



A MESSAGE FROM
PRESIDENT PHILIP W. EATON



The Dawn of an Expected New Day

2007 Opening Convocation Address

Philip W. Eaton, President

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I have been saying welcome in so many settings over the past couple of weeks, I am ready to get things going in earnest. But this is the first chance I've had to welcome back all of our returning students. We've got things rolling here big time, and we are glad to have you all back in the mix.

I love, as you all know, these moments of gathering in community. I think this kind of gathering is vitally important to fulfilling our vision.

Speaking of gathering, this is the opening of a new day for our chapel program. Stephen Newby, along with Matthew and Bob and Deb and all the student leaders, are absolutely charged with new ideas and fresh energy for this new day. There is a wonderful program planned for this fall. This is the place to be on Tuesday mornings. I'll be here when I'm not out of town.

I have been talking a lot about becoming more intentionally global. This morning I would like to sketch out a plan for the year and reflect with you on why I think this is critical to our mission.

I have said before, I come to this with no special expertise. I am trained as an Americanist, a student of culture and literature, after all, a professor of poetry, one who loves the music and the intricacies of a beautiful text. What in the world do these things have to do with becoming more intentionally global? I don't know.

I am fully aware too that there are so many on our faculty and on our staff and even among our students who know the world so much better than I do. I will lean on you in the days ahead as we launch this discussion. And I am fully aware of the amazing things that are happening globally all across our campus. I wish I could talk about them all. By the way, read the stories on our banners across campus. And read the upcoming issues of etc. and Response. We are trying to capture some of the stuff happening among our faculty, students, and alums around the globe.

But here's my hope for this coming year. I hope we can launch a big conversation about our distinctive way of doing global education, and equally important, I will press us to end the year with a concrete plan of action.

As we have stated so clearly in our signature commitment, we must be a place that

knows and understands what's going on in the world! I come to this with all of the deepest hunches of leadership in me: we must sharpen our vision and develop a concrete plan on what it means to be global precisely because we are guided by this signature. This is the right thing to do if we are serious about our signature commitment.

Let me say too that what we are talking about here could dramatically change the way we do our work at Seattle Pacific. This global initiative is potentially transformative.

Let me talk first about some concrete possibilities. These are suggestions I bring to the table for consideration. There will be, I guarantee it, all kinds of new things that will emerge along the way, but at least these suggestions will give us a place to start.

I can think of five, new variables that ought to be in the mix:

1. I believe we should initiate a program in Chinese studies. To think that we understand the emerging world without addressing the explosive growth and massive issues of China and East Asia is ridiculous.

2. I believe we ought to begin a program in Arabic studies. We will need to think carefully how we go about this, but whatever we do, we should regard the encounter between Islam and Christianity as profoundly important for the future of the world. The turmoil, complexity, and violence, as well as the potential for stability and development, of the Middle East are profoundly part of the world agenda.

3. I believe we ought to consider sending 200 students airborne each quarter. We must create the policies and structures and personnel to manage our own programs with effectiveness, and we must coordinate our participation with the programs that others have to offer. We are willing to invest new resources into this venture, but we have to structure all of this so that it makes economic sense.

4. I believe we must cultivate meaningful connections with our natural partners in the Free Methodist Church across the globe—in India, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We have an almost untapped resource within our own tradition that stands ready to be used. By the way, Bob Drovda, Tali Hairston, and Chris Henshaw just returned from Hope Africa University in Burundi, a Free Methodist university that is thriving. They were exploring the possibilities of connection. I had the privilege of meeting the three bishops of the Free Methodist Church in India—very wise, savvy, thoughtful leaders who are managing extraordinary growth for the church in India. These are the kind of connections we must cultivate.

5. I believe we must consider how best to use the enormous power of the web to connect in new and effective ways across the globe. I have no idea where this might go, but I do know we have smart, visionary people ready to think about the creative power of the web. This is hugely exciting.

Very soon, I will gather with the Group of 30, a group of thirty or so faculty, students, and staff who gathered with me last year several times, and we will take these ideas and more and scope out where we are going. Then, I suspect, we will need specific groups to work on each of these initiatives. Somehow, I would like a plan of action by the end of the academic year.

And so, these are some concrete possibilities. But how do we discover and articulate our distinctive way of going about global education? Let me think out loud with you for a few minutes about some of the deeper roots that drive this effort.

I have been out on Google Earth lately. I can find myself spending an hour in Google Earth without even noticing. What an extraordinary tool. How fascinating our world can be.

We can zoom right down on campus, right down on my house. By the way, you will find that the pictures are some four years old, because our grand science building is still under construction.

But how amazing it is to zoom up a bit and see our campus connection to Seattle. We are connected here in our city, in our community. When you see the picture, any notion that we can or should be isolated over on the margins of Seattle is nonsense.

And then, of course, you can zoom up and see our place in our country, why it is we would assume that we should become national in scope. I heard a speaker not too long ago asking why is it that Boeing and Microsoft were created in Seattle? His notion was that Seattle, with all of its creative energy, had to reach out across the country and across the world to connect, and these were two powerful, world-changing engines of connection.

By the way, Seattle has also created Starbucks and Nordstrom and Amazon—all of them reaching across the globe. It has supported World Vision and World Concern and Agros—and Seattle Pacific University—all of them reaching across the globe. We are a city connected to world cities and our vision must extend across the globe.

But then with Google Earth, as you know, you can move across the globe and you can zero down on the streets of Baghdad and Jerusalem and Cairo. You can move across the vast continent of Africa and look down into Darfur and Nairobi and South Africa and Burundi. Amazingly, you can also look closely at the sprawling reaches of Beijing and Shanghai, Moscow and Paris, London and Vienna.

And as you look at these places, you know there is suffering, and violence, hatred across boundaries, poverty, lack of water and nutrition, diseases that are attacking children, war, and the destruction of the environment. You also sense the explosion of prosperity and the enormous struggle that all of God's children might participate in unprecedented opportunities.

And you find yourself thinking about the amazing development of cultures and languages and religions and the walls that have built up over time.

And then as you zoom back out, all the way back from nations and regions, and you see this stunningly beautiful earth, with the deep blues and the profound greens and the massive, beautiful, frightening surrounding space—and you feel as if you have committed an act of reconciliation. In the very movement of your mouse, you have brought the world together. And there is such beauty.

And I find myself asking: is there a story that can make the world beautiful and whole and reconciled again?

I think about the great English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, writing at the end of the 19th Century, who thought intensely about the pain and struggles of a rapidly changing world. But then he proposes a story for this amazing planet.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like the shining from shook foil. . . .
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things. . . .
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.

The world is indeed charged with the grandeur of God, and it will flame out when we least expect it, and indeed the Holy Ghost does bend over the world brooding, with warm breast, with compassion and concern—and suddenly we know there is hope.

But then we have to ask, oh really? How do we know that God bends over this chaotic, out-of-control, suffering, exploding world—with compassion and concern? How do we know there is such a story of hope for this planet of ours? Maybe there isn't an overarching story. Maybe there is only conflict and war and destruction. Maybe there is only dividedness that will get execrably worse. Maybe there is no such thing as reconciliation for this planet. Maybe even beauty is an illusion.

And I think as we consider our distinctive way of going about global education, we have to ask: do we have a story for this planet?

I have been thinking and writing a lot about the stories that universities tell about themselves. What is the anchoring story at the heart of our enterprise of learning in the American academy? Is it a story about the economic impact we make in our communities? Sometimes that's a story that presidents like to tell. Is it a story of graduating people with the competence and skills to lead productive lives? Indeed, we hope that is one of our stories. Is it a story about discovering and learning for its own sake? Yes, we do celebrate the joy of discovery and learning.

But do our universities have a story of hope to offer this beautiful yet suffering planet? I think too often the university of our day is scandalously tentative about affirming and announcing any story of what is true and good and beautiful. This is dangerous territory in our postmodern world.

Here's my point: I want to claim for us at Seattle Pacific, humbly claim, with appropriate caution, with "proper confidence," to use Lesslie Newbigin's phrase, I want to claim that we embrace a story that can change the world, a story of promise that all things were created in the beginning good, and all things in the end will be right and good again. And our story tells us we've got a job to do to bring this goodness into the world we serve.

As most of you know, I have been reading Jurgen Moltmann this summer. Moltmann talks about a story for the planet in terms of promise. As he reads the Christian story, God has made a promise to his people: "in the future, at some point," God says, "I will make all things right. In the future, at some point, all of my children will flourish again. Just wait. Have confidence. Trust me." And then God says something quite extraordinary. He says, "now, you've got to go to work." That's it. That's the Christian story we embrace.

"The glow that suffuses everything here," says Moltmann, "is the dawn of an expected

new day.” That’s just what Hopkins was saying. We get the glimpses of God at work. We get the glimpses of “God’s grandeur” shining out, and we are stunned by the beauty of it all. We get glimpses of reconciliation going on across the world.

Bishop Lohara, from India, said in this room in July, “God is doing a new thing in the world, and I want to be part of it.” Doesn’t that describe what we are trying to do with our global efforts? Be encouraged. God is doing a new thing. We get a chance to join in, to participate.

And I love what Moltmann says then. Our faith, coming out of God’s promise, says Moltmann, “can have nothing to do with . . . resignation and with escapism.” Sometimes “the despairing surrender of hope,” says Moltmann, “can wear the face of smiling resignation. . . .” Sometimes that is the posture of our culture. Sometimes that is the posture of the university of our day. Sometimes that is the Christian posture. But the “face of smiling resignation” is not the face we wear at Seattle Pacific.

No, we are a people of promise, a people of hope. We want to change the world. Out of God’s promise, says Moltmann, we “see reality and mankind in the hand of him whose voice calls into history from its end, saying, ‘behold, I make all things new,’ and from hearing this word of the promise, [we] acquire the freedom to renew life here and to change the face of the world.”

As some of you know from earlier speeches I have given at this opening of the year, I have been reflecting on a little passage from Psalm 119.

Keep in mind the word spoken to me,
your servant,
on which you have taught me to fix my hope.
In my time of trouble my consolation is this:
your promise has given me life. . . .

God indeed is doing a new thing in the world, and we need to be part of it. This is why we are doing global education at Seattle Pacific. We have a story of hope to tell. We have a promise to share. We have work to do.

God bless each one of you as you begin this year. And may God bless our efforts to extend our understanding and our reach globally. As we go about this work, may we claim God’s promise that one day he will make the world right. And as we claim that promise at the heart of our story, may we claim as well “the freedom to renew life here and to change the face of the world.”