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LEADERSHIP FOR TOMORROW*

Hebrews 11:8, 13—"By faith Abraham, when he was called, . . . went out, not knowing whither he went. . . . These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off."

THERE is a characteristically paradoxical but pregnant saying of G. K. Chesterton: "The only *important* thing about knowing the truth is to know the *really important* truth."

That is sound wisdom for any time. Certainly, for today. These times are compelling us to divest ourselves of one after another of the things we had thought essential for life—very much as a sailing ship, caught unprepared in the teeth of a gale, heaves to clumsily, strips herself of one after another of her proud adornments and superstructure, even her cargo and ballast, and reefs to confront the storm. Today, all that matters much are the things which matter most. The only important thing about knowing the truth is to know the really important truth.

Furthermore, there are some truths which do not need to be argued today.

The President of one of our large Eastern universities reports a conversation with a solicitous parent. Having requested an interview, she waited upon him in his office at the appointed hour and inquired solemnly, "Mr. President, how are you preparing our sons for tomorrow's world?" To which he replied, "Madam, if you will tell me

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what tomorrow's world is to be like, I shall tell you how we are preparing your sons for it."

There is the predicament of education today. The task of education is always twofold. It must aim to prepare youth to live in a particular age, with its special circumstances and distinctive problems. It must also seek to prepare youth to live—intelligently, significantly, satisfyingly—in any place and circumstance. Today, the two tasks are one. Youth can be equipped to live effectively in the particular times in which their lot will be cast only as they are prepared to live in *any* time.

This is, likewise, the predicament of our nation, of the world today. And it is the predicament of this generation. The most important fact about the graduation of the class of 1946 is precisely this—you are standing on the threshold of an untrodden, an unknown, and an unpredictable future. You are standing today at one of the great milestones, one of the high outlook-posts, of life, and from its vantage-ground your eyes leap to discern the country ahead; but that territory is almost completely shrouded in impenetrable uncertainty. Like Abraham of old, you are summoned to go forth into a future which is your rightful heritage; and you must go forth, not knowing whither you go.

Can we say anything at all with some definiteness about that future? Three things, at least:

1. It will be a time of change, of rapid change, of largely unpredictable change. To be sure, there are those who think they can foresee the course events will take. They offer equally confident, but radically contradictory, predictions. When the prophets so sharply disagree, it may be well to declare a moratorium on prophecy. The plain truth is: no man is wise enough to sketch even in broad outline the dimensions and contours of the "world of tomorrow." No

one can forecast the character of social life, of industrial order, of national life, of international relations thirty, twenty, ten years hence. We do know it will be a time of rapid and largely unpredictable change.

2. It will be a time of widespread and largely undeserved human suffering. Surely, that needs no arguing. It is already upon us. It is probably no exaggeration that, this morning, there is actually more acute, massed human misery than this planet has ever before witnessed. It dominates the existence, not of thousands, but of millions, yes, of tens of millions of individual men and women and children today, and at the most widely scattered corners of the earth's surface. And the end is not yet. As far as the eye can penetrate, it scans a future scarred with colossal human need.

3. It will be a period of threatening peril for every great fruit of human achievement, not to speak of every hopeful movement for human advance: freedom of life and of speech and of mind, self-determination of individuals and of peoples, international order and community, social progress of every kind. That fact, too, rebukes elaboration. In this land, we could not escape the sufferings and sacrifices of war. We shall certainly not escape war's aftermath. In our lifetime, our fate as a nation is inextricably linked with the fate of all mankind. We cannot, if we would, evade the dark days ahead.

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Those, then, are some of the certain features of that mysterious, unpredictable territory ahead.

At once the question presses: What manner of men and women are needed for such a time? The answer is clear: those whose inner beings are under command of three qualities at least—qualities strangely and unexpectedly fore-
visioned in that account from centuries long past under the word "faith."

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1. We need men and women of *insight*, those who see beneath the mere surface appearance of things, and beyond tomorrow's obvious inevitability. True insight possesses a double vision. It sees things precisely as they are—much that escapes the casual carelessness of ordinary sight, much that is evaded or denied by the comfortable complacency of self-satisfaction—sees with an inexorable penetration which tolerates no shams and no tempting self-deception. But true insight also sees things as in all truth they might become. It refuses sentimentalism; and it goes beyond mere realism. Sentimentalism is the view of things as we wish they were without adequate regard to what they really are. Realism is the view of things precisely as they are, often with emphasis upon the devious and dubious path by which they have become so. But insight is the view of things precisely as they are, always in the light of what in all truth they may become.

We cannot linger to explore fully the secret of such insight. Its parentage is twofold:

On the one hand, it springs from resolute, disciplined independence of mind. For my generation passing through the mill of education, what was mainly desired was a knowledge of the habits of our culture, of the traditions of our national life, of the unquestioned standards of familiar morality, the unchallenged structure of accepted convictions—"the way things are done." For the present generation, there is demanded a higher, more difficult gift. If the future is really to be so unpredictable, so fluid, so strident, your need is for the ability to move freely through the ebb and flow, the whirlpools and rapids of an uncertain current, with independence and courage, forming your own judgments, holding all accepted traditions and party shibboleths under the scrutiny of a fearless and exacting criticism.

Take it in public life. Here, if ever, is need for informed independence of mind among men and women of education. We need to become less tolerant of the pettiness of politicians, the timidity of statesmen, the selfishness of partisan groups of all kinds. American political history knows a term of ugly sound and rather unsavory reputation: "mugwump"—those who refuse unthinking party allegiance, who insist upon judging men and issues on their merits, who invest their support where they believe right to lie. Our need today is for the deliberate perspective of the mugwump.

But there is a deeper and more subtle secret of insight. It is born, we have said, of the marriage of two qualities. If thorough and realistic grasp on facts supplies masculine independence of mind, this must be wedded to the more feminine characteristic of a serious sense of personal responsibility. Our forefathers were often gifted with the second in generous measure, not always with the first. Our generation often possesses the first, not always the second. Both are essential. The human mind is so constituted that it can lay hold on really significant truth only if to brilliance and equipment of intellect is joined dogged and determined and, if need be, self-giving devotion. All supremely important truth is inwoven with the great and intangible values of reality; it makes exacting demands upon those who allow themselves to come within range of its imperious command; therefore, it can be discerned only by those the temper of whose spirits is open to its claim. Insight is, in some measure, a matter of attunement and eager receptivity. The greatest truth can find entrance into the human spirit only through the narrow portal of profound loyalty. It is reserved for those who "not having received the promises" have yet "seen them afar off."

2. Thus is suggested a second characteristic demanded

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of leadership for tomorrow. Indeed, if one were asked what quality is most obviously needed in those going out into life today, the reply would not be difficult. We need men and women with "sticking power." The importance of such a temper at the very core of the beings of those who must live through the coming days should be obvious enough. The fact is, we confront the world over a humanity, baffled, disillusioned, confused, apprehensive. Dull, indeed, is he who does not sense just beneath the surface of men's mind a harrowing disquiet, verging on despair. Every factor upon which men have confidently relied to assure peace, security, advance appears to have failed them. None of them alone nor all together have availed to forestall world-wide economic distress, and conflict which embraces every people, and threatens ominously the future of all humanity. The final outcome of the cataclysmic changes which are shaking the world's life hour by hour and challenging every cherished assumption of our forebears, no one can foretell. The precise form which our society will take in the days ahead, no one can foresee. This one thing we know: we are moving into a day which will tax to the last extremity both the wisdom and the endurance of every sensitive and sincere person. It is a life-job we are enlisted for. There is no place in it save for those who are prepared to endure to the end. The future is for those who, summoned to go forth into an unknown land, GO, not knowing whither they go.

3. Insight; endurance. Thus far there will be no dispute. And thus far we have spoken of nothing which might not be expected in the equipment of any well-educated and well-trained citizen.

But we sense the need for more. These are no ordinary days. The demand is for extraordinary equipment. How shall minds be held steady amidst the terrific currents of

swirling events and changing opinions? How shall spirits be kept sensitive yet clear amidst almost overwhelming disheartenment? Above all, how shall wills be steeled in strength against well-nigh irresistible pressure and without any sure promise of result from their resolution? Almost instinctively, our lips reach out for an unexpected word: our great need is *faith*.

Yes, but "faith" is one of the weatherworn words of religion—a term of a thousand meanings and, for many, rather hackneyed and unattractive associations. One recalls the Sunday School lad's definition, "Faith is believing what you know ain't true."

In one aspect, *faith* is confidence in convictions felt to be true but never fully proven true. And of that we shall return to speak at the end. But, in another and more obvious aspect, it is precisely *faith* of which we have already been speaking. *Faith* gives insight. And *faith* is the power of endurance.

We do not easily think of religion as the giver of wisdom. Yet, high religion has always bestowed wisdom, and of precisely the kind we stand in need of today. In part, this is a by-product of its bestowal of vision. So impartial and competent an authority as Professor Whitehead thus defines religion:

Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.

In part, *faith's* insight comes from the possession of a broader and truer perspective than is otherwise obtainable.

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Religion should lift one up from the swirling stream of history where sound judgment is impossible, to a place of relative quiet and of higher vantage-ground; there one may survey the fast-flowing flux with some detachment; there one may bring the powers of a steady and unbiased mind to bear upon its meaning; there one may open a receptive consciousness to the imprint of its significance; and thereby one may perceive more truly and judge more competently.

But the deeper secret of faith's insight has already appeared. If it be correct that all supremely important truth is inwoven with the intangible values of reality so that its discernment is in some measure a matter of attunement, of ethical and spiritual attunement, then precisely such inner equipment prerequisite to understanding of events is a distinctive gift of true religion. So it has been in all ages. This is the testimony of history: high religion has enabled those who have yielded to its direction, not only to see beyond the immediate horizons of ordinary outlook, but also far deeper into the actual meaning of immediate events. This is a characteristic of the true prophet in every age. It is a gift of faith. If it be true that only the pure in heart see God, it is likewise true—and ultimately for the same reason—that only the pure in heart rightly understand the meaning of the swift passage of the time in which they live, and thus possess true wisdom for its guidance. To brilliance and equipment of intellect *must* be wedded self-giving devotion. This is the mark of faith. Such insight is reserved for those who "not having received the promises" have yet "seen them afar off" and who, summoned to go forth into an unknown land, go, not knowing whither they go.

And faith yields endurance. It *is* confidence in convictions

believed to be true but never fully proven true. But, even more, faith is devotion to ends believed to be realizable but never fully achieved. The life of faith knows well the truth of Lowell's bitter lines :

Truth forever on the scaffold:
Wrong forever on the throne.

And of Hartley Coleridge's sharp rebuke :

Think not the faith by which the just shall live,
Is a dead creed, a map correct of heaven,
Far less a feeling fond and fugitive,
A thoughtless gift, withdrawn as soon as given.
It is an affirmation and an act
That bids eternal truth be present fact.

The man of faith is schooled, in the words Bernard Shaw puts in the mouth of his Saint Joan, "to dare, and dare, and dare, until I die." He is strong to endure to the end. He is prepared, if need be, to "die in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off."

How is such faith born and nurtured and sustained within the human spirit? Such faith with its practical fruits of insight and endurance has its basis in that other side of faith's nature which we more familiarly associate with the word. Faith *is* devotion to ideals believed to be achievable but never fully achieved. Such life-devotion is possible because faith is also trust in realities felt to be real yet never fully proven real. It springs from certainty of God, certainty that truth alone permanently prevails, that right *does* ultimately triumph. The deepest secret of its usefulness lies just here—it has been laid hold of by an ideal which it knows to be real, and it is denied peace until that ideal

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is translated out of its own interior certainty into the structure of its world's life.

Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes,—they were souls that
stood alone,
While the men they agonized for hurled the contumelious
stone,
Stood serene, and down the future saw the golden beam
incline
To the side of perfect justice, mastered by their faith
divine,
By one man's plain truth to manhood and to God's su-
preme design.

HENRY PITNEY VAN DUSEN.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Rev. Dr. Henry Pitney Van Dusen, President of the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, is a Philadelphian by birth. He is a graduate of Princeton (1919) and of the Union Theological Seminary (1924), and he received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Edinburgh University, Scotland, in 1932. He was ordained in the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in 1924. He became an instructor at the Union Theological Seminary in 1926, and has since served at that institution as, successively, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and the Philosophy of Religion, Associate Professor, Professor of Systematic Theology, Dean of Students, and President. Since 1934 he has been a life trustee of Princeton University, and he is also a trustee of Ginling College, Nanking Theological Seminary, Millbrook School, and Little School. He is a fellow of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, and a member of the American Theological Society and of the Council on Foreign Relations. He was President of the American Association of Theological

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Schools from 1942 to 1944. Dr. Van Dusen has been author or editor of numerous religious books published since 1926. His editorial activities include also membership on the editorial boards of *Religion in Life*, the *Presbyterian Tribune*, and *Christianity and Crisis*.