10-1-1981

Message From the Dean

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A Mandate for Man

No one, of course, has ever been able to fix a point in time when our species emerged. Although the word "impossible" is an anathema to us, I fear we must admit that that search is an impossible one. We are destined never to be certain about where we first appeared or in what moral or intellectual condition. That, too, was a separative. We never stop wondering; we never stop looking; and we will never stop arguing about it. But we will never really know.

We do know rather more, however, about what we are going to. We can get a reasonable fix on the other part of the beginning. Given our technological capabilities and our rate of intellectual growth, in which we are said to be able to double our technology every five years, a task that once took an estimated 100,000 years, we have only two ways to go. We shall become benevolent or we shall become extinct.

Benevolence, more than any other single force in our changing, evolving, turbulent condition is concomitant to our own survival—and a good thing, too. A less sensitive master plan might have come up with an altogether different construction. I, personally, find an endearing imperative in the fact that we simply have to learn to be nice to one another and to our one and only planet in order to survive. It is a little ironic that benevolence had to be mandated, but it has been, and all avenues of logic proclaim it. It is further mandated by logic and time that we take heed rather quickly. Our hate-love affair with ourselves has brought us to the edge without much spare time to do anything but say, "Yes it is so, benevolence here we come."

How then shall we record our own history? Where are the peaks and valleys from those unknown beginnings to that benevolent future? I suggest that evil is not a fair measure of the true human being who will emerge, perhaps, from us. Wars have always been counterproductive dips, and since we usually forget what they are about, or who started them, or why, I propose to you, in the innocence of the non-historian, that we do not count them stepping stones. Rather, I think, the pavement we follow, our path and markers, are moral ones, just ones and, above all, gentle ones. And I did not play Polemics here. These are the harsh realities of our condition. And perhaps that is best. We never stop arguing about it. Without mercy. These were men who had the power of life and death over millions of people—and wielded it without mercy. These were the masers and shakers of their time and they wore shiny belt buckles and daggers. O.K., one last question, who was the twelve-year-old girl who remained hidden in a small room here in Amsterdam for two years, kept a diary, and then died in a concentration camp? The chorus, of course, was immediate. "Anne Frank."

"Does that tell us something about power—dark, corrupting, unlimited, and evil? I think it reflects directly on what we were just talking about. It suggests that quiet, benevolent, positive human acts and actions, people with ideas, goals, and thoughts are the high places in our past, present, and future. All the rest of it happens down in the valleys, in the cuts, hollows and draws, the dank places and the dark, the places that real history forgets once you add time."

As might be expected of a race, a species coming from the primitive time of skull bashing and cannibalism and overall brutish behavior toward a mandated, no-alternative place of gentle care and benevolence, we peak at the good and suffer briefly, and mercifully forget the bad. Nature has been kind. Men and women cannot remember pain.

To tie up the loose ends, to package it, as they say in my world of show and tell, I think our purpose in being here today has a great deal to do with everything I have been talking (continued on page 4)