Speech at the graduation ceremony for the sixth-year Humanities[1] classes at the Instituto Nacional. December 1956[2]

Mr. Principal, teachers, young students:

The Instituto's administration, in accordance with the unbreakable rule of rotation, has entrusted me with the honorable mission of expressing the teachers' sentiments at this farewell ceremony for the sixth-year students.

Rather than [giving] a speech, I would like my words to take the form of an after-dinner conversation.

The aim of humanistic education is to shape the individual. It receives the student as a child and sends them forth at the height of adolescence. They arrive here with the essential foundations for beginning to exercise their intellect; they leave the Liceo[3] equipped with a basic yet broad view of the world and its affairs, which enable them to chart their course along life's paths.

Rather than merely acquiring a wealth of specialized knowledge, you, young students, have been here cultivating your various natural aptitudes through practice, learning to seek, know, and love the truth, accustoming yourselves to voluntary submission to discipline; in short, shaping and developing your personalities.

You should not, therefore, judge your time at the Instituto by the amount of knowledge you retain in your memory, but by the ability you have acquired to use your reason and your will, to understand and grasp things, to seek the truth with enthusiasm, to overcome your base desires and be masters of yourselves, and to be inspired by everything great and beautiful that the Universe offers to humanity.

This is what you have gradually acquired throughout your studies in the Humanities. And you will be held accountable to the society that has shaped you for the use you make of this foundation.

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[1] A national newspaper (whose name is unknown, as it is not listed in the worn copy preserved by the Patricio Aylwin Foundation) published this speech that Patricio Aylwin delivered to the students graduating from the Instituto Nacional (National Institute) in 1956, under the title "Farewell Voices." The exact date of the ceremony is unknown. Before reproducing his words, the newspaper notes: "By Professor Patricio Aylwin A." Aylwin was a teacher at this educational institution from 1946 to 1963, teaching Civics and Political Economy.

[2] Translator's note: In the Chilean educational system, until 1965, primary grades were six years of compulsory schooling and six years of optional secondary education called Bachillerato or Humanidades (Baccalaureate or Humanities).

[3] A *liceo* is a public secondary school, equivalent to a high school in the United States or a secondary school in the United Kingdom.

You must fully understand the responsibility that rests upon you. Chile expects you to be socially useful individuals; “well-rounded individuals” open to all the concerns of your time, knowledgeable about and committed to advancing the progress achieved by science and technology, and not individuals motivated by selfishness or excessive specialization.

The mainly economic pressures of modern life often lead people to shut themselves away in the small world of their material concerns, where the spirit has almost no place. Immersed in their daily tasks, the voices of the world do not reach their ears; the suffering of others bounces off their outer shell; the human tide flows pass on their side without even touching their skin.

Nothing could be more serious than this atomization of society caused by the unchecked pursuit of individual selfishness.

Humanity needs people with great ideals. “He who lives without an ideal,” Maritain has said, “is scarcely a man.” To live as a human being, one must live for something other than oneself; one must be capable of great enthusiasm and great self-sacrifice; one must know how to be inspired by the joy of knowledge, by the delight in beauty, and by the power of ideas; one must know how to give oneself fully and freely out of love.

I cannot hide from you a certain degree of disappointment that overwhelms me regarding many of you. When I have presented topics specific to my field, I have seemed to detect a lack of interest, a regrettable indifference toward matters of importance to Chile: its geography, its history, its problems. It has seemed to me—I hope I am mistaken—that your concerns fly too low, at the level of material desires, of the pursuit of comfort and pleasure. If this is true, it would signify a premature aging from which you must correct yourselves if you wish to save your generation for history.

Ortega y Gasset has spoken of the “daddy’s boy” or “satisfied young gentleman” as a figure representative of our time. He is the one who receives life as a gift and not as a task; the one who expects everything to be handed to him on a silver platter and is incapable of doing anything on his own.

Beware of being mere “daddy’s little boys.” Remember that the more you have been given, the more obligated you are to give your very best in order to surpass yourselves. Demand respect for your “rights,” but, at the same time, be fully aware of your “duties” and be diligent in fulfilling them.

“Irresponsibility” is, in my view, the most serious of our national problems. It is a kind of indifference according to which it would make no difference whether one does things right or wrong. “So-so” and “just in case” are expressions that abound among us, indicative of a state of moral decay. The result is the tremendous “mediocrity” in which we are mired: mediocre governments, mediocre officials, mediocre professionals…

Have you ever stopped for a moment to think about what this means?

Chile is falling behind among the nations of the Americas. Our production is insufficient, expensive, and of poor quality. Our public works projects are at a standstill. Our own education system—once

the pride of Chileans for more than half a century—has not progressed in the way its rank allowed to expect for pedagogy in Latin America.

I would like to share with you this "pain of Chile" that tears at my heart. I would like to see you fired up by the most enthusiastic patriotic calling—one that does not consist of flags, songs, or military marches, much less vain pride or rivalries with neighboring countries, but rather in a full sense of responsibility toward that ongoing endeavor that is a nation; in the ability to feel its problems, to set aside our selfishness, and to give everything we possibly can to shape the country's future; to each do our "task" well, because what a nation becomes will depend on what each of its children does.

In a few more days, you will receive your Bachillerato in Humanities. This Bachillerato diploma will open doors to the freedom you have long desired. Whether you go on to university or enter the workforce, know that a "freer" stage of life is beginning for you than the one you are leaving behind.

Without a doubt, it is very likely that you will face fewer external "restrictions." Especially in college, you may not be called on in class or tested daily. But be careful! Freedom does not mean "doing whatever we want." You must know how to use freedom to deserve and preserve it. If, just because no one is monitoring me, I do not study, do not try, or skip classes, I will be a poor student, unworthy of that freedom, and I will end up failing the year.

Do not forget: "Freedom is the ability to decide our actions in accordance with the dictates of right reason." And this is what constitutes man's mastery over himself, which is his distinctive and superior trait: the capacity to conform his actions to the rational dictates of his intellect, and not merely to the lower forces of his instincts or passions.

There is a parable in the Gospel that is worth recalling at this moment. A man had three servants. As he was about to go on a journey, he gathered them together and gave each one some coins, called talents. When he returned some time later, he asked the servants what they had done with them. Two showed him the profits or returns they had obtained from their investment; but the third said to him, "Sir, I was afraid of losing the talent you gave me, and so as not to lose it, I dug a hole in the ground and hid it there, safe and sound. Here it is." And the master praised the conduct of the first two and censured the last one.

Talents are the special aptitudes, abilities, and personal worth that God has given to each of you. In your homes and in your studies at the Instituto, you must have developed and nurtured them!

As you leave the Instituto, we, your teachers, wholeheartedly hope that you will continue to cultivate your talents and that you will not be timorous or selfish in using them. May you know how to make use of them not only to secure your own well-being and a dignified, independent place in society, but also—and very especially—to do good, to spread beauty, to bring about justice, and to contribute through your generous efforts to building a better Chile for all Chileans and a better humanity for all people.