

Text of Baccalaureate Sermon

In his baccalaureate sermon yesterday at Syracuse university, Bishop Frederick DeLand Leete said in part:

Despite materialism, humanism, sensuality, social, industrial and political amorality and immorality, and the iconoclasms of ideals and conduct that characterize transitional epochs in history, thoughtful people of regions where expressions of judgment are free manifestly seem to be impressed anew with the conviction that the world is God's and that God is keeping ward as well as watch above His own. This is the one rationality and ground of confidence in the welter of conflicting ideas, passions and inconsistencies of an unsettled and uncertain age.

We are not required today to argue for the existence of God. This is sometimes done, but with poor effect. After a discourse on this theme one of the hearers quite appropriately exclaimed, "Nevertheless, I do believe there is a God." Finite beings are not able to do without a Supreme Being. Intelligent minds, if they think thru the problems of the universe, find the key of knowledge in an omniscient and all-powerful Intelligence. So imperative is this concept and fact that even Voltaire in his dark day, could declare, "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him."

INSTANCES IN HISTORY

History furnishes many instances of the failure of those who build the structure of their lives, not on the rock of religious faith and character, but upon the sands of personal indulgence and sin. Not even an Alexander can escape the ruin that ensues so false a choice. He may conquer the world, but he destroys himself.

Recent attempts to rescue the name of Aaron Burr from proved treason have not availed to alter the evidence that he destroyed his prospects for a successful career when as a student under conviction of sin he rushed out of a revival meeting and hardened his heart against truth and wisdom, rather than surrender his life to Christ as his better nature prompted him to do.

Many commentators have called the Versailles treaty, from whose blundering compromises and injustices the world will long suffer, a Clemenceau treaty. This is another of many outstanding names which teach us that one who begins without God and continues without obedience to His commands may cause much confusion among his fellowmen and die without hope of another life. It is far from interesting to travel thru the two bulky volumes of Clemenceau's Autobiography, but even a hasty perusal of it, accompanied with some knowledge of other records, is enough to show that genius without divinity is an engine of destruction.

CLEAR DEMONSTRATION

It is clearly demonstrated by every true criterion—personal development, usefulness to society, acquisitions in friendship and fortune—that by far the highest average of success is with those who have established themselves and reared the edifice of their achievements upon "the sure foundation of God." Exceptions to this conclusion are so few as barely to be enough to confirm the facts observed.

The law that determines individual strength and accomplishment is also that of institutions. The power and permanent worth of the social organizations we form and of the services they render to mankind depend upon something more than human origin and purpose. It will be well for social reformers to note this. Here it is fitting also to remind ourselves that the mother of philanthropies and of education is the Christian church.

It ought not to be necessary to remind any group of people familiar with their history of the close relationship that has so long existed between religion and education, and of the mutual services which each of these disciplines has rendered to the other. What could the church have accomplished without trained leaders—its St. Paul's, its Augustines, its Savonarolas, its Luthers, its Thomas Aquinas, its Butler, its Wesley—together with thousands more excellent products of the best halls of learning? True, not everyone in the church has appreciated the value of intellectual culture, but if any have treated it with contempt or hostility, there has always been someone sensible enough to rebuke this unwarranted folly. A corresponding error and fallacy is that of the educator who despises religion or who describes it as a foe of knowledge.

CONGENIAL TOWARD IDEALS

Certain of our state universities, whose presidents I have known well, exhibit a freedom from constraint and a congenial attitude toward Christian ideals and activities which gives to their environment quite as helpful a religious atmosphere as may be found anywhere. I have also heard leaders of tax-supported schools acknowledge in the strongest terms their indebtedness for great numbers of intellectually and ethically efficient faculty members furnished them by church schools, for support given educational undertakings by church members generally and by their representatives in legislatures, and for the background of friendliness to intellectual training which has been

created in the public mind more effectually by Christian idealism and interest in human welfare than by any other force.

It is too evident that there are definite dangers which university and church must alike strive to avert. But, first of all, each must seek its own best, with no let-down of stature and purpose, so that education and religion may have mutual respect. Then the college will be too wise to belittle religion, and the church will be too good to be little in its relation to culture. The truth we need to keep clearly before our minds is that these two disciplines are so inter-related and mutually dependent that they stand or fall together. Christianity cannot thrive or even survive among an illiterate, unscientific, falsely or narrowly taught people. Nor will free popular education permanently exist and prosper among those who are irreligious, profane and immoral.

UNITED EFFORT REQUIRED

In the end disaster is coming to the world unless a humanity can be produced characterized by what Wordsworth called the "homely old integrities of soul." This attainment, the establishment on earth of righteousness, justice and peaceableness requires the united effort of both of our chief character forming agencies, school and church. There must be no relinquishment or lessening of function, of objectives or of determined effort on the part of either of them. And all educated men and women in every sphere of life should co-operate to this end, or to what advantage have we been given intellectual and religious instruction?

If our most creative forces exert their utmost influence in this direction, tolerance, understanding and mutual regard may fuse racial and social jealousy, suspicion and strife into a human solidarity possessed of redemptive power.

We have been thinking of present-day perils to school and church. The most threatening

clouds are in the political sky. Every form of human liberty may well tremble before conceptions of state rulership that are now held in European countries and are more or less current everywhere. Freedom of worship and instruction, freedom of speech and press, freedom of capital and labor, of contract and service, freedom of association and of person—all are opposed and often attacked in theory and in practice.

I venture to say that this is coming to be the greatest problem and responsibility of the two most puissant forces, those which are represented here today. No other powers than those of education and religion can save the world from tyranny over body, mind and soul.

Church and school must stand firmly together to resist and prevent slavery for the whole race and even to keep government from destroying itself and plunging society into hopeless chaos. Time will show that this view of the situation is no figment of imagination and may represent a coming deadly crisis impending, and perhaps nearer than we think.

I wish to express the conviction, with whatever strength I have, that the nations of the world, agitated and distraught, selfish and egotistical, ruining themselves by costly officialism, inept economics and spend-thrift militarism, will never find firm peace or diffused and lasting prosperity until they base their laws and procedures not upon conflicting demands of human selfishness but upon "the sure foundation of God." This is because, as Addison affirms, "the true wealth of a country lies in its men and women."

Nations of the ungodly are doomed. What is the testimony of the ages? Thruout the past mighty states and colossal powers have arisen and for a time they flourished. Some of them grew important and proud, tho from the beginning they defied the Sovereign of the Universe and flouted His precepts. Others that once knew and hon-

ored the rule of The Highest sowed in themselves and seeds of folly and iniquity. At length they all went down in ruin.

On the basis of sound history, it is safe to predict that such will be the end of every existing government, even that of America, if it follows the disastrous examples of the past.

This nation has been guilty of many a sin and failure to do justice, but it has profited much by Christian character and Christian education. We have been in and are not yet thru a bitter season of trial and distress.

RECOVERY PRIMARILY MORAL

We talk about recovery: It has not come. Some folk think it will never come until we understand and act upon the knowledge that it is primarily moral, not material re-creation that is needed, a new ethical sincerity and consistency, beginning in Washington and in every state capitol, remaking every occupation, industry and institution; cleansing church, school, press, radio and movie; bringing to threatened breaking homes new virtue, loyalty and love.

What will it profit us to regain lost wealth, to divide it more equitably, to attain social and old age security, even to get international peace, if there is not spiritual recovery? Without more and better Christianity we are not likely to get these physical benefits or if any of them are achieved it is safe to predict that it will not be long before there will come to us more losses and greater and "that the last estate will be worse than the first."

ALL PROBLEMS SOLVABLE

One thing we need at this hour is a firm conviction that all problems related to human existence and progress are solvable, for example that of employment, about which we hear so much and do so little. Or we do the wrong thing. It is perfectly evident that just as much work as ever is needed in the world, and more. There even is money enough to pay for it. We have only to get brain and brawn together, add industry, honesty and mutual confidence, free men and resources from burdensome costs and restrictions and from political and organizational controls and the rebound and growth of successful undertakings of every nature will be astounding.

Even at the worst I predict that few of the class of 1939 will long be unemployed who have a reasonable amount of initiative, inventiveness and patience, if they really want to work and love it.

This is no day for defeatists or weaklings. High challenge rather than dismay should be found in the tempora et mores in which we find ourselves. Arise, men and women of intelligence and devotion. In the name of God and with full confidence in the efficacy of His guidance and aid give proof of the saneness and depth of your learning and your holy faith by making this land what the founders dreamed, what patriots died for and strong men and women wrought for thruout the more resplendent decades of our history. Tho elsewhere "the trumpets of an empire shout an empire's doom," America, thou shalt live and make alive.