

worldview

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STUDENTS AND THE WORLD: WHO'S ANXIOUS, WHO HOSTILE?

As surely as the New Year breeds resolutions does the time of graduation produce ripe generalizations on the state of the world and the tasks of the new generation. Nor should we be too readily scornful of the custom. In a world grown increasingly indifferent to traditions we should be grateful for the perpetuation of those that may be beneficial, and at least do no harm. And in fact, the commencement exercises do shed some light on the way different generations view the world—and each other.

Probably the most succinct statement of a phenomenon that has already produced much excited prose was Father Vincent O'Keefe's at Fordham University's graduation ceremonies. The traditional pattern of the anxious student prepared to go nervously into a hostile world has been reversed, he said. "It now looks more like hostile youth is going forward into an anxious world—a world not quite sure what to expect of them." And this observation seemed borne out by the procedures of other commencements.

To the students of C. W. Post College of Long Island University, news of the outside world was delivered by General Lauris Norstad, former commander of NATO forces. It is questionable whether NATO and its present problems are of first importance to the students at C. W. Post but he did manage to present a world which, if neither anxious nor hostile, was rather ominous when he said, "Even now ministers from all the NATO nations are gathering for a meeting in Brussels to decide the fate of Western Europe." So much, it seems, it is in the power of men to determine.

Another bearer of news from the world—and this simply by his presence—was Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The war in Vietnam is a concern of many students today and as one who is involved in the planning of that war Mr. McNamara is also a concern. At Amherst, where he was awarded an honorary degree, a number of students walked out on him in an orderly if conspicuous manner, and at New York University an even larger number made an exit in silent protest as he was again being honored. While Mr.

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McNamara professed delight at the orderliness of the demonstration, another emissary from the world and the principal commencement speaker, Mr. Arthur J. Goldberg, said that although the nation was devoted to free expression and the right to dissent "it is completely destructive of democracy, as we learned during the terrible Nazi period, when peaceful and orderly meetings should be disrupted and broken up." To many people Mr. Goldberg's anxious concern would seem to be in excess of the cause. If an orderly, quiet demonstration is going to call forth such ready comparisons with Nazis, we would do better to give up historical analogies completely.

But all was not protest, nor all students hostile. At West Point several members of the grad-

uating class voiced quite other sentiments. One dedicated cadet proclaimed that "every American has a definite commitment to go to Vietnam and do his part." The image here conjured up of a vast influx of Americans floundering around in Vietnam, each looking for the part that is his to do, almost excuses that cadet. But a rather different emotion is aroused by the cadet who saw the war in Vietnam as "a chance to keep up with the changing methods of warfare." On the basis, apparently, of never putting off till tomorrow etc., he said, "As an Army officer trained to fight, I feel we need this conflict in order to learn what we may face later." Neither anxious nor personally hostile, this is the kind of student that makes a number of people nervous. J. F.

in the magazines

In an article in *New Blackfriars* (April), a monthly review edited by English Dominicans, Brian Wicker asserts that "the problem of politics is essentially the problem of reconciling personal relationships to public or impersonal human relationships."

At the start of life, he says, there are only "personal relationships," and "these become the paradigms of our social life, the norms by which we evaluate and judge all social interaction. A social relationship which falls short of the personal is almost automatically felt to be, to that extent, a less than fully human relationship, despite the fact that entering into impersonal relationships with the circumambient atmosphere of humanity is as inescapable and natural a process as growing up itself." Thus arises the problem: "How to reconcile the fact of the impersonal social atmosphere which is as necessary to life as food and drink, with the experience of something by comparison with which it seems almost unnecessary, or even hostile?" Politics, "which is about the artificial structure—the social institutions—which we need in order to breathe in the rarified atmosphere of impersonal social life," falls heir to our dilemma.

Wicker examines some movements and institutions which reflect man's tendency for "dealing with the political problem in purely personal terms"; where the attempt is made "to project the structure . . . of personal relationships into the outer atmosphere of politics—where it cannot function because it was not designed to do so."

Among these he cites liberalism, which "simply accepts the diagnosis that I have indicated, admits the existence of the disease so to speak, and then

avoids its implications by systematically choosing, at all the crucial points, to follow the way of personal relationships and to ignore, or even defy, the impersonal atmosphere of wider humanity. Having allowed that there has to be a choice between the two, the consistent liberal always prefers the familiar world of personal relationship to that of politics."

The author charges that "the tradition of Christian [and particularly Catholic] thinking about social problems has been predominantly liberal in its stress on the primacy of personal relations. . . . The universal Church itself has been thought of as an extended family. And the parish—the one social experience offered by the Church to the majority of its members—has succeeded only when it could be organized and known as a family-based society with its own spiritual 'father'—the parish priest—at its head."

While Wicker recognizes a "certain validity" in this ideal, he nonetheless finds it "characteristic of an immature, or childish perspective. It deals with the political problem by mostly ignoring it." On the other hand, "the very Catholicity of Christianity, the universality of its message, implies an embracing of all human relationships," he notes. "Thus, precisely in so far as the Church succeeds in converting the world, the family-analogy *must* break down. . . . The vast majority of my fellow believers must always remain, to me, part of the anonymous atmosphere of unexplored humanity which surrounds me but which I cannot know. To pretend that the Church is an extended family is therefore hypocritical and dangerous. For not only is it a