COMMENCEMENT/ BACCALAUREATE ADDRESSES, 1999

Life Lessons

Remarks at Baccalaureate by Judith Rodin, President of the University

On this beautiful occasion, we share the sweetness of celebration and the sadness of farewell. Even more so, we share a sense of pride.

Baccalaureate today and Commencement tomorrow are two of the proudest moments in our academic community. They are the times when our students glory in their achievements, and when we faculty bask in their glow. Together, we have reached the distant shore. We have met the top of the mountain.

These are the days we celebrate knowledge and wisdom, the mastery of classic concepts and the birth of new hypotheses. Each of these precious gifts holds its own lessons for you, the Class of 1999. And while they are a highly significant part of your formal education, we would be remiss on this day of reflection if we did not acknowledge the vital lessons that cannot be taught only in a classroom or in a laboratory: They are life lessons.

They are many and they are as unique as each of you, and I will not presume to enumerate all of them here this afternoon. But I would like to address just three: the first symbolic of your past, the second representative of your present, and the third hopeful for your future.

The first: To believe in yourself. For many of you, this life lesson came first from your families. Your mother, your father, a grandparent, a favorite aunt or uncle, even a sister or brother. You may be the first in your family to earn a college degree; or you may be the current generation in a long line of Penn Quakers. No matter the details. Somewhere, sometime, someone said: "I believe in you." And the seed was planted.

Perhaps that someone was a teacher. The relationship between teacher and student is one we particularly honor today and tomorrow. One of our graduating seniors, Myra Lotto, captured such inspiration beautifully when she wrote: "Each and every student clutches to a vulnerable point, a truly personal point. When a teacher helps a student to understand that vulnerability, even just for a moment, the student is free to learn."

The teacher-student relationship is sacred and timeless: A unique union that is long respected and as singular as the two individuals in it. It is a relationship that can infinitely change the lives of the learnèd and the learner. Consider Socrates and Plato. Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller. These teachers and students shared formal lessons, to be sure. But even greater were their shared life lessons.

There is a book, long-seated on *The New York Times* best-seller list, that pays homage to the special relationship between a student and his professor. In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, prize-winning journalist Mitch Albom re-acquaints himself with his beloved sociology professor in his old teacher's last year of life. While both student and teacher cherish these final moments, it is the student who is forever changed, who learns to believe in himself anew. Albom asks, poignantly: "Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such teachers, you will always find your way back."

I had the rare good fortune some five years ago to personally thank the professor who changed my life. Dr. Henry Gleitman, in my freshman year at Penn, turned my sights to psychology, which grew into my professional passion, and wended me on the road back to Penn as president. I am delighted that he is still here at Penn, and it gives me great comfort to know that I have—close by—a mentor who had been there at the beginning. I hope you are all so fortunate.

The second life lesson reflects the accomplishment we honor today. It commends hope—hope in the unseen.

There is a student graduating from another Ivy League university this May whose story I would like to share with you. For Cedric Jennings, the road was long, and the way rocky. He is the first in his family to attend college, and the first from his Washington, D.C., public high school to attend an Ivy League university in nearly a decade.

Cedric's story is recounted in a striking book called *A Hope in the Unseen*, by a Pulitzer-Prize-winning writer for the *Wall Street Journal*. The title is drawn from a Biblical passage that Cedric uses to light his way, and one that holds significance for all of us. The passage is: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

As Cedric Jennings struggled to make his way, his faith gave him the confidence to pursue what seemed a daring dream—an Ivy-League education. He drew strength from the support of his family and several devoted teachers. His faith and support kept him grounded, and able pursue the unknown—to sustain hope in the unseen.

No matter how closely or how distantly your story resembles that of Cedric Jennings, you have shared his drive, his foresight, and his aspirations. Each of you has faced your own academic challenges during your years here, and many of you have faced personal challenges as well. But you persevered, staying grounded perhaps in faith, perhaps in family, perhaps in friends. Your presence here today is a testament to your hope in the unseen, a lesson that will do you well no matter where life leads you.

And where life will next lead you is the question of the hour. I would ask that, wherever you go, you take this third and final life lesson with you: Give of yourself. Education is not a gift you keep. It is a gift you share.

In the final days in the life of sociology professor Morrie Schwartz, his former students called and wrote. Some, we learn in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, "drove hundreds of miles for a visit, a word, a smile. 'I've never had another teacher like you,' they all said."

Would that we all live lives so impactful and so meaningful.

Today and tomorrow, we celebrate the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that higher education reaps and sows. It is my prayer that you will continue to believe in yourself, to have hope in the unseen, and—above all—to give as much as you have been given.

Congratulations and God bless you.

On the Edge of a New Century

Remarks at Commencement by Peter Conn, Chair of the Faculty Senate

In 1855, an unknown poet named Walt Whitman published a book called *Leaves of Grass*. Reading the book in Boston, Ralph Waldo Emerson responded with one of the most famous tributes in American literary history: "I greet you," Emerson wrote to Whitman, "at the beginning of a great career."

My name is Peter Conn. Today, I have the privilege of speaking to you on behalf of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. I take Emerson's words as my own: I greet you all, distinguished graduates of Penn's twelve schools, at the beginning—the commencement—of your great careers.

This is an occasion for celebration. We gather to salute a job well done by several thousand of the brightest, hardest-working human beings on the planet. Your parents and friends and children and assorted loved ones—all the people who have made your success possible—have come together with your teachers in a joyful act of congratulation.

At the same time, this is also an occasion for more serious reflection. We stand, somewhat anxiously, on the edge of a new century, peering back into the past and forward into the future, searching at once for the reassurance of continuity and the exhilaration of promise.

What we see should give us pride and hope. An unbroken chain of intellectual and professional achievement binds you to those who came before—and those who will come after. The founders, faculty and graduates of this university have bequeathed a tradition of accomplishment that reaches back across two and a half centuries.

Benjamin Franklin, inventor, diplomat, and all-purpose genius, provided us with our charter and our distinctive vision of educational excellence. W. E. B. DuBois, historian, sociologist, and activist, taught here and published his landmark book, *The Philadelphia Negro*, exactly one hundred years ago. Alice Paul, scholar and champion of equality, took her Ph.D. in sociology in 1912, the first woman to receive a doctorate in that field at Penn. Among her many subsequent accomplishments, Paul wrote the text of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923.

Franklin, DuBois and Paul stand among your predecessors and benefactors; it does not exaggerate by an inch to say that each of them changed the world. You should draw strength from their example as you set out today from this place to choose your future, make your mark, formulate your contribution to our collective legacy.

The stakes are high, the challenges are many, the risks are formidable. Each day's newspapers bring grievous reports of natural calamity or human barbarism. In the struggle against disorder, we rely upon the nonnegotiable values that lie at the core of the university: a belief in the power of the cultivated intellect, energized by a restless discontent with received opinion, and governed by a commitment to the truth.

So we persevere, with a rightful confidence. Like Henry David Thoreau at Walden Pond, we know where we live and what we live for. Those of us joined together here today affirm our commitment to the primacy of rational inquiry and of disciplined investigation in the service of human welfare. I can think of no more honorable vocation.

Thank you.

A Healthy Respect for Uncertainty

The Commencement Address of Robert E. Rubin, Treasury Secretary of the United States

In approaching this Commencement address, I'm mindful of an observation made by this university's founder, Ben Franklin. He said: "Here comes the orator with his flood of words and his drop of wisdom." I promise not to flood you with words. Whether I leave you with a drop of wisdom is for you to judge.

You graduate today in a world starkly different, in many ways, from the one in which I graduated. It's far more interconnected. Information moves dramatically faster. The decision cycle is vastly shorter. Economies and people around the world are more closely linked than ever before. Decisions made in one capital can be felt across the globe.

Business today is conducted largely without borders. When I first went to Wall Street, more than 32 years ago, finance, for example, was focused on the U.S. markets. We sold U.S. stocks and bonds to our clients and raised money for them in U.S. capital markets. Few overseas markets mattered. Even the biggest U.S. companies had but a limited overseas presence. Now, Fortune 500 firms are headquartered in the U.S. but are truly global in nature.

When I first joined an investment bank, I had to get a partner's signature to make an overseas call. Today traders live on global trading wires, and capital markets are integrated worldwide.

Global markets and technology have brought us together as never before. Pick up a newspaper and you'll find exchange rates for the Thai Baht and Korean Won—currencies few people worried about when I began my career. Countries that were economically irrelevant to us 25 or 30 years ago, today provide great opportunities for American businesses and consumers. But, as demonstrated during the past two years, these same nations can also give rise to financial instability that can threaten economies around the world, no matter how strong.

Last year, for example, Russia's failed economic policy actions shook global market confidence—and other countries felt the impact. A Latin American finance minister explained this dilemma to me last year. How, he asked, do I explain to my people why the value of our currency is shrinking and our interest rates are rising, all because the Russian parliament failed to raise taxes last week. This may sound unusual, but it's true.

This interdependence isn't just in economics. Today we must deal with immense problems in other areas that begin in one nation but affect many others. Many of these are problems that no single nation can solve: Environmental problems, such as destruction of the rain forest, that can damage the atmosphere of the entire globe, or acid rain. Health problems, such as the startling incidence of HIV in the SubSaharan Africa population, that can spread so readily in an era of jet planes. And terrorism, nourished by despair in one country, with its consequences felt around the world.

Whether we meet these challenges of interdependence, and of the tension that exists between the sovereignty of nations and the need to work together to solve problems that have no borders, will shape the world you live in.

In the face of these realities, there are those who believe we should look inward and withdraw from the world. I believe the whole history of the twentieth century shows that this will not work. We would follow this advice at our peril. The world does not end at our shores—it begins there.

In the complex world of today, decision making has become ever more difficult, but the fundamentals of decision making have remained the same. And, one lesson I can draw from my life is that effective decision making is the key to almost everything you will do.

When I arrived at college, I had never given much thought to how I made decisions. College began changing that. What first struck me was the skeptical atmosphere. Our professors' words weren't seen as unquestioned truths, but as starting points for criticism and thought. In my sophomore year, I took Philosophy I from a wonderful, elderly professor named Raphael Demos. His whole point was to show that every assertion ultimately rested on a basic principle that could not be proven. It could only be assumed or believed. That conclusion, together with what I learned in law school, fundamentally shaped the way I've made decisions ever since.

As I think back over the years, I have been guided by four principles for decision making.

First, the only certainty is that there is no certainty. Second, every decision, as a consequence, is a matter of weighing probabilities. Third, despite uncertainty we must decide and we must act. And lastly, we need to judge decisions not only on the results, but on how they were made.

First, uncertainty.

When my father was in college, he too had signed up for a course in philosophy with a renowned professor. On the first day of class, the professor debated the question of whether you could prove that the table at the front of the room existed. My father is very bright and very pragmatic. He went to the front of the room, pounded on the table with his hand, decided it was there—and promptly dropped the course.

My view is quite the opposite. I believe that there are no absolutes. If there are no absolutes then all decisions become matters of judging the probability of different outcomes, and the costs and benefits of each. Then, on that basis, you can make a good decision.

The business I was in for 26 years was all about making decisions in exactly this way.

I remember once, many years ago, when a securities trader at another firm told me he had purchased a large block of stock. He did this because he was sure—absolutely certain—a particular set of events would occur. I looked, and I agreed that there were no evident roadblocks. He, with his absolute belief, took a very, very large position. I, highly optimistic but recognizing uncertainty, took a large position. Something totally unexpected happened. The projected events did not occur. I caused my firm to lose a lot of money, but not more than it could absorb. He lost an amount way beyond reason —and his job.

A healthy respect for uncertainty, and focus on probability, drives you never to be satisfied with your conclusions. It keeps you moving forward to seek out more information, to question conventional thinking and to continually refine your judgments. And understanding that difference between certainty and likelihood can make all the difference. It might even save your job.

Third, being decisive in the face of uncertainty. In the end, all decisions are based on imperfect or incomplete information. But decisions must be made—and on a timely basis—whether in school, on the trading floor, or in the White House.

I remember one night at Treasury, a group of us were in the Deputy Secretary's Office, deciding whether or not the U.S. should take the very significant step of moving to shore up the value of another nation's currency. It was, to say the least, a very complicated situation. As we talked, new information became available and new considerations were raised. The discussion could have gone on indefinitely. But we didn't have that luxury: markets wait for no one. And, so, as the clock ticked down and the Asian markets were ready to open, we made the best decision in light of what we knew at the time. The circumstances for decision making may never be ideal. But you must decide nonetheless.

Fourth, and finally, judging decisions. Decisions tend to be judged solely on the results they produce. But I believe the right test should focus heavily on the quality of the decision making itself.

Two examples illustrate my point.

In 1995, the United States put together a financial support program to help Mexico's economy, which was then in crisis. Mexico stabilized and U.S. taxpayers even made money on the deal. Some said that the Mexico program was a good decision because it worked.

In contrast, last year, the U.S. supported an International Monetary

Fund program designed to strengthen the Russian economy. The program was not successful and we were criticized on the grounds the program did not succeed.

I believe that the Mexican decision was right, not only because it worked, but also because of how we made the decision. And I believe the Russian decision was also right. The stakes were high, and the risk was worth taking.

It's not that results don't matter. They do. But judging solely on results is a serious deterrent to taking the risks that may be necessary to making the right decision. Simply put, the way decisions are evaluated, affects the way decisions are made. I believe the public would be better served, and their elected officials and others in Washington would be able to do a more effective job, if judgments were based on the quality of decision making instead of focusing solely on outcomes.

Time and again during my tenure as Treasury Secretary and when I was on Wall Street, I have faced difficult decisions. But the lesson is always the same: good decision making is the key to good outcomes. Reject absolute answers and recognize uncertainty. Weigh the probabilities. Don't let uncertainty paralyze you. And evaluate decisions not just on the results, but on how they are made.

The other thing I'd like to leave with you is that you will be entering a world of vastly increased interdependence—one in which your lives will be enormously affected by decisions made outside of our borders. We must recognize this reality and reject the voices of withdrawal to face the challenges of interdependence. Then, we can realize the immense potential of the modem era, for our economy and our society.

You've just completed an important milestone in developing your ability to deal effectively with the complex choices of the world in which you will live and work. By continuing to build on this foundation throughout your life, you will be well prepared for the great opportunities and challenges of the new century,

Congratulations and good luck.

After Seven Decades on the Planet...

The Baccalaureate Address of Rabbi Gerald Wolpe

Recently, I heard a story about conflicting national egos that, in so many ways, illustrates some of the moral dilemmas that we face in our complex world. Though fictional, it has an eerie sound of reality.

German scientists, with the encouragement of their government, decided to explore the accomplishments of their ancestors. They received permission to dig an exploratory hole 50 meters deep in Southern Bavaria. A spot near the remains of an ancient Visigoth village was chosen to create a sense of historical continuity. At 50 meters they were intrigued to discover small pieces of copper. These pieces became the object of laboratory study and nationwide conferences. After close to a year of inspection and theory, Germany announced with pride that 2,000 years ago, the ancient Germans had a nation-wide telephone network.

Naturally, the British government was jarred into action. It ordered its scientists to dig even deeper. To give their project the same ancient tone as the Germans, it allowed the work to be done on the Plains of Salisbury, near Stonehenge. 100 meters down, 50 meters deeper than the German dig, they found small pieces of glass. With the same scholarly devotion as the Germans, the British came to their triumphant conclusion. They announced with great national pride that the ancient residents of their island had a nationwide fiber net 3,000 years ago.

Hearing these claims, the Israeli government was deeply disturbed and was determined to win this international contest. They consulted with the scientists at the Weizman Institute and chose a spot near Masada for its own historical imagery. They dug 50 meters like the Germans, 100 meters like the British and without pause went even further—200 meters. They found absolutely nothing. They wondered and worried about this phenomena—held numerous conferences and came to their, own conclusion. The fact that they could find nothing meant only one thing. So, they announced with official pride that the Hebrews of 4,000 years ago had cellular telephones.

This manipulation of historical facts is not unusual. Using the past as an excuse or even as a weapon has justified horrendous acts from Northern Ireland, to the Middle East to the Balkans. It has been, regrettably, one of the components of nationalism. The names, language and posturing may be different but the impulse is the same. Nations and ethnic groups portray their ancient successes as criteria to describe or excuse their current status. It is seen as an acceptable technique for instilling much needed pride into insecure groups. If one can prove that his/her ancestors did something that was unique and unprecedented, then it is not only a contribution to the world; it provides a descendant with a much needed sense of superiority.

Granted it is childish, but it has always reflected, especially in our own day, a sense of uncertainty and foreboding. We are being buffeted by rapidly changing events and new criteria for acceptable behavior. They affect all social structures and have a major effect on our insights and reactions. We yearn for any familiar strain in our changing world, something which seems to be attached to the past and which contains comforting rhythms of the continuous or even the eternal. But it does not come easily. It is difficult for us to apply the past to repair our damaged pride as there are few contemporary traditions to which it can be attached. Our world changes so speedily that we have become strangers to ourselves and we search desperately for anything that reminds us of a secure yesterday with which we can identify. If only we could build a bridge to the supposed secure society of the past, then we would have some hope for the future. The comedian, Flip Wilson, used to have a routine about worshipping in the Church of What's Happening and he had a valid insight. We are a generation of obsessive introspection because things change so rapidly that we have no rules for that self assessment. The result is that we try harder and harder; we have actually made a religion out of self identification. There is no clergyman who has not suffered through listening to a congregant excusing some outrageous behavior or retreat from family responsibility because "Rabbi, I have to spend time finding out who I am." How often I have been tempted to tell that individual to give me two minutes so I could tell him exactly who he is.

Someone has described this phenomenon by saying that we are "Hamlets in Supermarkets." What a vivid and perceptive description it is. "Hamlets in Supermarkets." Surrounded by twenty kinds of dry cereal and forty varieties of frozen yogurt, we ponder the meaning of Life. "To Be Or Not To Be—Whether it is better to suffer the slings of outrageous fortune...." resounds in our souls as we push our overflowing food baskets to the cashier and swipe our Visa and Mac cards at the checkout counter.

Perhaps the complexity of this issue can be simplified by the story of two four-year-old kindergarten youngsters who were standing in the school yard during recess. Suddenly they looked up as two F15 jets streaked across the sky.

"Do you happen to know," asked one of the children, "how they handle the combustive heat that is generated by the supersonic speed? I would think it would melt the supportive outer structure of the wing struts."

"Oh," said the second four year old. "That is relatively simple. They've solved the problem by the strategic use of ceramics. Placing tiles in a regressive pattern, it diffuses the heat impact and thrusts it back towards the jet stream just behind the plane. That way, it eliminates the danger of metal stress."

Just as he finished his explanation, the bell rang.

"Well," said one to the other. "Back to the old finger painting."

It is no wonder we are so insecure and yearn for certain self identification. The contrasts in our lives appear daily in forms as dramatic as those kindergarten children. The rapid changes which I mentioned before are not just minor social adjustments. Technology is a constant enemy of consistency. Our children handle esoteric information with the sophistication of major intellects. They surf the web and plug into data that ranges from the profound to the dangerous. We have moved from a slow accumulation of knowledge to a growing dependence on smaller and smaller electronic devices, efficient and fast, that spew forth staggering amounts of information. It happens so quickly that we have no time to ponder its implications.

BACCALAUREATE 1999

Our world totters on the fear that the desk top, the lap top and the palm top may not be able to tell the differences between the years 1900 and 2000. A computer that mixes up those two dates can ground airplanes, rearrange my bank account, stop elevators in skyscrapers and, in the most terrifying of possibilities, immobilize my credit cards. We are overwhelmed; the mind has been replaced by the zip drive and we are not certain that we know how to move from facts to knowledge.

So, on the one hand, we try to manipulate the past primarily for purposes of national and group conceit and a supposed sense of security. On the other, we have shredded the idea that facts–cold and brutal–can be blended into the mixture of culture that can define us as human beings and can comfort us with a healthy continuity of past and present. A high school teacher of English who had a profound influence on my life once told our class, "I do not know what people will be reading in five years, but I know what they will be reading in a hundred years; they will be reading Shakespeare, Moliere and Dickens." Perhaps that aphorism was crafted by the bias of a traditional New Englander, but it did express resistance to a new culture that seems to have no time for what is enduring.

Presently, my wife and I are going through a difficult trauma. It is one that has been shared by others but it is still an individual trial. After many years of living in large homes, we are preparing to move into a Center City apartment. Downsizing by deciding what to discard is brutal. One particularly difficult task is to decide what to do with a multitude of photograph albums. The most vulnerable ones come in two categories. One is the photo album that once belonged to my mother. From time to time she would tell me who an individual was in her album. Yet, now that she has died, she is not with me to help recall someone whom I have forgotten. I also find I do not have a sense of loyalty to a great-granduncle or distant cousin. So, "goodbye, great-granduncle Yankel or cousin Merchick. You have lived out your years on earth and now the lack of shelf space means you have been zapped out of the album."

There is a second series of photos. We have many albums that are reminders of trips that my wife and I have taken throughout the years. At times, I get the impression that I saw Jerusalem, Pompeii and Avignon through a 35mm lens.

Many shots of distant places just don't make it any longer. Palaces, cathedrals and landscapes now are consigned to the trash heap because there are condominium rules about the number of holes you can make in the walls for bookshelves. Nostalgia falls prey to reality. The past becomes selective because the present does not have time and space for it all.

I share these thoughts and emotions as one who has spent slightly more than seven decades on this planet and who is still struggling with this sense of contrast, contradiction and irony. I am at that point when I appreciate the observation of Henny Youngman, a comic who was really a philosopher. He once said that "Life is what passes you by while you are making other plans." I am now the combination of rabbi, bioethicist, professor, husband, father, grandfather, part time golfer, etc. etc. A native of Boston, I am a Red Sox fan. I guess because I am Jewish and I know how to suffer, I will always be a Red Sox fan. But also as a committed and observant Jew, I try to make some sense out of these challenges through a three thousand year old tradition.

Let me give you one example. A famous 19th Century Rabbi, The Salanter Rebbe, once said "my neighbor's need is my spiritual need." It bears repeating, "my neighbor's need is my spiritual need." That intrigues me. For it says that my spirituality is not a mantra, is not a rhythmic swaying of the body; it is not even a desirable reaching for God; it is a response to my neighbor's need.

America is going through one of its periodic obsessions with spirituality. In our day, there are TV shows about angels, naive and geared to available time between commercials, that are high in Nielsen ratings. Books about the long narrow tunnel with the light at the end that ushers us into the afterworld occupy many tables in Barnes and Noble and web sites. Stadiums throughout the country now are filled with pious seekers who display the same unbridled enthusiasm as the crowds which occupy the same stadiums for rock concerts. The manner in which the audience sways, cheers and chants at both events is frighteningly similar. So, what is spirituality? If it is totally inner-directed then it is misdirected. If it deals only with you and your supposed inner spirit and light then you have missed a Divine imperative. The Salanter Rebbe says simply, "if your neighbor screams even in a whisper and you turn to him or her with care and response, then that defines your spirituality."

The Russian novelist Tolstoy once walked at night through the streets of Moscow. He was approached by a beggar who was unkempt and filthy. He was a horrible sight. The beggar reached out his hand in a request for alms. Tolstoy looked at him with regret.

"Oh, my brother, forgive me. I left my home without my purse, I have no money to give you."

The beggar answered, "Do not worry. You have given me much more than money. You called me brother."

Granted that this story is probably apocryphal and idealistic; it sounds a message. In these years our graduates have had the opportunity to dwell with the best of the past. The giants of those years have spoken to you. If my high school teacher was correct then you are also the vessels for the future to know about Shakespeare, Moliere and Dickens and all the other voices that have shaped our society. If you close the book and look only at the present after you stride away from Locust Walk then you rob not only yourselves but also those who some day will consider you as part of the past. As you travel through the exciting and hopefully rewarding worlds of finance, science, medicine, law and government, pause and create those special moments for listening. Listen not only to your own needs; they are important and they are essential to the meaning of your life. But listen also to the Salanter Rebbe's definition of your human qualities–to his definition of your possible spirituality. Listen to the sounds around you, not only to the sounds within you.

The tense, hectic moments in your life will test your endurance and training; the quiet moments will test your soul. Reaching into the core of your being in those moments will ask you to remember the meaningful voices of the past who now filter through you. They ask you always to listen to the world around you; to its exquisite sounds and sights as well as to the voices of pain and need.

In the Rabbinic Midrash there is the story of a man who, observing the suffering in the world about him, pleaded with Heaven.

"God, there is so much pain in the world. War, famine, cruelty and fear. Why don't you send someone to change it?"

The voice of God replied from Heaven,

"I did send someone; I sent you."

How clearly this message impacts on our daily lives can be seen in an event that took place as I prepared these remarks. We still stagger under the imagery of the horrendous event in Littleton, Colorado. It has evoked response from every corner of our society from government to private expressions of outrage and fear. Yet, a majority of the United States Senate voted on an issue of availability of guns as if nothing had happened in Columbine High School. The reaction was mercurial. These representatives of the electorate staggered before a flood of protests. Telephone calls, letters, e-mail, telegrams burst through their serenity and arrogance and reminded them that there is a moral underpinning to the American political system.

The miracle happened. In an unprecedented scene, numerous Senators indicated that they had reviewed their vote and thought it best to revive the legislation. They had been reminded of their vulnerability because the individual, sent by God, raised his/her voice. It was that same voice that changed the national attitude towards the right to drink and drive, to pollute the air by smoking, to destroy the bounties of Nature or to ignore the rights of anyone who is a minority in our society. God gave us the mandate to improve his world and when we accept that responsibility, tyrants, both self appointed and elected, lift their heads and listen.

You are a privileged generation. You face a new period of history with all of its frightening challenges but challenges that produce unprecedented opportunities. You walk into that world armed with expanded minds and youthful optimism. Think of the past and use it as an instrument of caution and wisdom and not as a means to claim a supposed superiority; enjoy the present with our love, pride and support and when you are obliged to discard you own photographs realize with satisfaction that you always understood that you were sent by God to change and better His Earth.

In the words of Robert Browning: "Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid."

Graduates of 1999, we present you with your world. May God grant you the wisdom to use it well. Amen.