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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES OF
WARNER PACIFIC COLLEGE

CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES AUDITORIUM

10:45 A.M. PDT

Dr. Gilliam, Senator Hatfield, my good friends and former colleagues in the House of Representatives, Edith Green and Les Arends, members of the Class of 1976, faculty and guests:

Let me congratulate the wonderful choir. Those of us who are so incompetent in that area greatly admire and appreciate those who are so good. Congratulations.

I am honored to address this year's commencement exercises at Warner Pacific College. I congratulate today's graduates. I also congratulate the parents, families and friends, and President Gilliam and the faculty of this very fine school. I know that they must all be proud, as I am, to see another group of young Americans well-educated, well-prepared to take their place in our Nation's life.

As President, I am constantly aware that the ultimate authority of our republic is not in the White House; it is in the people. That is why I want to finish my most important job -- restoring the public's trust in the Presidency itself. I did not seek this office, but neither will I shirk it.

When I became President, as you were about to start your junior year, this country was faced with very serious problems. Underlying those problems was a crisis of confidence in our Government, a crisis of spirit among our people. America had been buffeted about for more than a decade with shocks to its system that would have crippled a lesser country -- political assassinations, a long and frustrating war, riots in our streets and on our campuses, economic distress, scandals at the highest levels.

In the few hours before this responsibility was suddenly thrust upon me, I was asked what verse I wanted the Bible open to when I took the oath of office. I turned to the Bible which had been given to me when I became Vice President by my oldest son, Mike, who is a divinity student in Massachusetts.

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Ever since I was a little boy I have used a very special verse in the Bible as a prayer. I am sure that many of you are familiar with it. It comes from the Book of Proverbs and it says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy path."

That was the verse that I placed my hand upon when I took the oath of office, administered to every President since George Washington. These words have meant very much to me as I confronted the problems of this country.

When I received your invitation to address Warner Pacific, I welcomed the opportunity to address an institution that encourages civic virtues based upon the highest spiritual values.

I agree with Theodore Roosevelt's observation that "to educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." Too much of our education today caters to the ego of the individual rather than the true growth of the human personality. I am therefore very gratified that excellent institutions such as Warner Pacific continue to inspire individual growth.

Our national life has reached a point where we must recover transcendent qualities of spirituality and morality. I know of no better way for Americans to achieve personal and social regeneration. Franz Kafka wrote earlier in this century that "the fathers of the church were not afraid to go out into the desert because they had a richness in their hearts. But we, with richness all around us, are afraid because the desert is in our hearts."

As you today begin a new phase in your lives, I count on you to discover a spiritual richness in your hearts. America relies upon such an inward quest far more than an outward reach to the moon or even to the stars.

We have come a long way in 200 years. Our first century was one in which we perfected our free system of Government. Our second century saw the growth of the most productive economic system of all time, with wealth more widely shared. What do I see for our third century? I see it as the century when the individual regains and enlarges his personal freedom. Men and women must prevail over the endless agencies and organizations that would reduce human beings to computerized abstractions and program people into numbers and into statistics.

I place a very high premium on creativity, originality and your right to differentiate yourself from the mass. Today's mounting danger is from mass Government, mass education, mass technology. I am determined to prevent conformist pressures from smothering individual expression or stifling individual opportunity. Individualism must stand as the sentinel of 1976 against the monolithic threat of sameness in our society.

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Never forget that in America our sovereign is the citizen. The Government and institutions exist to serve the people. The State is the servant of the individual in that it must never become an anonymous monstrosity that masters everyone and is responsive to no one. These propositions are the foundations of our Bicentennial.

My vision of America's third century is one of an era of achievement rather than apathy, of fostering the ennobling and transcendental qualities of the individual spirit rather than building huge new bureaucracies.

Two centuries of sacrifice and struggle, of conflict and compromise, have won an unprecedented measure of political and economic independence for each of us. I am proud to be the President of a free Government that can check and balance its own excesses. I am proud of our free economic system, which corrects its own errors, controlled by the marketplace of free and enlightened consumers.

I am especially proud of the role of free education in preserving individuality. Today, I challenge educators, students and graduates to regain the commitment that made America great. Each generation brings a new spirit of competition, new reservoirs of enthusiasm, new responsiveness to the humanitarian needs of others and regenerated pride in personal independence.

Your generation bears a very special task, the preservation of individualism. But you do not bear that task alone. You bear it with your families, your communities, your schools and your churches. Americans have the highest living standard ever obtained by a nation of this size, but if our material strength is to have any meaning whatsoever, we must seek moral and spiritual growth.

Each generation faces new difficulties and new challenges. Surely we have no less needs of an abiding faith than did the Oregon pioneers who established a new life in the American wilderness. We have no less need of faith than the American colonists when they flung their challenge of independence in the face of the world's most powerful empire. We have no less need of faith than your fathers who found no atheists in their foxholes.

The faith of our fathers is living still in America today. It will live as long as freedom rings in this land of liberty. In the stirring words of "America," "long may our land be bright, with freedom's holy light, protect us by thy might, great God our king."

Thank you very much.

END (AT 10:53 A.M. PDT)