

STANFORD UNIVERSITY NEWS SERVICE

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SAN JOSE —

The "revolt against reason" can have "infinitely more ominous" consequences now than ever before in man's history, President Richard W. Lyman of Stanford said here Friday, Jan. 22.

Addressing the midyear commencement at San Jose State College, President Lyman said: "You may not have the utmost confidence in those who now have their fingers on the thermo-nuclear triggers, here and abroad.

"But I would ask you to consider where we would be if the advocates of the pure 'Do It!' school were in command—the kind who argue that the path of morality is to do whatever your authentic inner self feels is right, without trying to weigh the consequences at all."

There is "no alternative" to man's continuing efforts to build more responsive institutions, more honest politics, more rational ways of resolving conflict, he emphasized:

"We shall either win the struggle to humanize and control technology's impact upon the human species or we shall fail, and slump back into a still darker barbarism or outright extinction.

"There is no retreat to Arcadia, no resting place in the gentling arms of Consciousness III, no lasting escape into dreams or drugs. The mere fact that so many are seeking such solace in place of solutions is among the the more ominous [facts] we face."

The revolt against reason, President Lyman said, stems from modern man's desire to be reassured "his feelings count for something. He wants also to believe, often against the overwhelming evidence of his own experience, that his actions, if he takes any, will make a difference, that when he acts something will happen, something will be accomplished. He is weary of being told that he doesn't understand the problem and will he kindly get out of the way so the experts can handle it for him. He is fed up with finding that things don't work—the telephone, his city council, the UN, the college catalog. These things, probably more than any actual adverse changes in the distribution of justice in the world, which has never been very good, seem to me to account for the rapid increase in tension and in the willingness of people to resort to extremely self-centered and power-obsessed attempts at confrontation as a means of achieving change."

In the academic world, he continued, "the rush to get aboard the relevance bandwagon has in some instances produced a deplorable willingness to give at least tacit acceptance to the notion that only the latest in contemporary literature is really worth studying—that Shakespeare or Sophocles, far from having enduring value to the individual in search of his own humanity, are exhausted volcanoes not worth exploring for any but eccentrics and pedants."

He acknowledged that "there is—or ought to be—a limit to the number of doctoral dissertations produced on topics whose significance is as slight as their titles are cumbersome." But, he added: "Even a dissertation with a pedantic title may have served its author as valuable training in scholarly method."

No matter how earnestly the effort is made by scholars to mount collaborative attacks on social problems, he said, "results are bound to be slow and halting."

"It will take more than some marriages among academic disciplines to cope with the present widespread distrust of all attempts at objectivity, and contempt for the very notion of analytic thought as a tool for solving social problems."

Commenting on the relationships between state and private institutions of learning in California, he said: "The private institutions of higher education in California have a very great deal at stake in the survival and good health of the public ones.

"Any temptation, even the slightest, for people in private colleges and universities to take any advantage of the troubles of their publicly supported neighbors, or to assume a superior air in the presence of those troubles, is both antisocial and stupid. We have not done so well in the management of our own affairs in the private sector that we can afford such attitudes. . . .

"If there is one thing that is clear about the future of higher education. . . it is that mutual interdependence among the various kinds of institutions and among particular institutions will increase in years to come.

"We need each other right now, if each of us is not to be isolated and fatally damaged by the storms we are all trying to weather. . . Mutual admiration and respect is, for all of us, the price of survival in a world full of menace."

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