Baccalaureate Sermon

by

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"At that time, Jesus said to His disciples, All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Matthew xxviii, 18-20.)

In this impressive ceremony which today gathers us here about the altar of God, the Church presents new evidence of her unfailing fidelity to the solemn mission given her centuries ago when her divine Founder sent her forth as the Teacher of the Nations. Like an anxious and solicitous mother she assembles around her in their college chapel these young women who have been taught, as the most essential part of their collegiate training, to cherish the noblest and highest ideals, and who are now about to pass from the peace and protection of scholastic life into the struggles and
dangers of modern existence, that to them she may address a parting message. She cannot do otherwise. They are her charges, her daughters in the Lord, and if this morning she pauses in the midst of the central act of Christian worship to remind them that their religious faith is their priceless and most precious treasure, that virtue and not knowledge is the lever that lifts humanity, it is because of an obligation as definite and as unmistakable as the words that imposed it—"All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach all nations; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

How sublime are these words of our divine Redeemer, and how stupendous the teaching mission of the Church, who carries her credentials from the very hands of God Himself. "As the Father hath sent me, I also send you." He from whose sacred lips fell these words so significant was the greatest teacher of all the ages. He came as a teacher, and
His school was the world. He taught the multitudes from the ship; He taught from the mountain top and from the hillside. He taught in the temple, and in the harvest fields, and by the silvery sands upon the margin of the lake, and He taught with tireless persistency, whenever and wherever He found even an individual to lend Him a hearing. By the unaided majesty of truth, established by His miracles, and embodied in His life, He proclaimed the message of salvation; and though His hearers were beggars, or fishermen, or shepherds, the words He spoke were words which have resounded throughout the centuries and which even now awaken in myriad hearts echoes from higher realms. He was the light that enlighteneth all who come into the world.

Comparatively few were the years of this divine Teacher’s life upon earth, but His lessons were not to be wafted away to nothingness by the winds of Geneza­reth nor was His benign influence upon the world to find its ending in the clouds that bore His body from the heights of Olivet. “All power is given to Me in
heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach all nations; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Such was the mandate that made certain the passing of Christ's words and Christ's influence down through the ages. Its letters spelled the great charter of Christianity; they contained the solemn charge to Christ's Church as the teacher of mankind, and sent her out upon a mission without precedent or parallel in the history of the world.

This teaching office the Church took up with loyal devotion and with a sense of consecration which no educational agency ever felt before nor ever will again. For where is the land into which her voice has not penetrated, and where is the nation that has not felt the saving force of her heaven-appointed mission? Into every quarter of the globe she has carried the beneficent lessons of Christian knowledge, and she has placed the Cross of Christ agleaming in the heavens where Roman eagles never flew, for by the enthusiastic zeal of her missionaries the kingdom of the Nazarene has
been spread far beyond the most extensive empires of antiquity. Nations for ages buried in the obscurity of paganism and the darkness of infidelity she lifted into light. She showed them the day star of deliverance and led them forth, the ransomed children of God, from the slavery of error and superstition, to be sharers in the glorious and unfettered liberty of the children of God.

Teacher of the Nations, she sent her representatives into every land and clime to teach in her name the message of her Master. She gave them no shield or buckler but that of faith, no sword but that of the Cross, no armor but the livery of Christ, but she told them that their school was everywhere—wherever the sun shone or the moon sent down her silvery beams—and their pupils every one, for no one was so low that their humility should not reach him, nor so exalted that their authority should not claim him, the object of their unsleeping solicitude and tireless concern.

The history of education contains many inspiring pages, but none that grip and thrill like those that tell the story
of these religious teachers, these intrepid heralds of the Gospel who, knowing no danger and fearing no peril, went forth with a divine enthusiasm to conquer or to die for the truth.

Into the jungles of Africa, undeterred by famine or fever, they went to face the ferocity of savage beasts, or the fury of yet more savage men. On the frigid steppes of Siberia, on the burning sands of Arabia, and on the inhospitable mountains of China their bodies lie entombed by thousands; and in our own America how many sank silently into unknown and nameless graves, as through the un­trodden solitudes of the West and to the far-off golden slope of the Pacific they toiled their weary way to bear the blessings of Christianity to the untutored children of the forest and the prairie. Their deeds are not engraved on monuments of brass, nor cut in shining shafts of marble, but they are treasured in the records of eternal life, the deeds of saintly men and women heroically devoted to the mission and ideals of Christian education.
Religious teachers, indeed, were these, but they were the promoters of human progress in every field of endeavor as well. True religion and sound civilization are inseparable. Men may scan as they will the pages of history for the past nineteen hundred years, but they will find no agency contributing to culture and refinement that does not bear the stamp of the Catholic Church. She is the one institution upon earth which can look down the vanished centuries and gazing upon the glorious memorials of man's uplifting struggles say with truth, "These are mine." From the time when triumphant she emerged from the dark recesses of the catacombs to the day when the blighting shadow of the Reformation crossed her pathway, she was the one educational force in all the world which could check the passions of men and crush the ambitions of princes. She it was who found the Roman world two-thirds slave and made it wholly free. She it was who found woman the victim of man's brutality and made her man's companion. She it was who saved ancient learning from the ruthless hands
of the barbarians, preserving it for the instruction and enlightenment of the world today. She it was who covered the face of Europe with her schools and universities and rescued men from the thraldom of ignorance and superstition. All that is pure, all that is holy, all that is uplifting and ennobling in human life may be traced to the lessons which this Teacher of the Nations has ground into the very souls of men from the day of Pentecost to this hour in which we live.

Throughout her whole history the Church has ever made the education of her children in Christian schools the object of her most tender solicitude. In her divine constitution and heavenly charter, obtained directly from the hands of Christ, she finds inscribed in indelible letters her warrant and sanction for such education. “Going therefore teach all nations; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Even while cruelly persecuted by Roman Emperors, she opened a school of higher philosophy in Alexandria, where an Origen, a Clement, and a Catherine allowed no intellectual
precedence to the most learned masters in the academies of reigning paganism. When the days of peace and prosperity dawned, she established schools by the side of her monasteries and basilicas. Monte Casino shed its light over Italy; Lerins gathered scholars from Gaul and Germany; under St. Patrick's magic touch Ireland became the isle of schools and scholars. Of the great universities that sprang up in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and the British Isles, she was the foundress and promoter. Salerno, Padua, and Bologna; Paris, Salamanca, and Seville; Louvain, Leipsic, Fribourg and Tubingen; Oxford, Cambridge, and Glasgow—these are her creations, these rich sources of culture and civilization whose renown is imperishable. They attest her zeal in the holy cause of education, as does every Catholic school or college where religion is blended with secular learning.

Back of the educational activities of the Church through all the centuries of her existence there has ever been a very definite view of what education should be. It rests upon the fundamental truth
that man is created for a supernatural end and that she is the divinely appointed agency to assist him in attaining his supreme destiny.

When the Church received from Christ her commission to teach all nations, she was not left in doubt as to what the content of her teaching was to be. "Going, therefore, teach all nations; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." She was to teach, therefore, everything that pertains to the spiritual welfare of mankind, everything that points the way to eternal life and unveils to the vision of men the beauty and glory of the kingdom of God.

Religion, then, is the supreme law of life. It alone can give peace to the soul, sanction to morality, and stability to government, because it alone can give proper direction to knowledge. It is something to be so woven into the warp and woof of thought and conduct and character, into one's very life, that it becomes a second nature and the guiding principle of all one's actions. To treat religion, therefore, as though it were but
an incidental phase of man's life is to blunder in a matter of the highest and most serious importance.

The world needs knowledge, it is true; but it needs righteousness as well; and it needs righteousness far more than it needs knowledge, for righteousness far more than knowledge creates true manhood and womanhood, assures the integrity of the family, and cements the social fabric into strength and enduring solidity. No man is educated, no man is fitted for the duties and responsibilities awaiting him, unless his store of virtue is even richer than his treasure of intellectual wealth. The decadence and ruin of individuals and of societies come from lack of virtue, not from lack of knowledge.

Something more, therefore, than book learning is needed to enable us to attain to the perfection of our being; something more must contribute to the making of noble men and women. Intellectual ability is the superstructure of civilization; character is its foundation, and education to be of value must lay the foundation of character deep and
secure in the adamantine bed-rock of religion. It is obvious, then, that any plan of education which ignores God is vitiated in its root and in its entirety, and any system of education which abolishes religion from its curriculum is false and incomplete. It is false, because it ignores the true character and needs of man; it is incomplete, because it leaves unsatisfied the deepest cravings of man's soul and unanswered the eternal questionings of the human mind. Education to be adequate must be wedded to religion.

This view of education is the result of the Church's genuine insight into man's true nature. Nor is it held by her alone. A few years ago in addressing the graduates of Yale University, the President of the University of Pennsylvania paid this striking tribute to the Catholic educational system. "I am profoundly convinced," he said, "that the time is not far distant when all men, without exception, who think at all, and who possess the faculty of reasoning clearly and logically, will understand that the highest use to which the human
mind can devote itself is the contemplation of God and His relations to man and the physical universe; and when that time comes, I am certain that a hymn of thanksgiving will well up from the heart of America to the Catholic Church, which, through misrepresentation and calumny and slander, and in spite of the most powerful opposition, has always held that great ideal before the minds of the people; has always made God and His Christ the basis and foundation of education."

We live in an age which is indifferent to the supreme interests of human existence. It seeks all knowledge except the knowledge of God. Its standards are the standards of the market place; its ideals those of industrialism. We need to be told that if the secret of power lies in education, it is the education which strengthens and illumines the mind, which purifies and enlarges the heart, which forms and confirms the conscience. For such education President Coolidge pleaded last week at Andover when he said: "Our doctrine of equality and liberty, of humanity and charity comes
from our belief in the brotherhood of man through the fatherhood of God. The whole foundation of enlightened civilization, in government, in society, and in business rests upon religion. Unless our people are thoroughly instructed in its great truths they are not fitted either to understand our institutions or provide them with adequate support. For our independent colleges and secondary schools to be neglectful of their responsibilities in this direction is to turn their graduates loose with simply an increased capacity to prey upon each other. Such a dereliction of duty would put in jeopardy the whole fabric of society. For our chartered institutions of learning to turn back to the material and neglect the spiritual would be treason, not only to the cause for which they were founded, but to man and God.”

But what is this, if not the teaching which the Catholic Church has proclaimed for nineteen hundred years? In this teaching she knows no compromise; she can entertain no compromise; she has no room for compromise, for she has
never had a moment's indecision on the true nature of education.

The Christian philosophy of life, of which the Church is the teacher, explains this ceremony at which we are assisting today. It is the reason why Emmanuel College opens its doors to young women, that here, under the protecting hand of religion, they may become fervent Christians and accomplished scholars.

Most favorably does the Catholic Church look upon the higher education of women. She realizes that women are the most effective force in extending the kingdom of God, and she knows that the more opportunities she gives them for mental and moral advancement, the more efficaciously will they coöperate with her in her work of purifying the world and promoting Christian virtue. She knows that in an age when paganism looked down upon women as inferior beings, Christ, her Founder, proclaimed equal opportunities in His kingdom for His sisters as well as for His brothers, and placed one woman above all other creatures. His whole life was attended by the ministries of holy women, who fol-
owed Him bravely when men deserted or denied Him, and who stood beneath His Cross while His apostles were hiding in fear. His last legacy on earth, the last precious being on which He turned His thoughts was a woman, and to woman's eyes He first revealed himself in His risen and immortal life. Glorious, indeed, is the part which woman has played in Christian history, from the pure and spotless Mary to that other Mary, sin-defiled, whose burning tears of love washed her guilt away. No one who knows the mind of Christ and understands the spirit of Christianity can fail to sympathize with every movement which has for its object the intellectual advancement of woman, and if the voice of the Catholic Church is heeded, no law that is unjust to woman will exist in Christendom.

The best interests of mankind are served by widening and strengthening woman's influence. The ancient civilization perished because woman was degraded, and ours will be perpetuated by a reverent and enlightened womanhood. This must be so, for woman, much more
than man, lives not for herself alone. She stands at the threshold of life and at the gate of death. She is the first teacher in infancy and childhood, and she it is who smooths the dying brow. Man relies upon himself in the day of his strength; when weakness or sorrow overtakes him, he yearns for the gentle smile, the kindly eye, and the sweet, comforting words of woman. Man's time is the meridian of life; woman's, when the morning's dawn first appears and when the evening's shadows gather. She stands near the cradle, near the cross, and near the grave. There is no cradle over which bends not the smiling, anxious face of a mother; no cross beneath which a mother does not take her place; no grave that is not watered by her tears and hallowed by her prayers. Woman, then, even more than man, should be deemed worthy of the fullest opportunities for enlightenment, and her desires for knowledge should be given the freest scope for realization.

For we cannot keep half the race in ignorance and expect the other half to raise its vision above low ideals and
cheap accomplishments. We cannot be indifferent to the religious education of women if we expect men to be anything but sceptical and irreverent. The indelible stain on the pages of history is the world's treatment of woman in the past; and they who would condemn higher education for her today would betray the presence of a crude mind and a corrupt heart. They would manifest their failure to recognize that woman has an equal right with man to the benefits of culture and of knowledge, and that she has shown herself at least as capable and as successful as man in every noble pursuit. Let learning be added to woman's virtue and she will become a tremendous force to make God's will prevail.

Here in this educational center, in a city famed throughout the country for its culture and learning, Emmanuel College, providing for woman's intellectual and spiritual development, is busy with the teaching mission entrusted centuries ago to the Church under whose auspices it exists. Here the chapel stands beside the classroom to assert that true educa-
tion, true learning, true progress is that which leads to a fuller and better knowledge of God, and that Christian womanliness and Christian scholarship must go hand in hand to form the woman who is to be the glory of the Church and the salvation of society. Here, too, ever at work, are the true conservators of Christian education, the glory of womanhood, the magnanimous and noble Sisters who have made every sacrifice in the service of God. If the Church has successfully and gloriously pursued her office as the Teacher of the Nations, if in our own country she has risen from one eminence to another, it is due in large measure to the zeal and devotion of such saintly souls. Consecrated to every splendid womanly virtue and exemplifying the highest perfection of service and of sacrifice, they have given to these young women here before us the loyalty of their hearts and the vigor of their intellects. From your homes they received these young women four years ago. They have watched over their development with anxious concern and with thoughtful care. They have held
before them at all times the loftiest ideals of conduct and of character, and to them each day they have furnished every high inspiration and noble impulse. They have taught them not to place before themselves the standards of vulgar success, but to strive after the things that count for most in human existence and that give to womanly life its grace, its dignity, and its glory.

And now these good Sisters give your daughters back to you. With pardonable pride they assure you that these young women will be your consolation, that they will bless your homes and be a salutary leaven in society, the living examples of an education at once superior and Christian. From their ranks will come none to lengthen the lists of those who menace and defile the sanctity of marriage; from their lips will fall no flippant insult to the things that are sacred and saving; they will be guilty of no irreverence against nature or nature's God. The fairest types of Christian Catholic womanhood, by their lives this College may be judged.
My dear young friends of the Class of 1928, you see how exalted are the expectations which your devoted teachers entertain in your regard. Four holy and happy years you have lived and studied under their guidance, associating daily with ennobling influences, forming precious companionships, and communing intimately with the most gifted minds of the ages. Now you go forth into the world, saddened, to be sure, by the thought that this part of your life's journey must become only a memory, but satisfied also in the possession of the priceless advantages derived from your Catholic college education. For you we utter a fervent prayer that to each may come the success and happiness of an unclouded career, and as we offer you our congratulations we bid you cherish and hold fast those Christian principles which here have been instilled into your minds. Put them into the very fibres of your being; fix them forever in your souls, for principles unbending make character, character makes life, and life is the measure of beatitude. Give God the first place in your thoughts; let His interests be the
guide of your conduct and the term of your desires. Let His influence radiate about you that you may thus promote the teaching mission of the Church, and that, knowing the joy of God's abiding presence, you may translate into your lives the true meaning of your college name—Emmanuel.