# LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

Burns, John J.

SIXTY-SIXTH ANNUAL

COMMENCEMENT

ADDRESS

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# COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

*By*

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

FIFTEEN years have passed since I sat on a June day such as this in a setting less pretentious, on a campus equally attractive, though on a smaller scale, but in an atmosphere essentially the same as I find here this day at Loyola. On that day I heard solemnities pronounced, prizes awarded, degrees conferred and students declaim. The memory of that day, and of the length of the address in particular, will do much to insure the brevity of my remarks. You will appreciate my thoughtfulness and my regard for your sensibilities and my respect for your intelligence in avoiding all attempts at offering you a short and simple formula for material success.

It was the year of President Harding's entry into the White House to the hopeful cheers of millions of our citizens who had been sadly disillusioned by our wartime adventure in idealism. By that time the war slogans had lost their glamour. Those slogans which once had transformed our country so speedily from an easy-going, peace-loving populace into a militant machine-like empire bent single-mindedly on a task of destruction, had by that year only the capacity to make us sheepish. The campaign to make the world safe for democracy seemed a trifle silly in the cold gray dawn of the poker game at Versailles. We were just beginning to be a bit uneasy about our war debts. Only a few suspected that our erstwhile allies were to become, first, revisionists, and finally cancellationists. The war books in

fiction and in poetry were just starting to reveal the stark tragedy, the agony, the savagery, of what we had been led to believe was an affair of bands and medals and romantic escapades. So back to normalcy we went in high glee. There was, to be sure, a cloud in the sky. We had a depression that year. In retrospect and in the light of our recent superior learning on the subject of depressions, 1921 takes on the appearance of a mere dent in the economic highway capable of giving no more than an imperceptible jolt.

Many of the 1921 group of graduates viewed the problem of employment and its relation to them with great self-pity. It was true that the indices of our then economic tempo reflected a relatively poor condition of business. Many of the new alumni dared not risk the tempestuous seas of business and sought the haven of professional schools or the safe but minimum glory in the life of a pedagogue. Hardly any of us had an inkling of the mirage of prosperity which was to follow in the world recovery of the next few years, a recovery, by the way, achieved in part by money borrowed from this country by foreign nations and nationals in exchange for securities, many of which are still in default.

Today no candid advisor would attempt to minimize the problems that face this year's class. You are, of course, immeasurably better off than the class of the last four years. Despite the amazing recovery of the past year as reflected in the corporate profits, there is still unsolved the problem of how to employ profitably the millions who now seek work in vain. Many competent and impartial economists regard this issue as dwarfing all others, one that will tax the wisdom and statesmanship of the very best leaders, one that transcends political quarrels. This new and strange economic development of recovery accompanied by vast unemployment should be regarded as a specific development of

the machine age. It is too early to pass a wise judgment as to cause or cure, but before you are fifteen years older the problem will have become more acute or the statesman will have demonstrated more courage and wisdom. There should be, of course, much comfort in the truism that excellence knows no hard times, or as it is put colloquially, there is always room at the top. But that old-fashioned saw, however true it may be abstractly, is of little comfort to those who must be victims of the law of averages. There is this great difference: in 1921 the thought that a college graduate had some claim on the state to guarantee him even the minimum comforts of life would have provoked either merriment or condemnation. Today, such a view seems not unorthodox when the claim for state intervention in behalf of all kinds of individuals is based solely and exclusively on need. Now, of course, that transformation of attitude is due almost entirely to the sharp, the chaotic collapse of our economic system. At the same time the significance of the change should not be lost sight of. While "need" may have occasioned this present reliance upon the state, your generation will not easily abandon its fundamental slant that the state is the arbiter of our destiny and the guarantor of our every whim. It is one thing to advocate the adoption of progressively civilized social standards. It is quite within the theory of our society to advocate, for example, on the principle of fairness, a very high tax on very large incomes. It is not outside the precedents of our government to advocate the employment of the taxing power as an instrument for effecting a social policy even though that policy mean a control of anti-social accumulations. However, it is quite another thing, more subtle, more dangerous, more subversive to inculcate into the populace, directly or indirectly, an undisciplined appetite for material comforts and an unreasoning expectation that the state must provide for their every want.

This urge for state intervention in behalf of those who control, and in a true democracy that means the masses, is one of our gravest dangers. While it is true that the logic of a numerical majority democracy carries this risk of state intervention, it has always been assumed that restraint and generosity and respect for minorities would restrict the majority's demands that the state power be used for self-aggrandizement.

It was during the year 1921 that the present Chief Justice of the United States, then Secretary of State, sought and obtained a conference of representatives of the governments of England, France, Italy and Japan for the purpose of discussing and negotiating agreements concerning disarmament. In November of that year the governments reached an understanding which was hailed as the dawn of a new era in the relations of sovereigns. In fifteen years the dawn has hardly ripened into morning and almost as much cynicism obtains about international good faith as during the World War. In that year a committee of the Congress was investigating the Ku Klux Klan. It was shown to be another one of those frequently recurring phenomena indicating the emotional instability and the general ignorance of large members of our people. The inquiry was regarded as helpful and some dared to think that the wave of intolerance represented a hangover from the war hysteria and would not manifest itself in later years, a pious, but now we know a vain, wish.

It would be for me, though not perhaps for the audience, a fascinating inquiry to contrast the important events and institutions a decade and a half apart. The social historian of course must make such a detailed study if he aims to be realistic in his task of interpreting social trends. But the restriction of time and occasion makes such a detailed narration by me inopportune. Certain generalizations however are appropriate to a few conclusions I desire to leave with you.

For one thing, in 1921 the fashionable scientists were just beginning to question the mechanistic explanation of the earth, the universe, and life. Sir James Jeans had given the accident theory of the universe a scientific burial. You will recall that Huxley in a serious endeavor to explain the phenomenon of order in the universe had suggested that this order was a matter of chance. He analogized rather cleverly and said that if six monkeys were put to work hitting typewriter keys for millions and millions of years they would inevitably write all the books in the British Museum. The words of Sir James Jeans seemed to indicate the beginning of a trend back to the dogma which all the students of the Jesuit system have been taught from the time of your patron Saint. He said:

"Today there is a wide measure of agreement which on the physical side of science approaches almost to unanimity, that a stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality. The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine. Mind no longer appears like an accidental intruder into the realm of matter."

Frankly, this quotation cries aloud its tentative character and from a cautious scientist we can suspect that its vagueness was purposeful. But its significance can best be appreciated by those of my generation who were confronted on all sides by assumptions of science taken to be major premises for religious and social thinking. The remarks of Jeans are not suggested as a model of thought or expression, but rather as a colorful indication of an intellectual trend by first-rate minds in the period I am discussing. Unfortunately this trend, lacking a basic philosophy, seems to have atrophied.

Applied science during this period made enormous strides. Radio was on the verge of being popularized; trans-Atlantic flying was on the threshold of reality; and the airplane was leaving the stage where every flight was a hazard and as daring a form

of entertainment as the balloon ascension of two decades earlier. Science on all fronts seemed to be attaining successes that were an almost daily wonder. Discovery succeeded discovery and tentative hypotheses frequently had to be discarded before they had become publicized; their validity crushed by the latest data from the laboratories. Despite the successful record of science in this period I mention, life has become more confused than ever. The scientific man has failed to give us the secret of a happy life. Far from it! The world has never been more restless, more disturbed, more the victim of conflicting cross-currents, or more aimless. In place of peace and contentment we find mental and spiritual bewilderment.

Perhaps in no field of economic endeavor can there be found a more noticeable trend than in the field of the law. The last fifteen years have been record-breaking in the output of our legal machine. Of course, one great change has come about which the present generation will find increasingly difficult to appreciate. That is the repeal of prohibition, or as it has been termed, the abolition of the "era of the great nonsense." For a great many years jurists had sounded warnings against the practical wisdom of such prohibitory laws. Wisdom, however, is seldom the handmaid to a fanatical crusade. The full story of the damage done to the fabric of society by that one great mistake has never been told and probably never will be fully appreciated. Unfortunately the one good result of prohibition that might have remained, we shall not have, namely, the appreciation by the people and particularly by our lawmakers of the definitely circumscribed area within which the law may operate effectively. A problem of social importance is presented and the American way is to have a law passed, usually with haste and not infrequently without regard to the capacity of society to attain reasonably adequate enforcement. This characteristic is all the more to be deplored

because there has had to be an increasing reliance upon the law as a decisive factor in ordering our social life.

Some critics say that the increasing complexity of our legal system is an inevitable result of our more complex civilization. That, in a sense, is true. The more urban, the more scientific our ways of living become the more we must call upon our legal system to recognize and protect new interests and new claims, to create new rights and to impose new obligations. But there is a distinct and different factor in our social trend which accounts for the added strain on the law. It can best be appreciated if we consider what had been the important methods whereby men living in society attained peace and harmony. The law, that is, in the broad sense, the legal order, of course suggests itself as a primary method of social control and for many years, perhaps for all the years of this country's existence, it has been the most important agency. Particularly where society is not composed of a single culture group, the reconciliation of conflicts can be worked out only through the force of the law. But for many years the law had valiant allies in religion and ethical custom. This latter, as a regulatory force, is analogous to religion and finds its origin in religious forces. To me ethical customs are like the instinct for good living, for honorable conduct which characterizes the life of many descendants of the Puritans for whom nowadays all religion represents a vague and mystical antiquarian force. And yet the habits they adopt with such honor to themselves were deeply rooted in the faith of their fathers.

Perhaps the point can be made clearer by this formula. The more effective, the more alive the forces of religion are in a given community, the less demand there is for the interposition of the law. Monsignor John A. Ryan recognizes this factor in our present crisis. In commenting on the illegal practices of giant business enterprises against their weak competitors, the

enormous frauds perpetrated upon the consumer, the imposition practiced on laborers, he laid great stress on the moral nature of the crisis. The failure of our economic order in these particulars he lays to irreligion and to the deadly vice that we call avarice or greed. Donoso Cortes, the celebrated Spanish philosopher and statesman, was keenly aware of the relationship between law and religion. He said in effect that the freedom of society depended on the strength of its religious foundations and that in proportion as this foundation vanished the mechanical forces of a supervisory and controlling state must guarantee order and security to society.

The decline of religion as a fact of American life admits of no controversy. The decline of the Catholic influence may be more debatable, but personally I believe despite our more favorable statistics we as a group have not been conspicuously influential. We have failed to be even remotely the factors affecting the currents of American life in the way in which the glorious history of our faith would seem to demand. As for other religions, the cold statistics of empty church pews, of smaller contributions, of dwindling chapel attendance at colleges all eloquently testify that we are now deep in the decline of religious influence over American life.

During the last few weeks all over the country in accordance with our ancient traditions, baccalaureate sermons were preached to the Youth of 1936. Purposely I took note and found that invariably the speaker called for a revival of religion, for a reawakening of old influences, or else he condemned the growing materialism that is regarded in some quarters as a brand new development. Here, and for that matter all over the world, our Jesuit teachers have recognized this materialism as an old enemy wearing a new, a modernistic garb.

The state in recent days has been called upon to assume a re-

lationship in the affairs of the citizen hitherto unknown in our political history. Of course the unprecedented economic collapse made emergency action by the national government absolutely necessary. There is hardly a competent critic of either party who will not admit that a larger sphere of federal control was inescapable. But to many, the part played by the Federal government, whether arising out of emergency or not, is a danger signal of our approach toward the totalitarian state which, if it comes, will be a complete contradiction of our American ideal. But their resistance, as does all such resistance to this trend of our government, seems to be of little consequence. Passing by for the moment those activities of the federal government which must clearly be labeled "emergency," there still remains a great volume of recent legislation representative of the centralizing tendency of the federal government and representative also of this tendency to resort to law as a device to correct all problems of society. It is a perfectly amazing fact that a least since the days of the first President Roosevelt the candidates for the office of the Presidency of the United States have almost in the same language deplored the growth of bureaus in the federal government and yet no president left office without having made substantial additions to what are bureaucracies to the opposition but administrative agencies to those who advocate their formation.

If one were to generalize about a prolific source of new and sweeping legislation enacted by both state and federal governments it would be the failure of fiduciaries entrusted with other people's money to live up to the simple standards of honesty. The national nature of our problem was admirably expressed by Mr. Justice Stone a few years ago when he said, regarding their legal control of corporate management:

"Evidence of corporate activities, distribution of corporate personnel, stockholders and directors through many states and the diffusion of

hold on to the last position without hope, without rescue, like that Roman soldier whose bones were found in front of a door in Pompeii, who during the eruption of Vesuvius died at his post because they forgot to relieve him. That is greatness. That is what it means to be a thoroughbred. The honorable end is the one thing that cannot be taken from a man."

No thanksgiving could be too profuse for expressing your gratitude that here in these sacred shades you have been shown the light of a noble and joyous philosophy of life. To the ashy sadism of this prophet of chaos we offer the miracle of the *ratio studiorum.* Instead of the worship of the Roman sentinel we offer the saints and the martyrs and the simple dogma that man is created in the image of his Maker.

Let us dwell on the thought, how fortunate we are to be members of a community intellectual and spiritual which crusades in behalf of the theory of living that not only coincides with the experience of our daily life but is at one and the same time in tune with history and brimming with optimism.

You have been blessed with the soundest of teaching. The curriculum of this great university had its essential beginnings ages ago. Through centuries of turmoil and strife the basic principles remain unchanged. If the most important index of truth is immutability then by that test you, the newest sons of Loyola, have received the "veritas." No passing fad or intellectual novelty can find a haven in this school.

In a nation whose manners are dictated by the tawdry misbehaviourisms of the Hollywood idols, where the sensationalism of the press makes virtue a mockery and vice enthroned, where the term propaganda has become accepted as involving no social condemnation although in the unvarnished state it means plain "lying," where the shrieking radio standardizes the taste, the prejudices and the very thoughts of America young and old, it

is reassuring to see here an institution committed to the wisdom of the ancient fathers: that human life has dignity because of its Creator; that man is possesssed of intellect and will; that the function of education is to inform and develop the mind so that the student may know, and to train the will that he may choose the good and avoid the evil in life.

In the days at hand you will find that America will be inquiring, not hostile. This country has been chastened by the depression and mystified by the disintegration of moral influences. This inquiry will be a glorious opportunity for the apostleship of the dogma and the principles which for each of you this great day symbolizes.