Southern Methodist University
Commencement
May 21, 1988

VALUES, COMMITMENT, AND CRAFT

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I am immensely grateful for the privilege of being here today and for the honor you have bestowed upon me. And I am especially pleased to share this podium with your distinguished new President, whom I have known as friend and professional colleague for almost two decades.

President Pye brings outstanding qualities of character, wisdom, and vision to this great university. His insistence upon the maintenance and enhancement of intellectual excellence at Southern Methodist University will set an admirable standard for all of American higher education to emulate.

In his great novel, Doctor Faustus, Thomas Mann wrote:

> There is at bottom only one problem in the world and this is its name. How does one break through? How does one get into the open? How does one burst the cocoon and become a butterfly?[1]

As you pursue your personal and professional lives, as you prepare to "burst the cocoon" and "get into the open," you will face the question of shaping a life that is satisfying and meaningful. As each of us in the generations just ahead of you can attest, such satisfaction and meaning do not come easily.

But they are most likely to be earned by those who appreciate the importance of nurturing and integrating two separate selves: a "public self" that is committed to discharging the responsibilities of citizenship and a "private self" that is dedicated to developing the capacities to reflect, to create, and to understand.

I.

For all of us, personal growth comes from many sources. But none is more important than a dedicated commitment to social and public responsibilities.

Because we share a common society -- indeed, a common world -- with our fellow men and women, we share a common obligation to work to improve that society and that world. And such an obligation -- the obligation to be an effective citizen -- falls most heavily upon those who have been blessed by educational privilege.

Not all of you can be senators or governors, congressmen or ambassadors. Not all of you can stride across the national stage of public events. But every one of you can make effective contributions to the quality of life in the communities in which you live. Every one of you can devote yourself to strengthening the public institutions that enrich our communal life -- by service on city councils and local school boards; by support of art museums and symphony orchestras,

hospitals and shelters for the homeless; and by grass-roots participation in public debate and electoral campaigns.

And, so, I urge you to commit yourself to a public responsibility worthy of your talents and your idealism. By doing so, you will not only help to make our society a better place in which to live, you will also "get into the open" and place yourself upon a path toward self-definition. And I remind you, as you make that commitment, of Goethe's sobering warning that we must take care in choosing our ambitions when we are young, because in later years we are likely to achieve them in abundance.[2]

II.

As you commit yourself to defining a public self, I hope that you will also commit yourself to defining a private self: a self that yearns to understand the vast mysteries of creation and the universe; a self that can find peace in the still, dark hours of the night; a self

that can address grief and tragedy and the terrible misunderstandings that can arise among the generations; a self that responds to poetry and music and dance; a self that is renewed by reflection and contemplation.

I hope that you will find time for the cultivation of pursuits that add texture and mystery to your life -- whether it be reading philosophy or maintaining dear friendships or playing the piano or keeping a journal. I hope, in short, that you will cultivate the means of discovering yourself.

And I hope, too, that you will strive to balance and integrate these two separate parts of yourself -- the public and the private -- because too great an emphasis upon the public self can lead to self-importance and self-centered ambition, while too great an emphasis upon the private self can lead to self-indulgence and a selfish individualism.

Striking this balance is never easy, but if you succeed in integrating these two selves into a coherent

whole, you will have become a human being whose life will be satisfying and meaningful indeed.

III.

Such human beings are unusual, but they exert an influence upon others, well out of proportion to their numbers. Each of us has had exemplars in his or her own life -- men and women who have been our heroes and who have set for us standards of what it means to be a whole human being.

I would like to tell you about two persons who have been exemplars for me, who have been a source of my own vision of what the Greeks called exercising vital powers along lines of excellence.

One of these persons was my teacher at Yale Law School, Alexander M. Bickel, whose untimely death in 1974 is still an occasion for mourning. The other was my first employer, Thurgood Marshall, the leading civil rights lawyer of his generation.

Professor Bickel and Justice Marshall were very different individuals, but they exemplify the kind of balancing of public and private values that enables men and women, concerned with the shaping of satisfying and meaningful lives, to find their own particular way of bursting the cocoon and getting out into the open.

Alexander Bickel was a teacher and scholar, a man of the book, an elegant intellectual who challenged and deepened our understanding of the function of law in a democratic society. Thurgood Marshall was a pragmatic lawyer and earthy tactician, a dynamic mobilizer of men and women, a man of action who devoted his extraordinary talents to the most important law-reform effort of the Twentieth Century.

Professor Bickel advanced the law by the development of theory. Justice Marshall advanced the law by the perfection of practice. Each, in his own way, addressed the larger, humane questions that infuse law and life with significance.

The most important lesson that Alexander Bickel taught to me and to an entire generation, in the classroom and through his luminous writings, was the importance of process -- what he called "the morality of consent" -- and of the procedures by which public decisions are reached.

From him I learned, as he had learned from Edmund Burke, that adherence to the time-tested processes of the legal order (however frustrating they may sometimes seem) is more important to the practice of statecraft than is the achievement of any momentary political result. He emphasized that the democratic institutions that England and the United States have developed during several hundred years of trial and error (however imperfect they remain) provide the stability that is essential for expressing, as well as constraining, the majority's will.

My second hero, Thurgood Marshall, is perhaps the only person ever to sit on the Supreme Court who would

deserve a leading place in American history even had he never been appointed to the Nation's highest court. For it was Thurgood Marshall, prior to becoming a Supreme Court Justice, who directed the legal effort that culminated in the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education.

Justice Marshall taught me the indispensability of legal craftsmanship and the moral obligation to put that craftsmanship in the service of a significant public cause. In his case, that cause was the achievement of an integrated society based upon the central value of our legal and political system: equal justice for all citizens. Through his actions, as well as his words, Justice Marshall taught me that a citizen's finest opportunity is not to make money, and not to seek fame, but to ally both self and talent with an idea whose time has come.

And Thurgood Marshall also taught me that a person can mount a determined assault upon even the meanest and

most provocative injustices without surrendering his humanity or descending into a bitterness toward his adversaries that, in Yeats' phrase, makes "a stone of the heart."

Alexander Bickel and Thurgood Marshall represent two different strands in American culture -- the contemplative and the active -- strands that I hope you will admire, in equal measure, as you "burst the cocoon" and "get into the open."

Both of these men dedicated themselves to public lives of effective citizenship and to the achievement of a more just society. Both refined their private selves by wide reading and never-ending reflection upon the nature of a democratic commonwealth and of a free people's institutions. By mastering their own discipline, both men transcended it. By transcending themselves in their work, they found themselves again, in the human community beyond.

Professor Bickel and Justice Marshall teach us, by their example, that the processes of managing a democratic society and of conducting a moral life are both dynamic ones. They are processes that require a continuing dialogue about which of our inherited values are bedrock and which are merely convenient and conventional; a dialogue between the generations that have come before and our own generation; a dialogue between our own generation and the generations that will come after; a dialogue between our public selves and our private selves.

IV.

I have great faith that as your generation bursts the cocoon and gets out into the open, it will continue that process of dialogue. One of the themes of Carl Sandburg's autobiography, Always the Young Strangers,[3] is the way in which every society, in every generation, renews itself by the emergence of young strangers -- unknown young people who, because they have, perhaps,

the scholarly perceptions of an Alexander Bickel or the social vision of a Thurgood Marshall, are able to assume positions of public responsibility and to help new generations recover and renew those values essential to our collective well-being.

As all of us who are teachers look out each Fall on a new classroom of earnest faces, we are constantly aware of the possibility -- indeed, we are haunted by it -- that there may be sitting before us, as once there was before some other teacher, a young stranger, Abraham Lincoln; or a young stranger, Eleanor Roosevelt; or a young stranger, Martin Luther King, Jr.; or a young stranger, Alexander M. Bickel; or a young stranger, Thurgood Marshall.

Universities like Southern Methodist must strive to empower their young strangers with those qualities necessary for them to assume positions of leadership in our society. Universities must seek to develop in these young strangers what Saul Bellow has called "an open

channel to the soul"[4] -- so that the informed vigor of their public leadership will be tempered by the quiet lessons of their private contemplation.

But no university can do that job alone. Its achievement demands a commitment from each of you to undertake a set of public responsibilities that will make this world a more just, more civilized place in which to live. It demands a commitment from each of you to cultivate a sector of privacy that will permit you to grow in understanding and sympathy. And it demands a commitment from each of you to establish a creative balance, a nurturing dialogue, between your public self and your private self, so that in the end these selves connect and a whole person emerges.

Then you will have met the great challenge that Thomas Mann identified. You will have learned to "burst the cocoon" and "get into the open."

I have every faith that you will do just that. Congratulations and good luck.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus, 1948; trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 307-308.

2. Literally, "Was man in der jugend wunscht, hat man in Alter die Fulle," the Motto to Part Two of Dichtung und Wahrheit; of The Autobiography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, trans. John Oxenford (New York: Horizon Press, 1969), P. 229.

3. Carl Sandburg, Always the Young Strangers (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1952).

4. Saul Bellow, Foreword, Allan Bloom, The Closing of The American Mind (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).