has pictured this scene in his poem, GOD BAFFLED:

God is in struggle with a Stubborn Clod;
 Some obstinate, slow footed, sullen thing
 Impedes the free flight of love's starry wing
 Baffles the purpose of the hero God.
 Often He builds a dream into a man:
 If the man fails, then all he might have done
 Falls back as burden on the battling one:
 Our failure mars his high romantic plan.

God's feet are baffled when our feet are bound:
 His march stride is hindered by our chains:
 He feels our fetters and he knows our pains:
 He feels them even on heaven's ascending round:
 So He descends to earth's red battle ground,
 Joins in our struggle, wears our battle stains.

Let this high moment in your life be a "mount of transfiguration." In many fields of endeavor God's call to service may be heard. Do not be afraid to encounter life. There may be sharp contrasts to be sure, but these contrasts will give to life meaning and perspective. You can only make a significant contribution to life by being a part of its struggle, of its tragedy, of its self denial, and of its heart ache. These are inescapably the ingredients of character, of personality, of compassion, and of understanding.

There are times you will be in a minority, but let it be God's minority. That is what happened to Caleb and Joshua. Young men who saw the land of Canaan not from a worm's eye view, but from God's point of view. They, too, saw the land, the problems, the difficulties, but they realized, God helping them, that they could be part of the world's solution instead of part of its problem.

When Henry Martyn landed on the sun-baked beaches of India and saw her teeming millions he cried out, "Let me burn out for God." Nothing short of that kind of dedication would have established the missionary cause in disease-infested, prejudice-ridden India. But with even greater force would I say to this graduating class today: Nothing short of that kind of commitment will change the course of our tottering world.

I am not unmindful of the world mess the older generation is about to dump into your lap, but I am reminded of the neighborhood boys who were playing earnestly and furiously their first game of spring baseball on a vacant lot in the community. A passerby saw the teams in action, wildly trying to stop balls and cut off bases. He watched for a few moments and said to one of the extras, "How goes the game, friend?"

"Pretty good, Sir," replied the lad.

"What's the score," he added.

"Seventeen to nothing, Sir."

"Well," replied the man, "doesn't that look pretty bad for your side?"

Whereupon the boy eagerly vouched the information, "Oh no, Sir, we haven't been to bat yet."

In some ways the score looks pretty bad so far as righteousness, decency, peace, and purity are concerned in our world. I pray God that when you come to the batter's box you may have courage, faith, determination so that your "hit" may be on the side of righteousness and truth.

In your quest for a job, a task, a vocation don't be afraid to encounter life, but whenever and wherever the battle is joined let your Christian witness be deep and strong. And forget not, God will be your companion in struggle!

Commencement Address
By S. T. Ludwig
Trevecca Nazarene College
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