



# The Rotary News

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## COACH JOHN ERICKSON — BASKETBALL 1967-1968

John Erickson, Head Basketball Coach, University of Wisconsin, will be the guest speaker for the Rotary Club of Madison next Wednesday noon at the Hotel Loraine.

Starting his ninth year as Head Basketball Coach at Wisconsin, Erickson is a native of Rockford, Illinois, where he prepped at East High before entering Beloit College where he became the first player in Beloit's history to score over 1000 points in a career. He won nine major awards in basketball and tennis at Beloit, where he earned a B.A. degree. Before graduating in 1949 he was selected to the All-Conference teams for three consecutive seasons and was team captain in his junior and senior years.

John began his coaching career at Beloit College following graduation, serving as freshman basketball and varsity tennis coach. He served two years as basketball and golf coach at Stevens Point High. His 1952 team took second place in the State Tournament. He coached at Beloit High for the 1952-53 season and that team won a berth in the State Tournament. He served in the Army the next two years as a recreational specialist and athletic coach, then took over the basketball and tennis coaching job at Lake Forest College, Ill. In May 1958 Erickson was appointed as a full-time assistant Basketball Coach at the University of Wisconsin and was named Head Basketball Coach in 1959.

Make certain you are on hand next Wednesday to hear Coach Erickson report on "Basketball 1967-1968."

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## THANKSGIVING — HOLIDAY OR HOLY DAY?

Address by Rabbi Manfred Swarsensky, of Temple Beth El  
Rotary Club of Madison, November 22, 1967, Hotel Loraine

At a time when Thanksgiving has become largely a day for food, fun and football, it is well to remember that the Pilgrim Fathers celebrated Thanksgiving not as a holiday but as a holy day. Steeped in Biblical faith, these sturdy pioneers were conscious of their dependence upon a Power greater than they. Their attitude was all the more remarkable in view of the hardships and the privations they had experienced during their first year on American soil.

The world in which the Pilgrims lived is no longer our world. The 346 years between the Thanksgiving of 1621 and ours today, have seen undreamed-of changes. The political, economic and industrial revolutions which have swept the Western world, has changed the face of this country. The intellectual and scientific revolutions have changed our outlook on life. To suggest to modern man that he exists, as the Pilgrims believed, by the Grace of God, is almost felt to be an insult to his intelligence, the prevailing secular philosophy of life sees man as the master and the measure of all things.

This changed attitude explains why it is hard for modern man to be truly grateful. Gratitude is an emotion born out of man's humble recognition of his dependence upon forces greater than he: the power of a gracious God, the mysterious

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## THANKSGIVING

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Forces of the Universe, the accumulated wisdom of the ages, the toil of generations past. As the poet George W. Russel said: "A thousand ages toiled for thee."

In our time, Thanksgiving is more an occasion for self-praise and self-congratulation than for praising the real Maker and Master of things.

This change in attitude toward life may be inevitable. Its consequences are many and far-reaching. We have come to take Life, including the blessings showered upon us, for granted as if we had a rightful claim to them. Little wonder that the No. 1 problem of our generation is the problem of the meaninglessness of life.

We are, it is said, alienated from life, estranged from ourselves. Even the affluent society has not answered the problems of a generation that has increasingly become cynical about life. With more to live on than any generation before us, we have less to live for. We have become such a nervous, restless generation that we need pep pills by day and sleeping pills at night. We are so much on edge all the time that even sermons on Sunday mornings can no longer put us to sleep. Our situation is very like the situation of the man caught in a railroad tunnel. The victim is too far from either end of the tunnel, the home or the hope. He can see neither the light at the beginning of the tunnel nor the light at the end.

This sense of meaninglessness and cynicism is attributable to many causes. Chief among them is our loss of the sense of wonder and awe regarding the amazing phenomenon of life itself.

The child learns and feels his way into life by wondering about things which the adult takes for granted. It is the same attitude of questing which makes the scholar, the scientist, the poet, the artist, and the religious person. To wonder, Plato says, is the beginning of living and thinking.

"Absolutely incredible," writes Kirby Page, "is the way we walk through life, with head down, lowered eyes and unheeding ears. In the presence of a veritable miracle we stand as unblinking as an old cow in the meadow."

Emerson in one of his essays reminds us that if the stars would appear one night in a 1,000 years, how we would believe and adore and preserve for generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown. But because the stars always shine at night, even when hidden by clouds, most of us rarely give them more than a fleeting glance.

In a similar vein Thoreau said that "if the sight of a flaming maple tree in full

color should be seen only once in time, the memory of it would be handed down by tradition until it became shrined in the mythology of the race. Or if a man were granted in his lifetime but one unhurried view of the glory of sunset the recollection of it would be treasured all his days.

Or, if a husband knew that merely in a single day he would be blessed with the love of his wife and children, he would indelibly would that experience be burned into his memory.

A national survey of the personal and social attitude and aspirations of adolescent girls undertaken by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research reveals that only one out of five of the girls could recall every having had an experience that created in her a sense of "wonder or awe." It seems that the deeper man's mind penetrates the mystery of life, the more firmly man believes he has established his dominion over the earth, the more he loses his sense of wonder. If nothing can arouse our sense of wonder and awe, the sense of gratitude is crowded out of our lives. Thanksgiving becomes a mere holiday and loses its spiritual quality. There is a real need for recovering the sense of wonder so as to take the dimness of our soul away.

Among the things we take most for granted is not only the phenomenon of life itself, but our very own existence. As a rule, we grow aware of the unique gift of life only when death shocks us out of the routine of being. It is a speculation but a very real biological possibility that we would never have seen the light of the world, that we would never have tasted the savor of life. Would it have been possible that we be asked, whether we wanted to live or not, I am convinced that, if such an option was possible, every single one of us would have answered: Give me life. We would not want to miss this unique experience. So strong is the life instinct within us that most people are willing to spend their last nickel just to stay alive another day. If this is indicative of how deeply we cherish life, then it should follow that we do not take life for granted but regard it as the greatest unearned privilege.

And, even tragedies—and what life has not its share of them—could not mar our appreciation of life nor defeat us, as they often do.

It is not surprising to find ingratitude among those who are favored most. The Pilgrims' gratitude rose from the fact that they had little. Gratitude does not depend on how much we have but on our inner attitude. We can be as happy and as unhappy as we want to be. Our lives can be as interesting or uninteresting

we want it to be. If our personality is warped, if we are miserable inside, we will see life as a dreary affair. If our attitude is affirmative and appreciative, we will see light and hope in life and say, not only when the going is good, but at all times: It is good to be alive. Can we make this affirmation also in regard to living in our time. The Pilgrims' view of history is essentially different from ours. They held the Biblical view according to which human history is the unfolding of God's purposes, not of man's design. Today, it seems, we are closer to the Greek view of history which see in the shifting panorama of history the work of the blind, uncontrolled and uncontrollable forces of a Greek tragedy. This is not surprising. The tensions, the perils, the convulsions of our era are frightening. There are times when we are haunted by anxiety that man in his foolishness and his fury may blow himself off the globe, and write finis under the whole human enterprise. It is tragic indeed that during 92% of all recorded history man has been engaged in shedding blood; the tragedy is compounded by the fact that we are constantly fighting the wrong enemy. Instead of fighting the real enemies of all mankind—hunger, disease, ignorance—we are always fighting people.

It is wisely ordained that we do not have a choice as to the time in which he wants to live. We would be hard pressed to decide the era into which we would like to be born. I have heard people say that, if they had had a choice, they would like to have lived during the period between 1880 and 1930. This was a time when living was less complex, when the Western man was buoyed up by the implicit faith in the inevitability of progress, when our country was moving into the position of the unchallenged leadership among the nations, when the issues were clearer and life was securer.

But were they really? Let me read a paragraph from an article in "Harper's Weekly": It is a gloomy moment in history. Not in the lifetime of most men has there been so much grave and deep apprehension; never has the future seemed so incalculable as at this time. The political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty; Russia hangs, as usual, like a cloud, dark and silent upon the horizon of Europe, while all the energies, resources, and influences of the British Empire are sorely tried, and are yet to be tried more sorely, in coping with its disturbed relations in China. It is a solemn moment, and of our own troubles no man can see the end." This article was written not in November 1967, but one hundred and ten years ago, in November 1857.

A wise man once said: "Never say that the former times were better than yours." A study of history will reveal that, with all our tragic involvements, from which there is no easy way out, we cannot overlook the fact that our era is not only full of anxiety but also full of hope. Arnold Toynbee, the now aged British historian, said that our era will be remembered in the annals of history not just for the bitter East-West conflict nor for having produced the Atom bomb, but for having made the welfare of all, rather than that of the few its major concern.

Indeed, one cannot be blind to the enormous advances of our age, not only in expanding the frontiers of knowledge but also in the growing yearning of men to find ways for peaceful existence and mutual helpfulness.

When the history of our time will be written, our age may possibly be called the Age of Dialogue. It is easy to grow cynical about the United Nations. But the Dialogue which has begun between the Nations should neither be minimized nor abandoned. In a world which has constantly grown smaller, with everyone being everyone's neighbor, it is indispensable that lines of communications between people be opened and be kept open. "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come," as Victor Hugo said. We see such dialogue emerging between the religions of the world, which until very recent times have not been on speaking terms, with everyone busy confessing the sins of others. This is different now and will hopefully lead to a new era in human relations. We see the beginning of dialogue between the races which up until recently have lived in not so splendid isolation. If some of our contemporaries could only understand that there is no short-cut to the millenium, that force cannot build the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, I am confident that greater justice will come to those who so long had been denied a place in the sun. Certainly the results of recent elections held in several cities and many other developments point in this direction. But in this exciting and hopeful age no one can afford the luxury of sitting on the sidelines and letting the world go by. Solon, the Athenian Lawgiver, said that justice can be effected only if those who are not wronged feel as deeply as those who are. Only if we personally and actively identify ourselves with the great humane aspirations of our time, can we truly say: It is good to be alive. We are grateful to be born into an age which, with all its anxiety, is yet so full of hope.

Not only to live and to be alive in this

age is cause for gratitude, but also to be an American today.

Like most of use here, I belong, to the generation to which no one listens any more because we old-timers, over 30, supposedly no longer understand the spirit of our time and we are particularly out of tune with the aspirations of the younger generation.

It may be true that the generation gap has never been deeper. I am willing to admit that there are times when I find it difficult to understand the antics in the behavior of young people. Yes, I concede that there are times when I am thoroughly disgusted with those who want more freedom and power without being willing to assume the corresponding responsibilities which alone make freedom possible. Yes, at times, I am outright angry at those who are ready to stage their sit-ins, lie-ins, love-ins, as long as papa is willing to keep up his pay-ins. Had we not already an overabundance of organizations, I would start a new one, the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Parents." But, I must also concede that I feel a deep sense of compassion for young people growing up at a time so fraught with uncertainty and restlessness as ours. Much that annoys us in their attitude and behavior is, I suppose, their conscious or unconscious protest against the contradictions, the incongruities, the shams in society, the dehumanization of human relations, the reduction of the individual to a number in a giant computer society, caught in a treadmill of goods-getting and obsessed with the exorcism of psychological and ideological demons.

However, understanding the restlessness and the discontent in the minds and hearts of the growing generation, does in no way mean that we should ever condone a spirit of nihilism and anarchy which would ultimately destroy life of the individual as well as the fabric of American society. The polarization of our society in an Irresponsible Right and an Irresponsible Left is the one real peril to our society. Such development would squeeze out and immobilize the old-time Liberal and the old-time Conservative who have been the backbone of our nation.

Thanksgiving should be a time for remembering the toil and sacrifices that have gone into building this country which has, more than any other country in history, in larger measure succeeded in finding the necessary balance between Freedom and Authority, so indispensable for the democratic process.

We Americans are today the two percent of the world's most fortunate people, not only because of our unparalleled

material blessings, but also, and even more so, because virtually for the first time in history the principles of freedom, equality and justice have been made the foundation of a nation which has stood as a beacon for the rest of the world.

No outside enemy can do more harm to us than we can do to ourselves. There is no doubt that we have lost some of the original spirit of those who built this Republic to where it is today. Material advantages, desirable as they are, have become a way of making people soft, lethargic, even parasitic. For some people, nothing is harder to bear than a succession of good days.

We cannot close our eyes to dangers which bode ill for the health of our society. There is a growing tendency toward acceptance of irresponsibility as a way of life; there is disrespect for honest work and authority. There is impatience in this "Now-Generation" which has been called, which, raised on Instant Foods, wants instant solutions to all problems, and it is unwilling to postpone pleasures. There is an obsession with sex the like the world has not seen since the days before the decline of the Roman Empire. There is an increasing trend toward making the "Playboy Philosophy" of hedonism and pleasure the end-all of life. There is talk that we need a "New Morality" which, in reality, is nothing but the old immorality. There is talk that "God is Dead" when, in actuality, I am afraid, man is dead. What has died in us, are the very spirit and the very values which Thanksgiving calls to our mind, namely the consciousness of our dependence upon forces infinitely greater than we—the unearned Grace of God, the accumulated wisdom of the Ages, the toil of generations—and our never-ending sense of gratitude for these things.

The world of the Pilgrims is no longer our world. We could not go back to it even if we wanted to.

But the recollection of the first Thanksgiving of 1621 can have meaning for us in 1967, if we learned again to be grateful for the simple things in life which are the most priceless blessings: life and health, home and love and friendship, the privilege to give of ourselves and the determination to make our country and the world a better place so that our children and our children's children may be proud of us, as we are proud and grateful to those who have gone before us.

If we would add this spiritual dimension to our lives, Thanksgiving could be for us, as it was for the men of Plymouth Rock, not merely a holiday, but a holy day.