

## HOW TO BE A GOOD ALUMNUS

*The speech of Dean Benjamin A. Rogge at the President's  
Breakfast for Seniors on June 8, 1963*

Frankly, I didn't think you'd make it. I never do - that is, until I see you sitting here on this very morning of the year. Commencement is not for me the self-evident consequence of a set of sufficient causes; it is an act of divine intervention in human affairs. It is evident that He - the capitalized He - has dropped all else and for a few weeks given full time to the problems of Wabash seniors - and not just to the man who must pass Religion to meet the requirement, but as well to the man who must have a C in History 2 to have his cumulative one-point; to the man who must claim that he did indeed pass gym in the second semester of his freshman year, under a long-gone coach whose grade book has disappeared; to the man who must pass Phys-Chem or Spanish or 143 even, God help us, the second semester of C.C.; to the Phi Beta Kappa who hasn't done his Senior Reading.

And here are all of you and here are we, looking calm, casual and proud as the devil. A week ago we would have sold the lot of you for a nickel; today we love you, in the way that any craftsman loves his finished handiwork. Today you may even have a certain affection for us.

This Senior Breakfast marks the end of one relationship between us and the beginning of another. The last more or less original term paper has been graded, the last precise arithmetic has been used to compute the numerical average of a series of subjective guesses, the last entry has been made in the Book of Judgment by that Stern Recorder and noted billiard player, R. S. Harvey. No longer will we be evaluating you, judging you, goading you, re-forming you, encouraging you. From this moment it is possible for us to meet as equals.

As a matter of fact, in a peculiar reversal of roles, tomorrow afternoon you will become a part of the structure that has ultimate control of this college, and hence of us. This Senior Breakfast meeting stands in the limbo, after we have lost control of you (that is, all of us but Dean Moore) but before you have gained control of us.

This breakfast is for us, the graduating seniors and the teachers of Wabash College. No underclassmen, no wives, no parents, not even any dogs - and this is the last time we shall meet in this way. Here, over our morning coffee, I am asked to speak to you for the faculty and, hopefully, to say something meaningful. It is too late to urge you to be good students and get plenty of sleep. It is too soon to ask you to remember the college in your wills. I could urge you to continue to be students on through life but if I have to say it, we have already failed.

Let me instruct you instead in the only area that makes sense on this day, on how to be a good alumnus of Wabash College. You may have thought that this is the kind of advice you could pick up from the older boys in the locker room, but it isn't so.

For you to be a good alumnus of Wabash College will demand as much of you over the years as being a good student at Wabash College has demanded of you in the last four years. I am not talking solely or even primarily of the financial demands that will be made on you. Rather, I want to talk of what you should and should not demand of this,

your college, in the years ahead. I want to talk of the right and wrong uses of what is sometimes called "alumni pressure."

To begin with the negatives, I would not ask you to demand that this college remain always what you will come to think it was when you were here. Your Wabash College existed for only one brief four-year period, a period that is now closing. Next year this college will be different from what it was this year. Change is inevitable and do not ask of your college that it defy all the rules which govern human institutions and remain as you imagine it was in its Golden Years when you were on campus.

In this same way, do not demand that the college seek out for admission only what you may conceive to be the typical or real Wabash man. On the contrary you should demand of your Alma Mater that its student body be so constituted that no typical Wabash man can be identified. To me as an outsider the real strength of the Wabash student body is in its diversity. May the day never come when the applicant to this college must meet certain criteria set up to determine if he is the "typical" Wabash man. Let your pressure be directed to keeping this a college which can attract the loyalty of as diverse a group of young men as you now represent. Do not demand that this college be one which serves genius only, or the student-athlete only, or any other single type.

In the same way, do not demand that its faculty be of one type and of one point of view. At this moment, you may not think this a possible demand of yours in the future, but I can assure you that alumni do sometimes make such demands. Do not demand that they all be Gung Ho Wabash supporters, or all sensitive and creative artists, or all nationally known scholars, or all absolutely dedicated classroom teachers. May there always be room on this faculty for a Bert Stern and a Warren Shearer, for an Ed Haenisch and a Charlie Scott, for a Vic Powell and a Karl Planitz. Nor should you demand of your college that its faculty members all be religious or all non-religious or all anti-religious. Nor even should you demand that all of the faculty be hell-roaring Free Enterprisers like Ben Rogge. On the contrary, you should demand of your college that its faculty contain real diversity of point of view on the great issues of human affairs. You should demand that the college always remain true to the words of John Stuart Mill which are now hung on the wall of your President's office - that there is always hope when men are forced to listen to both sides of a question. As an alumnus, give the college permission to retain that diversity which as a student you may have thought so important.

But enough of the "demand notes." There are legitimate ends to be served by alumni pressure and I wish to identify some of them. It is altogether appropriate that you demand of your college that it retain its integrity as a place of learning - that it not be led to serve frivolous or peripheral purposes, or to use means that would threaten that integrity. For example, this college is a liberal arts college and I hope you will use your influence over the years to see that it remains one. This is a private college, independent of both church and state, and I hope you will use your influence over the years to see that it remains so.

But most of all this is a college which seems to be able to influence the lives of those young men who attend it - to provide them with an experience strong in its impact on what they are, what they think and say and do, and how they think and say and do it. It is a college which commands affection and loyalty and, at its best, is a lifelong inspiration to its graduates to seek to become something better than they are. If ever this college becomes just another place where young men may go to receive a degree; if ever

it seems likely to lose its sense of special mission; then you must do whatever you can to see that its leadership is changed to those who will know and believe in that special mission. If ever this college becomes one in which you can take no pride, if it seems to be losing its way, to be drifting with the educational tides; if ever its graduates seem to be young men cynical about the college, about learning itself and about human life and its terrible importance, then you must do what you can to revive here what we so earnestly hope you have found here in these four years.

It might be presumptuous to say that it is important to this country and to the world that Wabash College survive and prosper, that there continues to be provided here in Crawfordsville, Indiana, what George Kendall in the college catalogue has described as a "robust environment and intellectual opportunities fitted to help able boys to live four strenuous and agreeable years of their lives while becoming informed and self-reliant young men."

It may not be important to the world, but it should always be important to a Wabash man.

And on this, your last day as a student at this college, in this last meeting with your friends and your teachers, you might commit yourself to its strong and abiding importance to you. If the fate of this college is not important to you, to whom then is it important?