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A COLLEGE OF QUALITY

Remarks by  
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Bethany College  
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#### INTRODUCTION

I'm truly delighted to join in this day of special celebration.

For 150 years this distinguished college of liberal learning

- has combined the highest of academic standards
- with the deepest yearnings of the human spirit.

And I'm deeply honored to be awarded a Bethany degree which I shall cherish always.

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Also at the very outset I should like to say a word about the beauty of this place. I'm on several campuses every week and I've never seen a place that was more stunningly attractive.

Old Main is an architectural gem that is breathtakingly majestic.

- And every place you turn at Bethany there is a "cameo" of visual beauty that is aesthetically captivating.

and frequently it's enhanced by a true feeling of community and civility, as well.

This morning at the beginning of Bethany's Sesquicentennial Celebration I've been asked to talk about education.

- And focus specifically on how private higher education--most especially Bethany College--can contribute to the development of the great state of West Virginia.

As simple as it seems the answer is for Bethany

- to continue to do more of what it's doing--enroll more West Virginia students
- especially those who are least advantaged.

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- And provide for them a "first class" liberal education.

And this morning I'd like to focus on 4 priorities that are absolutely crucial if Bethany is to service effectively

- West Virginia
- the nation
- and the world.

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## I. LANGUAGE

First, I propose that Bethany continue to give top priority to the sacredness of language--to the quality of curriculum on the campus.

And help all students

think critically, and

become proficient in the written and the spoken word.

When I was a small boy in Dayton, Ohio, 100 years ago, we used to say sticks and stones may break our bones, but names will never hurt you.

- What nonsense.
- I'd usually say this with tears running down my cheeks, thinking all the time, "hit me with a stick, but for goodness sake, stop those words that penetrate so deeply and hurt so long."

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I'm suggesting that

- Our sophisticated use of symbols sets human beings apart from all other forms of life--the porpoise and the bumble bee, notwithstanding.
- And that it's through language that we are connected to each other.

Consider the miracle of this very moment.

- I stand here vibrating my vocal chords.
- Molecules go "skittering" in your direction.
- They touch your tympanic membrane.
- Signals go scurrying up your 8th cranial nerve.
- And there is a response deep in your cerebrum that approximates, I trust, the images of mine.

What an audacious act--which we simply take for granted!

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Language is the key to learning. And it's the glue that holds the place together. A college of quality means a place where language is revered.

- The problem is that too many students come to college linguistically unprepared.
- And when we surveyed 5,000 faculty, 65 percent said they were "teaching" students the reading, writing, and mathematics skills they should have learned in school.

In the Carnegie Report called College, published several years ago, we recommended that:

- All freshmen be asked to complete a course in Expository Writing. Since it's through clear writing that clear thinking can be taught.
- And we urge that writing be a part of every class--from Business and Literature to Science and Mathematics--which is itself a universal language.
- In our report we also suggest that all seniors--before they graduate from college--be asked to write a paper on a consequential topic.

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And this brings me to Bethany College and the priority you assign to language.

A comprehensive program with 6 written evaluations are of oral discourse--the best college assessment instrument I know.

Senior project in the major. Standards of language are the highest in the nation.

Here at Bethany--through your Freshmen Studies Program--

- students do engage authentically with professors and with peers.

They learn to

- Write with clarity
- Read with understanding
- and communicate orally with precision.

(Notes) SUNY.

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This, then is the first goal of the undergraduate experience--

- to help all students become empowered in the written and the spoken word.

And it occurs to me that Bethany College in its service to West Virginia in the 1990s may wish to establish a series of

- Writing institutes for teachers in surrounding schools.

Since it's through clear writing that clear thinking can be taught and children in West Virginia will civically and economically succeed and become linguistically empowered.

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## II. CORE CURRICULUM

This brings me to priority #2.

Beyond proficiency in language all students should have a solid general education

- that helps them put their learning in  
historical  
social, and  
ethical perspective.

And here again Bethany has a unique contribution to offer West Virginia.

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Today, almost all colleges have a requirement in general education.

But all too often

- students complete their required courses
- But what they fail to see are connections that would give them a more coherent view of knowledge.

and a more authentic, more integrated view of life.

Barbara McClintock--the Nobel winning geneticist--said on one occasion that "everything is one." "There is," she said, "no way to draw a line between things!"

- I wonder if Professor McClintock has looked at a college catalogue in recent days.

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Frank Press--the President of the National Academy of Sciences--  
captured this same spirit when he recently suggested that the  
scientist is, in some respects, an artist, too.

- Dr. Press went on to observe that "the magnificent  
Double Helix--which broke the genetic code--was  
not only rational--it was beautiful as well.

[CAPE KENNEDY]

And when the physicist Victor Weiskopf was asked, "What gives you  
hope in troubled times," he replied, "Mozart and Quantum  
Mechanics."

But where in the college curriculum do students discover  
connections such as these?

How can we help all students

- see connections
- and gain a perspective that is global?

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Several years ago, Art Levine and I,

- in a little book entitled Quest for Common Learning,
- suggested that we organize the core curriculum,

not on the basis of the disciplines

but on the basis of what we called the human commonalities.

- Those universal experiences that are found among all people and all cultures on the planet.

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We proposed that all students learn about

- How we all communicate with one another.
- How all students organize themselves into groups and institutions.
- How we all respond to the aesthetic.
- how we all recall the past and anticipate the future.
- How we're all a part of nature.
- How we all search for meaning in our life.

And how--

- At the most basic level we all share the mystery of birth and growth and death.

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Recently I brought my mother, who is ninety-one, from a nursing home to live with us in her final years. She is in need of the most basic care. And every day as we attend her, I am reminded of the cycles of our existence.

But I'm also reminded--how--in our modern age,

- families no longer participate in birth and death.
- we remain ignorant about how our bodies work,
- and how we are not called upon to care for loved ones as they approach the end of life.

All of these we turn over to the institutions. And we remain antiseptically removed.

I'm suggesting that in the education of our students we focus on

- the miracle of life
- the sacredness of our existence.

And perhaps if we all knew more about ourselves we would respond more reverently to the world around us.

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More than 40 years ago, Mark Van Doren wrote that

- the "Connectedness of Things" is what the Educator contemplates to the limit of his capacity.
- And the student who can begin early in life to see things as connected has begun the life of learning.

Here again Bethany College has led the way.

In my opinion, your "perspectives program" is one of the "best" general education sequences I have ever seen.

The eight categories

- Aesthetic development
- Intuitive reasoning
- Historical foundations
- Global awareness--and the rest

Are a model for West Virginia and the nation.

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Here again I have a small suggestion.

Could Bethany College--within the next year or two

- Host a state-wide conference, "The Curriculum for the Year 2000."
- A conference in which both school and college leaders in the state would come together to discuss what West Virginia students should be learning as they prepare to enter Century 21.

And surely your own core curriculum would be a superb model for discussion.

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### III. TEACHING

This brings me to priority number three.

In addition to affirming language and a curriculum with coherence.

Bethany College can make a distinctive contribution in this state

- by giving priority to good teaching.

Several years ago, I couldn't sleep and instead of counting sheep I counted all the teachers I had had. I remembered, rather vividly, 15 or more outstanding individuals--in college and in school who had touched me and truly changed my life.

First, I thought about Miss Rice, my first grade teacher, who, on the first day of school, said to 28 frightened, awestruck children, "Good morning class, today we learn to read."

It was Miss Rice who taught me language and learning are inextricably interlocked.

I then recalled Mr. Wittingler, a high school history teacher, who one day said quietly as I passed the desk, "Ernest, you're good in history--you keep this up and you just might be a student."

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That's the first time a teacher had said that to me directly. Suddenly I thought, "Doing very well," I just might be a student.

I remembered Dr. Joseph Smith, a literature professor who loved to have us read Shakespeare aloud.

Professor Smith laughed and cried, even though he had read King Lear and MacBeth 1,000 times before.

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The fact is that all of us are where we are today because of an outstanding teacher.

Don't need more teacher regulation in this country,

we need more teacher recognition.

The simple truth is that

excellence in education

means excellence in teaching.

And I'd like to see Bethany College lead a statewide crusade to raise the status of teachers in West Virginia.

And it's appropriate since you have a superb teacher education program.

First, Bethany might announce that it will give

- full tuition scholarships to all West Virginia students in the top ten percent of their graduating class
- who agree to teach at least three years in a West Virginia rural school.

Second, I'd like to see this college launch what might be called a Bethany Fellows program.

Have Aspen-like summer sessions that would bring 20 or so outstanding West Virginia teachers to the campus for renewal

- with morning seminars with the faculty and
- afternoon research

to give teachers a sense of dignity and renewal.

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Finally, I suggest that every fall Bethany ask all incoming freshman to name

- the most outstanding teacher that they had
- and then the college might send a letter to each nominee thanking them for being an unsung hero.

And the college also may have a special weekend

- in which all the "honored" teachers would be invited to the campus for a time of celebration
- with a dinner in their honor.

I'm suggesting that perhaps the greatest contribution Bethany College can make to state of West Virginia

- is be to give more dignity and more status to the act of teaching.

Since great teachers live forever!

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#### IV. STUDENTS

Finally, I'd like to say a word about the students

- and building a spirit of community and service on the campus.

In the award-winning Broadway play, Fiddler on the Roof, the peasant dairyman--who raised 5 daughters

- with considerable help from scriptural quotations,
- many of which he himself invented,

says that the things that make life tolerable to the hard working Jewish family are

- the old laws,
- the old customs,
- and the feasts that are handed down from one generation to another.

Without these--the dairyman declares--life would be as shaky as a Fiddler on the Roof.

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So it is with college.

While professors teach and do research. And while students study on their own, life for most of us is still made possible by shared rituals and traditions.

- And again with its magnificent heritage Bethany has a special role to play.

During our study of the undergraduate college I became convinced that we have

- not just a school problem but a youth problem in the nation.

Too many of today's young people feel

- unwanted
- unneeded, and
- unconnected to the larger world.

They come to college and become competent in a special field but what they fail to ask is competence to what end?

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During our study of colleges we found that

- About 50 percent of today's students say they "feel like a number in a book."
- About 40 percent do not feel a sense of community on campus.
- And about 2/3 of today's students say they have no professor who is interested in their personal lives.

In the Carnegie Report, we say that

- the college should be held together by something more than a common grievance over parking.

We propose:

- Better orientation for all students. All colleges should have Bethany's freshman seminars.
- We propose all college seminars and sessions in the dorms--just like Bethany provides.
- And we also suggest a community service program

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for all students, to help them see a connection  
between

- what they learn, and
- how they live.

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Rheinhold Niebuhr once wrote

- man cannot behold except he be committed.
- He cannot find himself without finding a center

beyond himself.

Martin Luther King said:

Everyone can be great,  
because everyone can serve.

And I believe the young people of this nation are ready  
to be inspired by a larger vision.

I'm suggesting that college is not only a place of interpretation

it's also a staging ground for action.

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And this leads to one final proposition.

Would it be possible for this college to sponsor a Bethany Adopt-a-Student program?

A program in which 100 Bethany undergraduates would agree to adopt 100 needy West Virginia high school students.

They would agree to

- write or call at least twice a month
- visit them at least once or twice a year, and
- serve as mentor.

And perhaps the college could have a special weekend that would bring all the adopted students to campus

- for fellowship and fun.

Incidentally, this could be a great recruitment program and both groups of students would feel that they are needed.

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And here again

- Bethany's internship program is also a model of engagement.

as you help students connect learning to the realities of life.

Vachel Lindsey wrote on occasion

It is the world's one crime--its babes "grow dull"  
not that they sow--but that they seldom reap  
not that they serve--but have no God to serve  
not that they die--but that they die like sheep.

The tragedy is not death. It's to die with

commitments undecided,  
convictions undefined, and  
service unfulfilled.

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Here, then, is my conclusion.

Bethany College is one of the nation's most distinguished institutions

And I salute you for 150 years of dedicated service.

Looking to the year 2000, Bethany can continue to contribute dramatically to this state as you

- affirm the centrality of language and support learning institutes in surrounding schools.
- As you sustain a curriculum with coherence and provide a model for education in all areas of the state.
- As you launch a state-wide crusade to celebrate excellence in teaching.
- And as you help all students understand that to be truly human one must serve.