DR. FLEMMING, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, MEMBERS OF THE CLASS OF 1953, PARENTS AND FRIENDS:

Commencement is an occasion which I can never accept routinely, because each commencement everywhere means so much not only to the seniors who are graduating, but to the world they will influence.

To be the first woman invited to address an Ohio Wesleyan graduation, to be allowed to come on the 100th anniversary of women on this campus, is a double honor which deepens my feeling.

And it is perhaps this coincidence of occasion that set me thinking about my theme today.

Before I go into my theme, I hope you will pardon a personal reference. I cannot appear here without paying honor to your distinguished President, Dr. Arthur S. Flemming. It has been my privilege to work rather closely with him during the past four months. I have been increasingly impressed with his tremendous ability and his common sense. He has contributed greatly as an advisor to President Eisenhower on government organization. As further evidence of his ability and the President's confidence in him he was recently named Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization.

I know Ohio Wesleyan is nationally famous for its Institute of Practical Politics and for encouraging more college trained men and women to take an active part in politics and government. Your Dr. Flemming is the epitome of the spirit of Ohio Wesleyan's Institute of Practical Politics. He has set a fine example -- at great personal inconvenience -- and I salute him.

*Commencement Exercises, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio, Monday, June 8, 1953, 9:30 a.m.
And now to Commencement, the beginning of a new phase in your lives:

You have in your school years been given many definitions of a liberal education, and many reasons for being educated. There must be times when you have wondered if the whole effort was worth while.

One of the finest scholars living, one of the first women ever to earn a degree at Oxford, gave casually an answer to that wonder which I like. Dorothy Sayers wrote that education teaches one to grasp facts and that once a person has grasped facts, he can apply his intelligence to the task.

This is perhaps too simple a reason for all of your years of work and study. But with each year you live, you will find anew that facts are not easily grasped, that they are changing, slippery, elusive objects. They will demand all your technique, all your educated intelligence, to pin down and arrange logically.

Facts are elusive because of the human beings who create them, but even more so, because of the human beings who express them.

Only the most exact science can produce a pure, unmodified and changeless fact, and even in science, long established axioms give way before new discoveries.

In less exact fields, every fact must reach us through the prism of the person who presents it -- through the prism of his personality, experience and prejudice.

Because human prejudice is going to complicate so much of your future lives, I should like to talk about it for a little while.

We know -- glibly we know -- that we all have our prejudices.

The trained psychologist tells us that no man can see or know the extent of his own prejudices.

Prejudice covers the reasonless dislike of a person for someone else, the proofless distrust of anyone from another race or religion, the rejection without trial of a new idea or theory.
Until some 35 or 40 years ago, psychology considered prejudice a basic human instinct like self-preservation.

Today we know that it is an acquired attitude.

Because today we think ourselves eager to find new life-saving drugs, new surgical techniques, it is hard to realize how slow mankind has been to accept some of the greatest medical discoveries.

Because today business seems constantly seeking new developments, we cannot understand the reluctance of men to accept the most significant inventions and discoveries of history.

From our comfortable vantage point in time, let us look back to smile at our obstinate ancestors.

There are the classic instances of Copernicus and Galileo. It seems strange to us now that the book in which Copernicus set forth his tremendous discovery of the solar system was not published until a few days before he died, and then with an apologetic introduction by the publishers; that it was later condemned by the church, an official condemnation not to be withdrawn for almost three centuries.

And yet only a few years ago, when the world's greatest lens was being taken up to the Mount Wilson observatory, it had to be guarded against damage from American flat earth believers.

When Galileo developed his telescope by which he could show earth-bound man the moons of Jupiter, one famous professor refused to look because he did not wish to relinquish his preconceptions.

Do we know how often we ourselves refuse to examine the facts with an open mind? Psychologists say it is oftener than we think.

Reactionary forces silenced Galileo so effectively that some of his new discoveries were kept away from the public mind for many years.
The Rev. J. McEnery was the first person to establish the existence of man in the Paleolithic or Old Stone Age. But when he submitted his evidence, no one listened to him. His proof went contrary to what people believed, and they hugged their belief to them in defiance of fact.

And so McEnery's papers were put away and forgotten for many years after his death. Truth had been slowed down by human prejudices.

Leonardo da Vinci, living 100 years before Bacon, showed a firmer grasp of the principles of experimental science than did Bacon. Yet Leonardo's studies were rated as eccentric whims and fancies by his contemporaries -- however admiring. It was not until the present generation that his fabulous scientific manuscripts -- which might have speeded so many inventions -- have been fully appreciated.

Francis Bacon, far-sighted English philosopher and scientist, was actually imprisoned and his works condemned because he dared challenge the scholars of his day.

That Jupiter has moons, that men lived in the Stone Age, are facts whose acceptance were not immediately important to the comfort or survival of human beings. But our ancestors were just as slow to accept discoveries which saved human life.

By dissecting human bodies, the Egyptians had learned much about the brain and nervous system centuries before Christ, but the practice of dissection fell into disrepute. When Andreas Vesalius in the 16th century sought to correct many misconceptions through dissection, he aroused so much fury that he almost lost his life in the search for accurate knowledge of anatomy.

Though smallpox had swept the world for centuries, killing and scarring in its sweep, some American doctors opposed vaccination on theological grounds -- though at the same time our leading churchmen were advocating it.
When Ambroise Paré worked to save human life during a plague in France, he was accused of being impious. "The plague has been sent," they told him, "because God was angry. You try to thwart God's will."

When a young and inquiring doctor in this country first presented his well-documented theory that peritonitis was being caused by an inflamed appendix, we might suppose that those who heard him were at least interested in the possibilities of his suggestion.

But the outstanding doctor present promptly pronounced the young man's theory impossible. "How could so small a thing as an appendix," he argued convincingly, "cause so vast a complication as peritonitis. Absurd."

And so another life-saving discovery was not permitted to save human life until many years later -- simply because a group of men assumed that they already knew all the facts. Prejudgment -- prejudice -- had once more delayed human progress.

And yet there are incidents on the other side of the score board to remind us what can be accomplished where the mind is open. There was the young English research scientist, Dr. Hugh Fleming, trying to develop some culture in his laboratory who noticed that an odd -- and to him annoying -- yellow fungus seemed to be destroying his bacteria. Though the fungus was delaying the experiment he wished to make, he took the time to develop it, analyze it, and describe it in a technical paper.

His paper lay in the journal for some 10 years before Dr. and Mrs. Florey discovered it and applied this bacteria-killing fungus to the treatment of human ails. Thanks to the open minds of three people, we have penicillin.

But man is not always ready to see the virtues of the new and the strange.

Those of you who saw the motion picture Henry V have a vivid memory of the fact that the prejudice of the French cavalry against use of the new longbow
contributed to the defeat of the French by the English at Agincourt in the 100 Years War.

Do you know that Napoleon -- military genius that he was -- turned down the modern submarine and the underwater torpedo which might have defeated Admiral Nelson and paved the way for a vast French Empire to succeed the British Empire?

It was America's Robert Fulton who had built a successful submarine, and offered the invention to Bonaparte. "With it," he said, "you can sink the English fleet and control both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic."

"Too fantastic for consideration," was Napoleon's verdict. Prejudice told him that there never HAD been a submarine and therefore there should never be one.

And when Fulton offered his underwater torpedo to the British agents, after he had used it to blow up several old ships, they turned him down with equal superiority.

Perhaps for history, it is just as well that Fulton came home to America and devoted himself to the steamboat.

But America cannot claim any consistency in the welcome to progress.

We think that the idea of the United States is the greatest and soundest idea in the history of government. But the men who proposed it were radical thinkers proposing a strange doctrine. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and James Madison had slid the word "federal" into the burgeoning Constitution and thereby roused the fear and fury of many respected men.

The revered Patrick Henry was most seriously disturbed that the new Constitution began with the phrase "We the people."

"Who authorized them," he asked resoundingly, "to speak the language of we the people instead of We the states?... If the states be not the agents of this compact, it must be one great consolidated national government, of the people of all the states."
After him, and in a voice so quiet as to be almost inaudible, small James Madison arose to suggest that "we ought to examine the constitution on its merits solely: We are to inquire whether it will promote the public happiness."

On its merits, the Constitution was adopted, and the years have justified the answer to those inquiries.

Though we Americans were quick to import the steam locomotive from England, and though we were quick to see the advantages of crossing our roadless, pathless country with steel rails, there was still active opposition to the new idea.

A Philadelphia newspaper a century ago carried this advertisement: "Mothers look out for your children! Artisans, Mechanics, Citizens, when you leave your family in health, must you be hurried home to mourn a Dreadful Casualty?

"Will you consent to be a suburb of New York? Rally people in the Majesty of your Strength and forbid this OUTRAGE."

There were innumerable towns which refused to permit a railroad to come in, and as a result, these towns delayed their own growth for decades, or in some instances stultified and died.

The very business men who had voted down the railroad to protect their interests found their interests had suffered from their rejection.

They had voted before all the facts were in. They had voted on prejudicial thinking and conclusion.

In the 1890's, New Yorkers fought the telephone because it was predicted that the telephone wires would become so numerous that traffic would no longer be able to move through the streets.

The trolley car was opposed because it might scare horses.

And of course the typewriter was considered a clever gadget, but obviously impractical when one could write so much more easily with a pen.
The railroads, fighting for recognition, were yet slow to recognize
the virtues of the air brake. Handbrakes were cheaper -- simply because they
already had handbrakes. But they were to find that the automatic brake would
save them money in the long run.

With all this great wisdom, Aristotle was guilty of casting all non-Greeks
outside the pale of his acceptance to a degree which smacked of the Herrenvolk
theory. He concluded that the Greeks, and they alone, were born to dominate the
earth.

Since he thought the Greeks were a master race, he went on to the con-
cclusion that all other races were meant to be slaves.

Looking back from our vantage point in time, it is a bit amusing to see
how many people judged themselves superior to other people and therefore destined
to rule the world.

Hitler was actually plagiarizing an old song when he wrote in Mein Kampf
"The Germans constitute a master race that has a mission to rule over inferior
people and create a new world order."

There is no race of men who have not suffered the scorn of some other
race.

Unfortunately men have seized upon every possible difference between them --
visible and invisible -- to justify prejudice, and on prejudice to rationalize
the whole range of cruelty from mere snobbery to total war.

It has been a costly luxury. It is still a costly luxury.

It is interesting to see how the excuses changed while the underlying
causes remained much the same.

Religion was the main excuse for hatred and violence through most of the
middle ages and until fairly recent times.

The broad graph of history suggests that religion was an excuse rather
than a true cause -- just as today race is so often the excuse.
Too often to be coincidence, minority groups were welcomed to a country in a
time of economic expansion, and ejected from a country in time of depression or
tension.

Too often to be a coincidence, persecution of a minority group came at a
time when the regime in power needed either a scapegoat, or needed a mass emotion
of hatred against something to cement a heterogeneous majority into a unified
nation.

Diocletian used the Christians in Rome. The first Christian emperors of
Rome, as well as Bismarck and Hitler, used the Jews.

The classification of mankind by races did not begin to permeate men's
emotions until well after America was founded. The historic group of 20 Negroes
who landed in Jamestown in 1619 were indentured servants with the same status as
white indentured servants. And in the early days of slavery in this country,
popular ethic held that as soon as an African slave became Christian, he should
be freed.

But as an entire agricultural economy began to grow on the basis of slavery,
the ethic became unpopular. At first many planters refused to allow ministers or
missionaries on their land, and then in 1664, the Maryland legislature ruled
that baptism no longer meant freedom. Gradually -- perhaps as a salve to
conscience -- the theory grew that would satisfy both the demands of Christianity
and the private economy.

But America was not alone in her prejudice -- judgment of men -- based on
race was developing as a quack science at the same time in Europe.

Two men, one French and one English, developed the fad of Nordic superiority
which Germany was to carry through to a tragic conclusion.

Count de Gobineau wanted to prove the superiority of his own family tree,
and wound up writing a book in which he said -- that there is a unique strain
within the white race of marked superiority to all others. He called it Aryan.
Houston Stewart Chamberlain carried it farther to insist that without the
Germanic tribes, man would still be little more than a beast and stated, "The less
Teutonic a land is the more uncivilized it is."

From England and France came the sweeping race theory which was to produce
Nazism, precipitate World War II, and destroy the very culture which they sought
to deify.

Yet obviously false as these theories were, some of their evil seeds took
root in America.

When America was founded, this was the land of opportunity and free men.
You tested a man for courage, industry, honesty and the other Biblical virtues,
and valued him accordingly.

Many Americans began to blame an individual's faults not on his lack of
schooling, not on his slum background, not on his impoverished family atmosphere,
but on his race or national origin.

The indulgence of this prejudice is costing us tax dollars in what must be
astronomical amounts.

It doesn't hurt to remind ourselves that the white man is a pretty small
minority in the earth's population today. We are outnumbered two to one in the
world.

Though it would be difficult to estimate what racial prejudice costs us
here at home, we can look at some highly provable figures.

Some economists place the total cost of discrimination -- while
diminishing -- in our country at from $15 to $30 billion a year because of people
not allowed to reach their full potential, not permitted to earn the salaries
their work merits, and therefore not able to expand the domestic market for the
goods we produce, or to pay the taxes they would be paying were they realizing
their potential.
Perhaps at this moment you are feeling "But I have no prejudices of this sort." Are you sure?

One may build a whole mountain of facts and yet not reach the celestial plane of truth unless one has built with understanding, with perception, with human sympathy the basis for value judgment.

Prejudice is a word which has been so much overused in recent years that it has lost its vividness of meaning.

It is essential to gain an awareness of what it is and how it can change men's lives. It will help each of you to meet each day with a mind open to the possibilities that the day holds.

The propulsion of this class today into the great mass of adult humanity will make changes, small changes at first, widening out like circles from the pebble tossed in the lake. We will never know the full extent of your influence -- and the fact that we will never know is a part of the mystery and excitement of this occasion.

Some of you may become scientists. If a man steps forward with an idea which seems preposterous but which is aimed at benefitting mankind, let your voice be the one to demand that he be given a hearing. Remember those who silenced Galileo, who shouted down the young man who showed the cause of peritonitis.

Some of you will become executives. If a man proposes an improvement -- either to make industry better or the community pleasanter or living more abundant -- however extravagant it seems, however impossible, look at his suggestion and test it for possibilities. Remember the towns that rejected the railroads, the railroads that rejected the air brake.

Some of you will be yeoman workers in the laboratory of science or business or profession. If a fact inserts itself, don't shove it aside without
investigation. Remember Fleming who was willing to study the presumptuous fungus which ultimately became penicillin.

And whatever your role in life, if you are presented with a stranger, don't reject him on the basis of his nationality, his color, his religion, his accent or his clothing. Look at him for his qualities of character as an individual, and as an individual, judge him for what he is.

I know of no greater stimulus to the awareness we need than the Sermon on the Mount. In reverence, I should like to quote a part of it now:

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."

END