

For a great many of us here, Stanford began four years ago come September. It had been a Beatles summer, filled with the sounds of Yellow Submarine and Eleanor Rigby. Both songs were pieces of critical social commentary, and I quoted from both in my first Stanford address, given as a part of the pre-Reg program to this present graduating baccalaureate class. I urged us all to stay out of the Yellow Submarine existence, which is preoccupied with itself and its own kind and is content to sail beneath its own sky of blue, its vision of the troubled life of man in a fractured world obscured by the surrounding sea of green. I emphasized the vast plurality of the Eleanor Rigbys of this world, all the lonely people cheated of affection and fulfillment and, like Father McKenzie who buried her, hopelessly trapped in a life of bitter lovelessness. And I spoke of the necessity of love, our own exercise of love -- love not as some sentimental or romantic quality, but love that is openness, vulnerability, responsibility and above all, commitment to the achievement of a fuller life and ultimate full human stature for all men. In view of the procession of weddings these days among members of this class, I wonder whether some of you may not have misunderstood me.

I can recall few more gratifying moments in my life than your response that Thursday afternoon in Memorial Auditorium. Certainly I have known in my life no more gratifying years than these that we have all spent together; and when I look at you, I must say that for all the talk of generational conflict, your parents get from me a resounding "Right On!" Whatever you may think, you have evermore been doing something right! I am especially grateful to this graduating baccalaureate class for the honor of this invitation and for counting me these four years as a kind of member. The submarine riders among you and the tens of thousands of your classmates across the country are fewer than in any classes that have gone before you, and your commitment to the Kingdom of God -- some of you would prefer some other name for it, of course -- your commitment to an ultimate kingdom of light, and justice and life, and therefore of participating, responsible love, is greater than any of us could have dreamed four years ago.

I do not have to apologize here for speaking as a biblical theologian. This is not a commencement but a baccalaureate address. It is properly, historically, traditionally a sermon, whose aim it is or ought to be somehow to set this moment, this day and event, these days, this time, in the durable perspective of a faith that has survived for several thousand years the glory and the agony of human existence.

There is much in this shared moment of history that is repugnant not only to a prophetic sensitivity that is biblically informed, but of course as well to a secular-humanist concern, which, incidentally, may also be of ultimate biblical derivation. But one does not have to be consciously biblically nurtured to know that man has the capacity to eat the fruit, to take the course, that will deprive him of his life-supporting environment; that he seems forever disposed, like Cain, to act

against his brother in ways not only destructive of the brother, but ultimately of himself as well; that he appears at his worst easily able to inundate his world by pollution, by population, by sophisticated poisons or fiendishly destructive weapons, and so to extinguish it; and that by his arrogance he persists in multiplying his divisions, and always further frustrating the human language of essential communication.

The anguish of man's evil ways -- evil not simply in the moralistic but in the empirical sense that these ways alienate him from his environment, from his fellows, and even from himself, and are therefore ultimately self-destructive -- this is an anguish known to all who have a vision of the family of man. And in the sensitive, prophetic view, however come by, this is a moment which may understandably be assessed even with despair, but must, and had better, be regarded with deep concern, with courage, with resolution, and with commitment of faith in God and man.

We've still got a lot going for us, and I am abandoning neither theological nor secular hope. But none of us has to be persuaded that our present condition is critical.

It isn't simply the long, long war; the depth and pervasiveness and variety and obduracy of nationalisms that threaten to destroy us, racisms that divide and corrupt us, and the concentrations of power that dehumanize both exploiter and exploited. It isn't simply the symptoms of our own profound malaise that confront us when we read Seymour Hersh's Pulitzer Prize-winning report of what happened on March 16, 1968 in My Lai. It isn't simply the reflections of our national ill-health that we see at Kent State, and Augusta and Jackson. It isn't simply the open political triumph of race privilege in Alabama, or of economic privilege in California; of tax privilege among the very wealthy; or of educational, juridical, medical, and even in a certain perverted sense, religious privilege for those who can afford it, It isn't that we appear to be heedless of the late Dwight Eisenhower's warning against the continued expansive powers of the military giant; nor is it then the still increasing power of the military establishments in Peking and Moscow and Washington and in part as extensions of these, in the far east, in the near east, and decidedly also among our sister American States all over Latin America.

It isn't simply that in this country extreme right and left continue to increase each other's ranks with the passionate advocacy of violent repression on the one hand, and violent revolution on the other.

Nor is it simply the tragedy that man appears to be failing again to build an international, supra-national structure which alone will be able to save him ultimately from self-destruction. We are standing on the eve of the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations and, celebrating this

attainment of maturity, the UN is wasted and weak, and possibly dying because its most powerful members, including the US, which is us, quite apparently do not really care whether it lives or dies.

It isn't all this. These are I think in the nature of symptoms. The diagnosis of the essential human illness as it now appears, in American life and history, and in language appropriate to this day, this place, and this hour may be put in terms of biblical theology as idolatry, the substitutionary worship of gods for God: or, for those of you for whom the theological category is obsolete, the affirmation that the limited is the ultimate, that the parochial is the universal; the assertion, explicit or implicit, that the way and the truth and the life are permanently enshrined here or here or here; the imputation to any mortal man or scheme or structure of absolute immortal value.

I marvel at the hypocrisy that lets us continue minting our coins with that familiar four-word phrase when it is not in God we trust but in one of the plurality of gods, a very thoroughly domesticated deity, draped in the stars and stripes and representing the interests in fact not even of 200 million people. It can even be an astonishment, since by our deeds we appear to trust neither God nor man, that we speak of trust at all except perhaps in ABM and MIRV and weapons systems, except in the force of power and violence, of repression and destruction and death.

Members of this graduating generation will tell us who are still in the religious institution that one of their problems with the Church is its own unconscious but rather wide-spread and thorough-going domestication of deity -- and it certainly does not help matters that on every Sunday morning, God is brought into the East Room of the White House, now transformed into a royal sanctuary, to bless "our cause" and to be manipulated, prostituted to the uses of Americanism.

I am appalled that we can, in the name of God, continue to support not simply lesser kingdoms than the Kingdom of God, but opposing Kingdoms which defy the basic assumptions of the Kingdom of God. That kingdom has clearly only to do with abundant life, with human fulfillment, with the realization of full human stature and dignity, and with reconciliation, brotherhood and love; a kingdom, a perspective in which in the sight of God we are all brothers, equally loved of him, so that when we kill, he is killed, when we crucify, he is crucified, when we burn, he is burned, and when by intention or indifference we destroy the face of the earth, we desecrate his gift to us.

If we have ears to hear, we know that Jeremiah's moving, anguished - rebuke of his own people also rebukes us. He speaks as perhaps only the biblical prophet can with full authenticity in the First Person, with the inspired audacity to say, "These are the words of the Lord:"

I brought you into a fruitful land to enjoy its fruit
and the goodness of it; but when you entered upon
it you defiled it and made the home I gave you
loathsome.

The priests no longer asked, 'Where is the Lord?'
Those who handled the law had no thought of me,
the shepherds of the people rebelled against me;
the prophets prophesied in the name of Baal and

followed gods powerless to help.
Therefore I will bring a charge against you once more....
(Has a nation ever adopted gods that were no Gods?)
But my people have exchanged their Glory for a god
(absolutely without efficacy).
Stand aghast at this, you heavens, tremble in utter
despair, says the Lord.
Two sins have my people committed. they have forsaken me,
a spring of living water,
And they have hewn out for themselves cisterns, cracked
cisterns that can hold no water.

(Jer. 2:7-1.3)

Paul's words are prophetic too, and fall as hard on us as on his contemporaries in the Roman Empire 1900 years ago. "They boast of their wisdom," he said, "but they have made fools of themselves, exchanging the splendor of immortal God for an image shaped like mortal man." (Rom. 1:22)

Cracked cisterns that can hold no water. An image shaped like mortal man. The Americanization of God. The deification of Americanism. The kingdom of the United States of America for the Kingdom of God.

If God who is God is at all, he has made himself known to us in authentic ways, and we have authentic knowledge of the nature of his kingdom. He and it have perhaps never seemed so remote. But the stubborn, persistent affirmation that he and it are even now among us and in our midst -- in a sweeping range of senses embracing even the secular -- is absolutely critical to our recovery. It is the difference between despair and hope, between destructive and constructive action, between madness and rationality, between chaos and creation, between death and life.

As a biblical theologian, I charge you on this commencement day with nothing less than the re-substitution of fresh springs of water for our cracked cisterns, with the renewal of the vision of the splendor of God and man, and with the slow, painful, controlled, intelligent removal of our idolatrous and destructive images of worship.

To this end I give you words of Miguel de Unamuno, that magnificent Spaniard who dies in 1936 in Fascist captivity, and who must be numbered among the authentic prophets. He was asked in a time and place of seemingly hopeless repression, "What can man in these circumstances ask of God?" Unamuno's answer: "May God grant us not peace but glory."

I give you words of another prophet who writes of someone he calls the Servant of God in the book of Isaiah:

Here is my servant whom I uphold....
and he will make justice shine on the nations.
He will not call out or lift his voice high,
or make himself heard in the open street.
He will not (so much as) break a bruised reed or snuff out
a smouldering wick;

(But) he will make justice shine on every race,
never faltering, never breaking down.
"He will plant justice on earth!

And this is of course justice in the Old Testament sense. It embraces vastly more than all legal and judicial procedures. It is often coupled in the Old Testament with righteousness, as when Amos cried "Let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!" All the rest, says Amos in effect, is garbage.

When we began together four years ago the prospects for love were brighter. But if God is love, he is also justice. When Unamuno could not see peace, he could say, "Then let it be glory." If it cannot now, if it cannot yet, be love, then in the name of God, and for the sake of the Kingdom of God, let it be justice, in a nation and a world that is in so many ways and so tragically the denial of justice.

Make justice shine on every race, never faltering, never breaking down. Plant justice in the earth. Let it be justice. Let it be. Let it be.