


Remarks of Former Governor David L. Lawrence  
Tree of Life Centennial Banquet  
Penn-Sheraton Hotel, Pittsburgh, Pa.  
7:30 p.m., Sunday, January 24, 1965

This anniversary we commemorate  
tonight, like most anniversaries, is a  
moment of rejoicing, a time to honor the  
past and an hour of rededication to the  
principles and the articles of faith  
which have made possible our gathering  
together in celebration and in tribute.

I am both humbled and honored  
to be part of that observance. I am  
humbled, as are all children of God, to  
join in recognition of a century of ser-  
vice to Him, service of loving faith and

of constant devotion. I am honored, as a Pittsburgher and an American, to take part in celebrating a hundred years of human progress and community advancement in which this Congregation has played a significant role and made tremendous contributions. I am honored, also, because I have lived not only to see the growth of the Congregation, but to know, as well, hundreds of its members whose lives have left lasting imprints of good works and strong deeds upon this city and the nation we love.

 Founded during the fire of civil conflict, the Congregation has lived through war and famine, panic and disaster, turmoil and torment, to be, today, on the threshold of a Great Society which

now we seek for our own country and for  
mankind throughout the world.

Its physical growth and move-  
ment, like the rings of a tree, are  
indicators of community change and growth.  
The advancement of its members, from the  
day of exile and stranger to this era  
of leadership and respect, is symbolic  
of the great social progress in a nation  
of justice, <sup>Union and</sup> liberty and ~~union~~.

Surely, our first obligation  
today is to offer a prayer of thanksgiving  
to Almighty God for having made this  
possible, for having given the guidance  
and provided the wisdom without which  
the joyousness of this event and the  
meaning of this day could never have been



realized.

But we come here, as well,  
fully aware that God's work has not yet  
been done, knowing there lies ahead new  
challenge to our wisdom and severe testing  
of our faith. So with our thanksgiving  
must also be our supplication for con-  
tinued strength and abiding wisdom that  
we may walk erectly along the path of  
pleasantness and peace, further advancing  
the lot of man while always conscious  
of the Fatherhood of God -- and grateful  
for it.

7 The world ahead must seem, to  
even the most visionary and courageous, a  
strange and perplexing thing to contemplate.

We are moving out of our element to the  
moon, and the horizons of the human  
potential extend farther and longer than  
ever before. Yet, to those founders of  
the Tree of Life in the summer of 1864,  
the world of today would exceed their  
imagination and abuse their credibility.  
I speak not only of the physical change  
all about us, contrasted to the stark  
and crude world of the American Civil  
War. I speak, as well, of the more  
meaningful side of human life, of the  
dignity of man, of the opportunity that  
is his, of the growth of understanding,  
and the deepening of respect, one for  
the other.

Surely this is the true measure  
of these past hundred years, just as its  
extension will be the test and the  
challenge of the years that are before  
us.

# 1

There are among us those who are  
exile and stranger, fewer proportionately  
than in 1864, but still here in this land  
of wealth and compassion. There are  
still those who hunger from want and suffer  
from untended illness, less than in years  
gone past, but still here in a society of  
refinement and affluence. There are still  
among us those whose potentials are stunted  
both by design and neglect, in a land  
founded on the principle that all men  
are created equal and in a world of un-

bounded possibilities.

We serve not to honor the past  
by merely counting our blessings, as real  
and as welcome as they are.

Rather, we honor the past by  
an act of rededication and a spirit of  
determination, knowing we have not yet  
achieved the best of all possible worlds,  
but sure in our capacity to seek out  
that goal as an article of faith and  
a commitment of purpose.

Our era on this globe surely  
must be one of the most exciting and  
demanding ever presented to a generation  
of mankind. Our knowledge has produced  
powerful instruments for public good and,

conversely, for human destruction. The  
yearnings of centuries now become practi-  
cal and achievable, while accomplishments  
previously undreamed become reality with  
every passing day. Civilization, in its  
highest sense, can now flower in an  
abundance and a beauty never before  
imagined.

But this is no gift, anymore  
than the founding and growth of the Tree  
of Life was an easy or simple accomplish-  
ment. It is a hope and a promise, whose  
fulfillment will be achieved or denied by  
the hearts and minds and acts of man. It  
is, as the Talmud says, the deed and not  
the theory which is the important thing.



Just as this bright world we  
seek will come not as a gift, neither  
will it develop by the deeds of a few  
or the actions of some others, far away  
and standing alone. It falls on all,  
on all of society, on all of America,  
on all of this Congregation if its  
roots are to be firm and its foliage bounti-  
ful.

Indeed, the President himself,  
holding the world's greatest office of  
power and influence, spoke of this in  
both the opening and concluding paragraphs  
of his Inaugural address last Wednesday when  
he said "Our fate as a nation and our  
future as a people rests not upon one

citizen but upon all citizens." Then before repeating the prayer of King Solomon he asked us all to "look within your own hearts to the old promises and to the old dream because they will lead you best of all."

Let no one shirk his own responsibility because of growing complexities of the age in which we live. The Great Society does not demand that we all become computer experts or astronauts probing the silent vastness of outer space. Every human being can contribute understanding of his fellow man, and concern for his well-being. Every person can help advance it by acts of kindness and compassion. Every action

which first considers the other person rather than one's selfish desires helps plow the field in which a great society can take root and grow to harvest.

For what is the symbolism of the tree of life? It connotes not strength and might, but wisdom and inner power.

And that wisdom and inner power has its source in every man, great and lowly, to be used for the constructive and the good, in small acts as well as in historic deeds.

I spoke of the excitement and the demands which today's world presents to this generation of humanity. Think back, not in terms of centuries or

decades but in months and years, and  
reflect on some of the great accomplish-  
ments of recent time. In all likelihood  
the history of this era will stand high  
in the chapters of our civilization.

One of its brightest sections will be  
the Ecumenical spirit generated by the  
wisdom of a wise man, old in years, who  
reflected the wisdom of the Talmud which  
points out that the older we are, the  
more unselfish is the act of planting a  
tree.

That ecumenical movement was  
long discussed by many people but it  
came into being by the initiative and  
the wisdom -- the inner strength -- of

Pope John, about whom your spiritual  
leader and my dear friend, Rabbi Hailperin,  
has written with such moving perception.  
And while the spirit of that movement  
has not come to full flower, the bonds  
of understanding it has produced are  
everywhere to be seen. The world and  
all who inhabit it share in the increasing  
sense of brotherhood which is one of its  
manifestations.

While the genesis for the move-  
ment came from one man, its fulfillment  
into true meaning depends upon many. And  
with that fulfillment we help reach  
closer toward the world we seek, where  
understanding uproots suspicion, respect  
supercedes fear, love overcomes hate.

In a very real sense this is  
the kind of world this Congregation has  
helped to achieve during the past hundred  
years. The cause has been served by  
many, from spiritual leaders to the  
members themselves, and it has remained  
steady as a goal when the Congregation  
moved from its humble beginnings down-  
town, to its more impressive home in  
Oakland, and now to its magnificent  
synagogue and sanctuary in Squirrel Hill.

For more than a third of its  
history, it has been blessed with the  
intellectual brilliance and the spiritual  
purity of a great leader and teacher,  
who has consoled the saddened and the

wearry and helped inspire the strong and the  
able to keep the way of the Tree of Life.

No proper observance of this  
kind can fail to note, with gratitude  
and deep and sincere affection, the  
service of Rabbi Hailperin to this  
Congregation and to the community whose  
citizenship we proudly share.

# → On this day, as in so much of  
life, when we try to find fitting and  
appropriate means to express our feelings  
and to articulate our hopes and aspirations,  
we find that no one can improve upon the  
ancient teachings and the written words  
which give guidance to our religious  
beliefs and meaning to the real purpose

of human life.

And so it is that I would turn,  
for my concluding contribution to this  
time of celebration, to the Book of  
Proverbs, and the familiar verse of its  
third chapter:

"Happy is the man that findeth  
wisdom, and the man that getteth under-  
standing:

"For the merchandise of it is  
better than the merchandise of silver  
and the gain thereof than fine gold.

"She is more precious than rubies:  
and all the things thou canst desire are  
not to be compared unto her.

"Length of days is in her right



hand; and in her left hand riches and honor.

"Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

"She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her."

END