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Commencement Address
University of North Dakota
June 10, 1952

A LIFE'S PHILOSOPHY

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A LIFE'S PHILOSOPHY

On the occasion of your commencement exercises, tradition says that I am expected to bring to you words of wisdom and advice and a formula for future success. On the other hand, I am aware of the delicacy of the position which, as a commencement speaker, I occupy. As a graduating class, presumably you did not ask that I come here to serve as your oracle and sage -- if indeed it was your wish to listen to anyone pronounce to you his words of wisdom. Since commencement addresses are almost a condition precedent to the awarding of diplomas, it seems to me that in order to obtain your diplomas, you are practically a "captive audience". Under the law of labor relations, unrestricted right to speak is considerably curtailed when a "captive audience" is being addressed. I shall be mindful of such limitations and shall try to resist the temptation to advise you on the formula for success or the road to the good life in one easy lesson.

The story is told of the panhandler who stopped a businessman, asking him for a dollar. The businessman said, "Be reasonable my good man, just ask me for a quarter". The beggar retorted, "Give me a dollar or don't give me a dollar, but don't tell me how to run my business". This morning I shall try to suggest a thought for your appraisal which I think is of paramount importance, but shall try to avoid telling you how to run your business.

It is an honor to be invited to have a part in your graduation exercises today, particularly so because these exercises mark the 20th anniversary of my own graduation here at the University of North Dakota

As an alumnus of this school, it is deeply satisfying to return from time to time, to visit friends of many years' standing, to see the growth of the school and its fine new buildings and to see the splendid young people it graduates each year, making their marks wherever they go. It has been a source of particular gratification to hear employment managers not only in the Midwest, but in the East report that they like to hire young people from North Dakota, because they are well-trained and willing to work hard to get ahead. It is pleasing to know that North Dakota graduates readily take their places alongside the best men produced anywhere.

Dr. Richard C. Raines of Indianapolis says that there are three most important decisions that each of us as young people must make. First, the choice of a life's work; Second, the choice of a life's partner; and Third, the choice of a life's philosophy.

I don't propose to discuss the first except to make this observation. In starting out as a young man, I remember giving considerable thought as to how one gets ahead, and no doubt you have been thinking of the same thing. Today in the personnel work of our company, I see the progress of young men from the other side -- from the viewpoint of management. Our executives are constantly watching the progress of our young men, anxious to see which of them are capable of assuming increased responsibilities -- which of them push out ahead of the others by reason of their leadership, their personality, their knowledge of the work, and above all their willingness to pay the price and to do the job better than the other fellow.

We know in business today that it isn't actually competition between products but competition between managements. Competition is so keen that

companies which stay on top try diligently to select the best man they have to fill each important job, regardless of who the man may be. There are usually more openings near the top than there are fully qualified men to fill them. What is true in business, seems also to be true in the other fields.

My experience has borne out the observation of North Dakota's illustrious alumnus, Mr. John Hancock. He reminds us that if we concentrate on doing the best job we are capable of doing and being unconcerned about where the credit goes, credit and success will come to us beyond our deserts.

In an article which I clipped about fifteen years ago, Mr. W. C. Teagle, President of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey put it this way. "Few of us are brilliant, save on extremely rare occasions. We do not get the answers easily... There have been many attempts... to define the elusive thing called genius. But I like best its definition as 'an infinite capacity for taking pains'. The successful men it has been my privilege to know were hard workers, sometimes slow of thought and speech. They did not always spark when the switch was turned on. But, one and all, they rounded up the particular job on which they were employed. They not only finished the work in hand but checked back on it. More than likely, they discovered other jobs that had to be done to supplement the original assignment."

I wish that I were wise enough to discuss with you the second great decision -- the choice of a life's partner. To the young men, I could say that I sometimes question the inclusion of this choice as a real decision which we have the opportunity to make. If my wife weren't here today, I would suggest that this is a decision frequently made for us, not by us.

It is the third decision -- the choice of a life's philosophy -- I invite you to think about with me for a few minutes this morning. I believe it is so basic and so vital that nothing else I could talk about is of comparable importance.

We say casually that our college training is not just to teach us how to make a living, but to teach us how to live. Have we learned how to live in the kind of world we have today? That is a question each of us might well ask ourselves. We have been taught to think for ourselves, but are we willing to think hard and honestly? Are we willing to pattern our lives on a philosophy which incorporates truths which are inescapable? General Omar Bradley is quoted as saying, "Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants". Someone else with a flare for rhyme has put it this way:

Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree,
Discussing things as they're said to be,
Said one to the others: "Now listen you two
There's a certain rumor that can't be true,
That man descends from our noble race.
The very idea! It's a dire disgrace!
No monkey ever deserted his wife,
Starved his baby and ruined her life;
And another thing: You'll never see
A monk build a fence 'round a coconut tree
And let the coconuts go to waste
Forbidding all other monks to taste.
Why, if I'd put a fence around this tree,
Starvation would force you to steal from me.
Here's another thing a monk won't do;
Go out at night and get on a stew,
Or use a gun or a club or a knife
To take some other monkey's life,
Yes, Man descended, the ornery cuss,
But brothers, he didn't descend from us!

Whether we like it or not, ours is a world in which the influence and threat of Communism is a part of our lives. Communism, or actually Stalinism as the members of its inner circle in this country term it,

tells a man that he is just an intelligent animal, without spirit or soul or purpose beyond the attainment of his physical needs and desires. Such teachings inevitably bring conquest and exploitation.

If that philosophy is to be defeated -- (and if it isn't defeated, then nothing else matters) -- it must be done by a more powerful one. It requires more than just the rejection of Communism. It requires more than people who are just anti-Communists living mainly to accumulate money, power, and pleasant experiences. I submit that it calls for a working philosophy that gives life purpose and meaning -- a belief and a faith that is capable of giving men strength beyond themselves and which is sufficient to stand any test that may come.

In the "Journal of Living" for September 1949, there appeared an article under the title, "The Story of the Eight Rich Men". The story related that in 1923 an important meeting was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Attending it were eight of the world's leading financiers: the president of the largest independent steel company; the president of the largest utility company; the president of the largest gas company; the president of the New York Stock Exchange; a member of the President's Cabinet; the greatest "bear" in Wall Street; the head of the world's greatest monopoly; and the president of the bank for international settlements.

Certainly here were eight of the world's best known financiers -- men who at least had found the secret of making money. That was in 1923. Now go forward twenty-five years or so and look again at the record of these men:

The president of the largest independent steel company -- Charles Schwab -- died a bankrupt and lived on borrowed money for several years before his death.

The president of the greatest utility company -- Samuel Insul -- died a fugitive from justice and penniless in a foreign land.

The president of the largest gas company -- Howard Hobson -- became mentally ill.

The president of the New York Stock Exchange -- Richard Whitney -- served a term in Sing Sing penitentiary.

The member of the President's cabinet -- Albert Fall -- served a term in prison and was pardoned so that he could die at home.

The greatest "bear" in Wall Street -- Jesse Livermore -- died a suicide.

The head of the world's greatest monopoly -- Ivan Krueger -- died a suicide.

The president of the bank for international settlements -- Leon Fraser -- died a suicide.

I have never studied theology. But as a lawyer, I learned that the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and the other teachings of the Old and New Testaments are underlying principles in the body of the law that govern human relationships.

As a businessman, I have learned that the techniques of business are less important than its human relations. I have learned that the most respected and influential business leaders I know are men who incorporate in their businesses principles of fair play and regard for the welfare of others.

In my experience as a lawyer and a businessman, and as one who tries to observe and think honestly and deeply for himself, I say to you very sincerely that I have found no satisfactory way of life other than the Christian philosophy. I believe that philosophy is the only one on which a lasting democracy can stand -- the only one against which Communism is powerless.

The Christian philosophy recognizes the dignity of man, his weaknesses and his potentials. It recognizes man's deep-seated need for a purpose in life beyond himself and faith in a power bigger than himself. It recognizes man's need to serve a cause, a person or an institution -- and in the forgetfulness of self, to become a broader and finer person. The Christian philosophy is the cornerstone of character, of liberty and of good citizenship.

My work is to help build the most efficient management and work force for our company that we can. Our job is human relations, but in that work we have no place for theorists or sentimentalists. We need sound, practical men. So deep is my conviction that there is no satisfactory substitute for a Christian philosophy to accomplish our job, that I would be very hesitant to hire a man for my staff whose life was not so grounded.

A few weeks ago I interviewed a young man who, like yourselves, is graduating from college this spring. He comes from a prominent family. He is the president of his social fraternity, and president of the interfraternity council on his campus. In looking for a job with our company, I asked him to tell me about his aims and goals. He said that first and

foremost he wanted to be a Christian citizen; second he wanted to live in a democracy; third he wanted to work where he could continue to learn; and fourth he wanted to be able to give his children the same advantages he sought for himself.

There it is! First and foremost to be a Christian citizen! The other things follow.

I am becoming increasingly aware of the fact that more and more leaders of our communities and of our country are publicly acknowledging their belief that the Christian philosophy is the only way to meet today's problems. Many of you no doubt have listened to the series of life philosophies broadcast over the C.B.S. network in recent months. In five-minute statements, numerous leaders in politics, business, education, and literature have described the Christian philosophies that motivate their lives.

The Minneapolis Star recently carried a series of articles in which some twenty or more civic leaders of the Twin Cities described how their lives and the foundation of their business success were patterned on a deep-seated Christian philosophy. Many of these men I know personally. Listen to a man who is recognized as one of the top two or three leading corporation lawyers in this section of the country. "The true advance of mankind is not in material things or secular things, but in the things of the spirit and soul, and only to the extent that the philosophy, teachings, and promises of the Old and New Testaments become the guide of individual, class, and international conduct is there any promise that mankind will be deterred from destroying itself."

Listen to a prominent banker. "I believe that a Christian philosophy is the common denominator of living -- whether we be man or woman, lawyer or banker, mechanic or merchant, housewife or salesman, fortunate or unfortunate. Certainly in these days of world strife it is an anchor that holds us steady as we maintain our faith in the future."

Several years ago, Will Durant wrote, "We move into an age of spiritual exhaustion and despondency... The greatest question of our time... is whether man can bear to live without God".

I have recounted to you "The Story of the Eight Rich Men". Let me bring the point home with another illustration. You are all familiar with the lines of William Henley.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

Few people know what happened to the man who proclaimed himself so boldly to be the master of his fate -- the captain of his soul. When his philosophy of self-sufficiency was put to the test -- when he lost his wife through unfaithfulness -- William Henley found his philosophy to be totally inadequate, and he took his own life.

If you are to build a skyscraper, it must have a foundation built on bedrock. If you are to build a vessel capable of withstanding the

storms of the ocean, it must be carefully designed and engineered. If you are to build a life against which Communism is impotent, a life that is adequate for any test that may be ahead, then I am convinced there is no other choice -- that life must be fashioned upon a Christian philosophy.