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Vessels of Honor

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Convocation Address

by B. J. Haan
President



Rev. Haan received his Th.B. degree from Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Prior to coming to Dordt in 1959 as its first College President, he served as pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center for many years.

Vessels of Honor

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. II Timothy 2: 19-26.

I want to extend a hearty welcome to the new members on our faculty, to the 450 who are enrolled at Dordt College for the first time and, of course, also to the 650 who have returned to continue their studies here. And we are delighted to have so many visitors at our convocation service. We sincerely hope and pray that Dordt may always be a place to which our friends among God's people love to come and where they experience a genuine feeling of belonging.

Tonight Dordt College enters its 23rd year. The beginning of each year has had its particular significance and interest. However, I think it can honestly be said that there is something of extra or special excitement, anticipation, and significance as we start our 23rd year. One gets the

impression that somehow in a more noticeable way so many good things have quite suddenly come, as we say, into their own. What the Dordt community all these years has prayed and labored for has not only been more fully realized, but also is more widely recognized and appreciated. So much so that never before has Dordt found itself in such a strong and strategic position to fulfill its consciously adopted role, as a Christian, Calvinistic higher educational institution, both on campus, among our constituents, and in society generally.

What is it that gives us the assurance that Dordt has suddenly more fully come into its own? Three things come quickly to our minds. For one thing we have gained the reputation in academic circles as being a truly solid, serious, and qualified higher

educational institution. The name Dordt stands for something that is respected in the eyes of academicians. They may not in many cases appreciate our educational philosophy but they do recognize and honor the way in which we go about the business of academic training. It is a joy to be able to move about with self-respect among the educators of our land. And this, of course, is a distinct advantage for the students and graduates of Dordt College.

Secondly, because of what Dordt stands for, is striving to accomplish, and has already achieved, it has found favor among the young covenant members of the church of Jesus Christ. We like to believe that the spectacular increase in enrollment indicates this. Young people are getting to hear about us. They learn from our graduates and our students. Apparently they like what they see and hear. They sense in what is going on at this place something basic and meaningful for our times. A host of things contribute to their gaining a good impression. They see Dordt moving out in front to give guidance and leadership not only to the students but to all God's people and to society in general. The manner in which we expand our programs, the way in which we tackle and discuss issues, the interest we take in world problems and the action we engage in to bring our witness to the world, these things are getting through. A good example of what I am trying to say can be found in the International Christian Political Conference sponsored by Dordt College. It's not only the fact of the conference but the spirit and philosophy behind and involved in it that catches the interest and curiosity of the youth. For, by God's grace, Dordt does go about its business with understanding and conviction based upon a clear, biblical, Calvinistic world and life view. Dordt's philosophy of life and action carries with it an authentic ring.

Thirdly, our constituents everywhere throughout Canada and the U.S.A. are becoming more impressed with Dordt, appreciate our college, and expect leadership from us in the promotion and advancement of our rich Calvinistic heritage. While they sense the spiritual darkness of our times enveloping them on all sides, they see Dordt College as one of the lights to shine

amidst that darkness. Many of the parents are sending their sons and daughters to this institution because they believe in us and the principles upon which we operate and teach. Not only so, but our constituents stand ready to give us all we need to be a strong Christian, Calvinistic college. They want us to do everything possible in as many areas as possible in order to strengthen and expand our witness and influence. Being a vital and strategic center of biblical Reformed action they are eager to invest heavily in this institution. Our present campaign for funds to build our chapel-music center is an excellent example. Do not think for one moment that our people are giving so freely and cheerfully simply because they like to see a nice chapel on campus. We find in the generous and eager support all across the country a loud shout of appreciation and a vigorous call and encouragement to keep up the good fight of faith. God's people look at their contributions to Dordt as an investment in an institution which honors the Lordship of Jesus Christ according to their convictions. These people really believe in God's covenantal faithfulness and are deeply grateful that Dordt share that conviction. In other words, Dordt is to these people an answer to their spiritual needs and concerns, an answer to their hopes, their understanding of life, their fervent prayers.

Now whenever God's people place that kind of trust in an institution and throw out that kind of challenge, then that institution better be mighty sure that it does not shirk its high obligation and responsibility. And we do not intend to shirk our duty. I want to call upon each administrator, each faculty member, and each student to take the challenge of God's people extremely seriously. Let us not disappoint them. Our times demand strong, sure-footed, spiritual leadership. And no institutions are more strategic in that leadership than the church and the college. In some ways the college is even more strategic than the church in that here the leaders of the church and of society are formed in their basic direction and philosophy of life. For that reason let us not toy with our opportunities, let us not take lightly our responsibilities. We have the means, the talents, the facilities to do the job. Let us prayerfully and

humbly execute it.

There is no better way to assure ourselves and all of God's people that Dordt will be faithful to the Lord than by living consciously out of His Word, the Holy Scriptures. We affirm again and again that the only guide for all of our life on campus is the Bible. And we insist that training covenant youth properly for effective kingdom service can only happen when they are biblically informed and directed. It is therefore in keeping with our sincere desire to honor the Word of our Lord in all things that I hold before you the apostle Paul's words to Timothy recorded in the passage which we read from Scripture. II Timothy 2: 19 ff.

I think that these words are especially fitting as we begin another year of study. What is Paul's desire? That Timothy and all Christians be "meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work." It was particularly important that Timothy strive for this because of his strategic position of leadership. He was to be a teacher of many both in word and by example. Is not that precisely the goal and purpose of our stay here at Dordt College? Think of the profound influence for good or bad that comes from this college, from the teachers and the students. We are leaders and we prepare youth for positions of leadership.

Paul tells Timothy that in a great house there are vessels of honor and dishonor. So too among God's people and even at Dordt College. Some bring disgrace upon God's name, but others praise. He urges Timothy to purge himself from the vessels of dishonor, to become sanctified, set apart, for the Master's use. Who are these vessels of dishonor, what characterizes them? They are the teachers of the lie, of unrighteousness. Both their philosophy and their life are a denial of the Word of God. These are disobedient persons. And they bring shame in this world. They dishonor the Lord and His people. Outwardly they belong to God's house but actually they serve the devil's purpose.

But then how are we to be and remain vessels of honor? Paul minces no words on this score. Two basic demands are laid down. First, "flee youthful lusts and follow after righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a

pure heart." We have not the time to develop the ideas present in these words. But one thought strikes us as being very significant. It is the plea to stay close to those who truly love the Lord, who call to Him out of a pure heart. If you and I choose the right friends and are in the right company there will be little danger of serving our youthful lusts. Then we will be encouraged to pursue the nobler and far more profitable virtues of life. Most students who failed at Dordt, whose lives were a dishonor to the college, did so because of the company of friends they sought and joined.

The second demand of Paul is most interesting and so important. He warns Timothy against "foolish and ignorant questionings" because he knows that these only bring strife. No really good thing comes out of bickering over petty matters. Rather it breaks down the climate and atmosphere necessary for the accomplishment of the big things in life. Where un consequential and cheap issues get the attention, the possibility of effective teaching is seriously curtailed. To change person's lives, to mold them in the way of repentance and righteousness, to save them from the devil's snare, requires gentleness and meekness, not the proud, "smart-alec" majoring-in-minors spirit and demeanor.

This advice of Paul is especially appropriate for us engaged in academic life. Strangely yet actually educational institutions are easily prey to the very thing Paul is concerned about. Educators and students so readily bicker about and carry on endless harangues over piddily issues. Meanwhile the grand and glorious task and opportunity to influence persons for greater and nobler service by wrestling with the big issues sadly suffers. Let us make doubly certain that Dordt College is not characterized by such a pattern of debate and discussion.

Finally, we have a wonderful assurance and comfort as we go forth. Paul states it this way: "The firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His." If we sincerely want to depart from unrighteousness because we carry the Lord's name in our hearts, nothing shall separate us from His love and care. And we shall, indeed, serve Him as vessels of honor.