

UNIVERSITY
OF
DALLAS

VALEDICTORY
ADDRESS
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VALEDICTORY

Where should I begin? I've shared much with many of you. My thoughts easily wander away to a time lapse photography sequence of days and years before today. There have been football games and library afternoons, groundhog mornings and term paper nights. We have even had occasion to hit the streets as well as the books, in Irving, in Rome, in Dallas, in Paris. Mostly Irving, though.

But when I was in Paris several spring breaks ago, I happened by the Rodin Museum. And while wandering through there, I came upon "The Thinker", that inspiring bronze man with chin upon fist, bent over in the deepest sort of thought. Ah! The contemplative life. That was for me alright. Just think of the tan you could get. When I finally returned from my Rome-ing around in Europe and got back into our hilltop hangout here, I would amuse myself while walking over to PDQ by remembering that Rodin sculpture. You see for my first couple of years here I could never quite figure out precisely what the Institute of Philosophic Studies was. After seeing "The Thinker", I decided that the Institute must consist of some athletic-looking guy sitting around in a dark dusty room in some removed corner of the Braniff building all day long with his chin on his fist, contemplating impenetrable philosophic questions. Such were the fruits of a liberal arts education, I thought.

Which reminds me of another story. My first semester here an old friend from high school came out to visit. I gave her a tour of the school that admissions would be proud of. By that time I had already been thoroughly indoctrinated into all the wonderful benefits attainable through the pursuit of the liberal arts tradition and I conveyed to her the things I had learned. Well, when I was all through with my sales pitch she said she still could not quite understand what was so great about the liberal arts "condition", as if it was a disease that would lay you up for whole semesters at a time. I gently explained to her that it was a liberal arts tradition, not condition, but I think she missed the point.

The point, my friends, has to do with the ideas, the ideals, and the imagination that have touched us during our stay here. We have learned many things in four years. Perhaps we even still remember some of them. A lot of the details, I suppose, will fade away before too long but I believe we have come a long way towards learning how to think, how to wrestle with ideas and how to submit to those that are bigger than we. I am sure you have read the UD catalog somewhere along your four years here, so you know all about this. We will carry the ideas and imagination of our respective disciplines with us when we leave. Do not get

me wrong, though; I do not say this merely for ideas' sake. Rather, my direction has to do with what follows upon embracing these things.

The world asks, "What does an idea *do* anyway?" I have yet to be able to sell any of mine. I cannot see them, I cannot count them and it is one difficult task to package them up for easier shipping and handling in my mental warehouse. And what about this imagination stuff, too? I think it is sort of like the grass in the backyard that you never get around to mowing: it's just there. But it is not in the front yard and nobody sees it, so that's okay.

Well, ideas do not just lay around waiting for us to think them. They are a way of meeting the world. They illuminate reality, just like the light bulbs blinking above the heads of cartoon characters. They run deeper than speculations, opinions or conceits. Ideas have a way of sparkling when we glance at them, winking when we look at them. They turn our gaze, capture our mind's eye and proceed to show us a path, a passageway into their viewpoint. As such, ideas have something to say. They are calling us to follow.

So what now? We have indeed encountered such provoking ideas in our stay here. We have met the ideas and imagination of our respective disciplines and we have conversed with their request for submerging ourselves into their way of encountering the world. Yet, in a broader sense, our curriculum has shown us a world more profound than any one discipline alone can fully fathom. We have met a community here, too, around the base of the tower and we have learned to share the University with each other. All the while we have lived under the roof of a Christian community, having heard the message of the cross of Christ and having lived amongst the Christian ideals of brotherhood devoid of bickering, pettiness and rivalries, ideals of charity and respect, of love.

The ideas we have encountered here call for a response, a following. Not only do they make us their own, but we make them our own. Our education has consisted of more than just note taking and quote taking. We have to take ideas in, digest them, and come to terms with whatever truths they may contain. We may not always agree with them but our common predicament here on this planet gives us the responsibility to listen to what the world is saying. We have been somewhat removed here at UD, I have been told, but we have not been isolated. The "RW", the real world is close at hand. We did not have to leave UD completely behind in order to go out there.

Which brings me to this: ideas engender actions and actions nurture our ideas. They enjoy a natural intimacy; an essential inseparability. Neither one can be what it is without the other, or else our actions are aimless and wan-

dering and our ideas are without life, without substance. Each springs forth from the other. We cannot entertain one without entertaining its brother. Of course, in various formulations, you have heard all this before. And you know of course that when we leave here you have to carry on with keeping imagination and ideas alive in the world, even if we do end up waiting tables or selling encyclopedias or working in admissions in a year or ten from now. If we had wanted to learn a trade rather than a vocation, then we should have been at a bartending school, right?

Nowhere along the line did we stop being active so as to learn great ideas and encounter imagination; nor are we about to forget ideas and imagination as we enter a world so bent on furious activity. As I said, they travel together. My desire here today has not been to implore you to remember these things in the world. If you have learned of and listened to these things in our years here, you will remember them. If the ideas have so invited us and the imagination so enticed us and the ideals so provoked us as to bring us to a deeper understanding of our world, then these are things we will not forget. No, my desire is to emphasize to you that these things call us to action, action complementing, continuing and remaining consistent throughout with our ideas and the truths they contain. They ask for articulation through action, in whatever our job or trade or position in life. Thus will we keep ideas and imagination truly alive in the world and bring them to fruition. Thus will we truly find the ideals we profess to have met here. Granted, the path may not always be obvious or easy, but it is important. It is why we have been here.

It has been said that it is not where you are going but how you get there. It is not the ideas and imagination you place before yourselves as idols but rather the ones you wear while you are travelling that really matter. My friends, congratulations are in order. We have—for the most part—travelled well. With courage and faith, may we continue to do so.

Good luck.

Good bye.

God bless you.

Gary D. Cieslak
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