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Convocation

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"Convocation"

John B. Hulst
President of Dordt College



John B. Hulst is the second President of Dordt College. For several years he was Editor of Pro Rege. He has also served as Campus Pastor, Dean of Students, Instructor in Bible and head of the Dordt College Studies Institute.

Greetings, and a hearty welcome to all of you.

This meeting, with which we begin the 1982-83 academic year, is called "convocation." The meaning of the word is quite obvious. It comes from two Latin words, *cum* and *vocare*; and in combination these words mean "to call together."

This indeed is what is happening here this evening—you are being called, you are being brought together. A few days ago almost none of you were here. There may have been a few early arrivals, but otherwise this was a very quiet spot. Then suddenly from widely separated locations throughout North America and elsewhere you came, by a variety of means, to this place—the campus

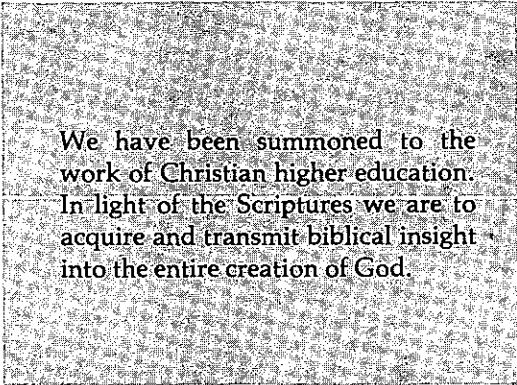
of Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.

Many of you said farewell to family and friends. You may have left some of the most beautiful spots or the most significant cities in the world. You probably passed a number of large and impressive colleges and universities. And, at the price of much time, effort, and money you have come to this place—the campus of Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa.

We're glad you came. This institution could not exist without you. But why? Why Sioux Center? Why Dordt College? Perhaps you were asked the same question when you stopped at a gas station, went through customs, or sat next to a friendly person on an airplane. Why are you going there? And

now that you have arrived you may be asking this question of yourself: "Why have I come here?"

I suppose a number of answers could be given to this question. I suppose too that a number of reasons have attracted you to this place. But ultimately the thing that brings and the thing that keeps you here must be the fact that we have a task to perform, a task given to us by God through Jesus Christ. We have been summoned to the work of Christian higher education. In light of the Scriptures we are to acquire and transmit biblical insight into the entire creation of God. By means of such insight we are to send forth from this campus Christian young men and young women equipped for every good work, prepared to take their place and carry out their tasks in a very complicated world.



We have been summoned to the work of Christian higher education. In light of the Scriptures we are to acquire and transmit biblical insight into the entire creation of God.

Our task at this place is an academic task. Its performance will bring us into and through a number of fields of investigation or courses of study. There will be, first, those courses which focus on the nature and structure of the created order—enabling us to see its coherence in Christ and reminding us that the creation of God is not a chaos but a cosmos. Classes in subjects such as organic chemistry, linguistics, or philosophy will help us in this. There will be, second, those

courses which provide insight into man's cultural activity—qualifying us to evaluate the spirits of this age and to reform all areas of life. The study of history and contemporary problems will aid us in this. There will be, finally, those courses which inquire into the requirements of various vocational and professional tasks—developing within us a proper attitude toward and love for Christian service. Here we have in mind especially the majors and pre-professional programs. All of these courses and programs are designed to provide us with Christian insight and wisdom which will qualify us to serve our Lord.

Reflecting and preparing for Kingdom citizenship by gaining and transmitting insight into all of God's creation! This is Dordt's goal. That is our task and responsibility at this time and in this place.

What we have described up to this point is one single task, one work. However, we contribute to the performance of this task in different ways. There are at Dordt College primarily three groups involved in this one work, i.e., the faculty, the student body, and the administration and staff. (I suppose we could speak of five groups by adding the supporting society and the board of trustees. But they are not here this evening; and, in any case, it is the faculty, student body, and administration which are primarily engaged day-by-day in the work of education.) And each of these groups—faculty, students, and administration—contributes to this one task in a different way.

The *faculty*, which numbers 70 people, by gaining and transmitting insight, is to lead and guide students to a biblical understanding of creation, culture, and calling. The *students*, approximately 1035 of them, by listening, reading, and observing are to work in seeking that understanding. And the administration and staff, which totals 80 men and women, according to the biblical direction set by the board of trustees, is to direct and manage the affairs of the college so that a climate and situation is created in which this search for understanding may ef-

fectively take place.

It should be obvious, on the one hand, that if one of these groups does not fulfill its responsibility, the entire educational enterprise will be frustrated. A lazy or ineffective teacher is an offense to a serious student. An indifferent student truncates the influence of a brilliant teacher. And a fumbling administration may create a climate of chaos in which neither student nor teacher can work effectively.

It should be clear, on the other hand, that all of these groups—faculty, students, and administration—must work together if the one task of the college is to be accomplished. And that is the thing to be emphasized at this convocation, i.e., that *we are called together that we may work together*, in the Name of Jesus Christ.

We assume, first, as members of this Christian academic community, that we are one in Christ. Our very presence here constitutes a testimony to that truth. We are members of the Church, that body chosen by the Father “before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (Ephesians 1:4); purchased by Christ “through his blood. . . in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7); and sealed by “the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Thus in Christ we “are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22). The everywhere-present, all-knowing, all-powerful, eternal Spirit of God is within us. The very Person who brought life to the creation, who prepared and qualified Christ for His work, who teaches and guides the Church into all truth dwells in us. The Spirit which inspired the Apostles, directed the Church Fathers, and strengthened the Reformers abides in us. The Spirit of the One who died on the cross, arose from the grave, ascended into heaven, rules at the right hand of God, and will return on the last day, oc-

cupies our hearts and lives. By virtue of that Spirit we are one. By virtue of that Spirit we are together in Christ.

We acknowledge, second, as members of this Christian academic community, that we are to be directed by “the word of truth” (Ephesians 1:13), by means of which we have been “included in Christ.” This emphasis upon the importance of the inscripturated Word of God has been constant throughout the brief history of Dordt College. In its initial purpose statement, adopted in 1961, it is written that

In the training and development of the redeemed in Christ the Holy Scriptures are basic, since they are indispensable to the proper realization of the individual’s capacities and the proper fulfilling of his responsibilities. All education must be Scripturally oriented.

This same perspective is clearly reflected in Dordt’s most recent statement, adopted in 1979:

As God’s infallibly and authoritatively inspired revelation, the Bible reveals the way to salvation in Jesus Christ, requires life to be lived in obedience to the Lord, and provides the key to the understanding, interpretation, meaning and purpose of life. Only the Bible can unlock the door to a true insight into the nature of created reality. Ultimately all things must be judged in the light of its teachings.

This one, inscripturated Word of God must guide us in all of our activities, especially in all of our academic work. It is only by common allegiance to the Word of God that this community will be kept together. We must be able to count on it that every member of this institution is willing and is trying to submit the entirety of his or her being, teaching, learning, and working to the Word of God. We know from the

Bible and from experience that if we ignore or disobey the Word of God we will be divided—in class, in the dormitory, off-campus, wherever we may be. It is only by bowing together before the demands of that Word that we will remain united. To function in unity professors must teach, students must learn, and administrators must manage—all as servants, ministers of the Word of God.

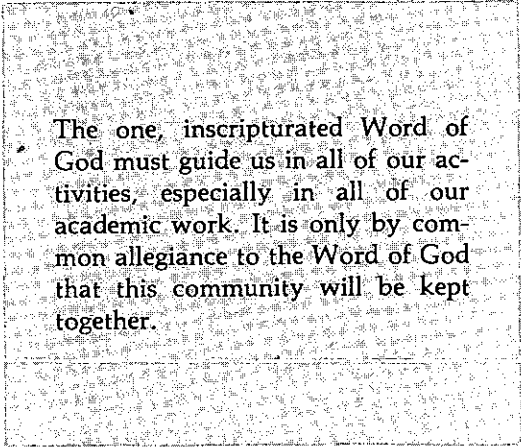
It is often said that the campus of Dordt College is a warm and friendly place. It pleases us, of course, to hear these comments and we hope that this attitude continues to characterize our college. But this friendly attitude is not ultimately what does or will keep us together. As Theodore Platinga says in his book *Rationale for a Christian College*:

The Christian college is on a solid footing in providing community only because of the common faith that brings professors, students, and supporters together, the faith that places the same sense of purpose before all of them. The Christian college should not hold itself out to be a place where the students are a bit more friendly, the professors a bit less cynical, and the expectations regarding behavior a bit more clearly defined. The Christian college is not a haven of ease and comfort but a place to prepare for the challenge of one's calling in life. The common faith and vision will naturally be translated into meaning, purpose and excitement in the classroom. (pp. 82, 83)

Finally, being filled with the Spirit and submitting to the Word of God, we must work together.

We are called together to *work*. Oh indeed there must and will be time for fun, rest, relaxation. But our primary calling is to work. As faculty we must work to understand our fields of investigation; to present informative and stimulating lectures; to

arrange interesting practicums; and to prepare tests which are fair instruments of evaluation. As students we must work regularly to attend and participate in class; to fulfill assignments; and to understand the subject material at hand. Two hours out for every hour in class! Forty-five hour work weeks! As administration and staff in the academic office, in development, in business administration, in student personnel, in maintenance, in the library, in the commons, and in the president's office, we must work hard and faithfully to provide the context in which all here gathered may answer to his or her calling from the Lord.



The one, inscripturated Word of God must guide us in all of our activities, especially in all of our academic work. It is only by common allegiance to the Word of God that this community will be kept together.

In a recent article, entitled "The College in American Education," Dr. Henry S. Commager, of Amherst College, observes:

For almost two centuries now, Americans have committed themselves to the ideal of the prolongation of youth. Students fresh out of some academy or high school were clearly too young to marry, too young for a career, too young to face the grim realities of life. Let them enjoy four golden years in a college where they might pick up some knowledge, some manners, perhaps a patina of culture and a mate. . . . College was to be a

buffer against life; it was to be dedicated to play, to friendship, to love.

you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

(John 13:34,35)

Not so. Again, play and friendship and love may be included, but college—especially a Christian college—is a place where all, including students, are called to work.

We are also called together to *work together*. We have been given one task. Filled with the Spirit and bowing before the Word of God, we must work together in the performance of that task. And the one essential ingredient in this cooperative effort is love—love for God and for one another.

There are many spirits or attitudes which threaten to divide us, such as the assumption of an adversary relationship, a lack of trust, an arrogant desire to advance self, or an absence of mutual respect. If we are directed by such spirits there will be opposition where there should be harmony, suspicion where there should be faith, pride where there should be humility, and cutting criticism where there should be healing support. This attitude, if it develops, will be tragic not simply because it will result in our being unfriendly toward one another, but especially because it will frustrate us in the performance of our God-given task. Conflict, suspicion, pride, and criticism devastate and paralyze the person standing at a lectern, sitting in a carrel, or working out of an office.

The only answer to such threatening spirits is love. Love which expresses itself in subjectivistic sentimentality? No! Rather, love which expresses itself in a desire to obey God and keep His commandments. Love which manifests itself in a willingness to help and assist others in their desire to obey God and keep His commandments. Love which drives a community such as that gathered here to help and support one another in the performance of its one, God-given task. That is why Jesus says to His disciples, His followers:

A new commandment I give you:
Love one another. As I have loved

During this coming year, on and around this campus, there will at one time or another be a *professor* working at his or her desk in the early morning hours trying to clarify a crucial point in a lecture to be given that day. There will be a *student* agonizing over a term paper which was due a week earlier. There will be an *administrator* sitting in an office searching for a way to stretch dollars and balance a departmental budget. There will be a *janitor* rushing about, trying to finish the duties assigned for that day. There will be a *counselor* talking with a student who has a cumulative ACT score in the 95th percentile, but is flunking most of his or her courses. There will be a *development representative* concluding arrangements for a deferred gift and a *recruiter* presenting Dordt College to a class of high school seniors. Unless all of these people—all of us—work with and support one another none of them will be effective. If all of these people—all of us—do work together and support one another in love their individual loads will be lightened and the task of this institution—the task of Christian higher education—will be successfully performed.

Tomorrow the work of this academic year officially begins. Tonight there are persons—faculty, students, and administrators, some of them first time occupants of these positions—who are fearful about tomorrow. If this institution was gripped by the divisive spirit of secularism, their fears would be justified. But because Dordt is being moved by the unifying Spirit of Jesus Christ, their fears are unnecessary. They, along with all of us, are part of a loving and supporting Christian academic community.

No, this is not a time for timid fear; this is a time for confident, united work. In the Name of Jesus Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit and directed by the Word, let us be about our Father's business.