

Among the more significant grafitti of our time is one which was found in a deep cellar under the city of Cologne. There, a desperate group of Jews hiding from Nazi terror had written this upon the walls of their living tomb:

"I believe in the sun, even when it
is not shining.

I believe in love, even when feeling
it not.

I believe in God, even when He
is silent."

Our times are not to be compared to those in which those terror stricken hunted men, women and children lived and died. But all of us, despite the happiness and security of this setting as it meets the eye, would be less than honest if we did not face the fact of our times: there are terrors in the world. In various ways we are hiding from them. We do not know when one of the idiocies or cruelties or thoughtless acts of violence will find us out and destroy us and our world.

It is our response to this situation which I would discuss with you for a few minutes. Let me confess immediately, graduating seniors, that I know perfectly well that from your point of view I have little to commend your attention. And I am honestly

humble about it, because you are, in some measure, correct.

I am over thirty (by a good deal!) and therefore, for some of you, not to be trusted. I am a Rabbi and, therefore, for some of you, less than reliable for you might think I speak from a position distant from your own. I am also a religionist and, therefore, I am associated with that abominable generalization: "organized religion". Though I think that I would be in agreement with most of you that modern "organized religion" has followed rather than led in the matter of innovative application of the ethical principles of humane life. Lastly, however, I imagine I am somewhat suspect because I am a parent. Indeed I am the very proud parent of one of you whom I love with all my heart. But that very relationship of parents and children in itself is a challenge for both of us.

I lead to my subject with a word in my defense and by implication the defense of the parents and family of each of you.

We were not always over thirty. We too were once your age, albeit in a different time and temper. Furthermore, I speak to you, not as the representative of a parochial faith but as one who believes that there are religious and ethical perspectives which apply to us all. Lastly, I beg you

to recall that, as I said a moment ago, the relationship between parents and children is a challenge for both. And in proper understanding of that relationship lies enormous resources and spiritual power to meet our current problems.

As you would expect I find a phrase from the tradition common to all of us useful for me to organize my thoughts and, hopefully, helpful for you to understand an idea which I earnestly hope you will remember to your good.

But before I share it with you, let me say most emphatically, that despite the setting of this service, my role as a speaker and the tone of what is expected I am definitely not preaching to you. I merely wish to open my own heart and mind, frankly and candidly and perhaps in what I say you will sense echoes of what you yourselves feel and believe. So we speak of both the young and the old, both parents and children. So let us think not of one or the other but of both.

In the Biblical book of Joel we read an astonishingly perceptive and relevant passage. Joel is describing a future when not only physical blessings shall be the reward for obedience to the ethical way of

life, but also spiritual blessings and in particular the gift of prophecy. So speaking for God, he says:

"And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my spirit on
all flesh;

Your sons and daughters shall prophesy.
Your old men shall dream dreams and
your young men shall see visions."

(Joel 3:1)

Now immediately questions arise. Isn't it astounding that in the future time alluded to, prophecy will be the gift of the young not the old and venerable? And again: What is the difference between a dream and a vision? In that distinction, I suggest to you, is the essence of the partnership between young and old which can and will sustain us through the terrors of our times.

Let me take you back for a moment to that heroic inscription on the wall in the cellar under Cologne:

"I believe in the sun, even when it
is not shining.

I believe in love, even when feeling
it not.

I believe in God, even when He is
silent."

Dear Friends All: those lines were the faith of no single group. There were young and old,

the aged and the infants. There were the wise and the simple, the weak and the strong. And yet they were united with a singleness of purpose that gave meaning to their life and which was responsible for their survival. They cared about each other. They loved each other.

Yes, old men dreamed dreams: about the past and its safety and security and its loveliness and its lost youthful exuberance. And young men saw visions, because their own past was so meager for them, visions of a future with safety and security and loveliness and the chance to seek out one's destiny in peace.

Dream and vision: different and yet the same. Each in a separate idiom and yet each including the other in love and concern. And still in all it was in the young that the potentiality of prophesy was given.

It would be foolish to even suggest that graduation from High School represents an end to learning. Not in our time. Not even for those who do not go on to study at colleges and universities. For in today's world and in tomorrow's, life itself demands learning. And those who close their books never to open another are doomed to powerless foundering in the currents of swift and

remorseless change. They will surely be inundated.

But even wisdom is not the sure and sole possession of either young or old to the exclusion of each other. It is not in knowledge alone that the nature of dreams and visions are determined. For the dream of the past and the vision of the future are both the product of the yearning mind. Freud said dreams were stimulated by unfulfilled wishes. Be that as it may, we can do nothing about the past. Only this present moment and the next lie within our power to shape and direct as best we can. And this is a matter of will, of choice, of character and spirit. What shall we do? How shall we behave? What is meaningful and what is not? These are matters of intention which hinge upon the kind of person one is.

It stands to reason then, that the dream of the old or the vision of the young is shaped not by age or group but by all those elements of experience and learning and loyalties and loves that make a man what he is. And each of us is just that: the composite of effects and influences of those with whom we have had our most meaningful relationships and loves. And if those relationships

be sound, which is to say honest and real, permissible and responsible, then we need no proof of their validity. We know. We require no proof of the sun even on the darkest day. Nor of love even when that love shows the face of discipline, control, anxiety or even remonstrance, as it does in the case of parent to child or when, as in the reverse, a parent wonders about a love obscured by what appears as individuality, the struggle for freedom, the impassioned plea for a different way of life from his own.

It is true that the gift of prophecy, if it be at all, lies with you, the graduates and your contemporaries. You will look to the shape of tomorrow's world. But that prophecy must find room for both the dreams and the visions, for the union of your generation with all of those -- younger and older -- among whom you will live and for whom you live to the end of your days.

There is terror abroad in the land. But there is also now as never before in human history an enormous unquenchable hope. Men no longer believe or act as if suffering and conflict were natural. There is a hope that life need not be dominated by terror. That wars are not inevitable. That there need not be barriers to learning or achievement or happiness one iota beyond a man's

own limitations of skill and will. That there need not be poverty and pain or brutalities in the name of nation or religion or race. Out of that hope has come much of the turmoil of our times. Out of that hope comes the protest against everything that is evil. Out of that hope must come tomorrow's peace.

The transition represented by graduation from High School for both students and their families is but one, we hope, in the measure of a long and useful life.

As we share this together, may we share our world together: the dream and the vision, yet giving to you our beloved children the gift of prophecy. And may you find in that prophecy the kind of world, the kind of life that will never cause you to cringe in the cellar of fear but to emblazon upon the gates through which men and women and children flow into each other's domains in peace, the eternal hope and trust:

"I believe in the sun, even when it
is not shining.

I believe in love, even when feeling
it not.

I believe in God, even when He is
silent."

May God bless you - our children - with that eternal trust.