

1972 Distinguished Teacher of the Year

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Thank you, Vice President Michels, President Williams, Deans of the Colleges, colleagues and friends:

Little did I realize a year ago as I read Dr. William Tessin's address in which he analogized the pursuit of understanding to the flow of power and listened to Dr. Michael Schwartz emphasize the professor's role as a scholar that I would receive this honor today; my sincere thanks to those students who nominated me and from whom I learned so much. Thanks also to my colleagues, especially those in the Foundations Department, who welcomed and supported me in the past academic year.

Today I would like to consider briefly some of the problems and challenges which face education and society in the seventies. Alfred North Whitehead has said that our theories of society, politics, business and education from Plato to the end of the last century are all warped by a common assumption. This assumption is that "each generation will substantially live amid the conditions governing the lives of its fathers and will transmit those conditions to the lives of its children. We are living in the first period of human history for which this assumption is false." Alvin Toffler maintains that what passes for education today even in our best schools and colleges is a "hopeless anachronism."

In an effort to survive in such a world where the only reality often appears to be continual change, we see people attempting a variety of strategies to improve their "cope-ability." Some seek a personal relationship with Christ without formal organizational lines. Others, despite all the criticisms of our present educational system, cope with change by becoming intellectually "frozen" and "stagnant" at the close of their formal education. Some have searched for their roots or heritage in Black Studies programs or, like contemporary humorist George Carlin, in "Irish Consciousness." The media has also played upon our nostalgic search for a sense of cultural continuity by reminding us of such things as "good old time flavor," the "simple car" and "soaps you can trust"

Just as Plato called for an educational system to identify his society's philosopher-kings, so, too, have Americans relied on education to solve their societal issues. Jefferson saw

education as the key to an enlightened citizenry. Schools were asked to play a major role in reconstruction after the Civil War, in integration after 1954 and in identifying scientific talent after Sputnik in 1957. Will we once again adopt what McLuhan calls the "rearview mirror" syndrome to overcome our feelings of impotence and alienation? Will we once again call on our faith in American education, which Henry Perkinson calls our "Imperfect Panacea"?

Perhaps education will now be asked to help us survive as humans in what sometimes seems an overpowering world. How can education help us when other institutions – family, community, religion, and government – have been unresponsive to our needs and have lagged behind staggering technological advances?

In an effort to meet the expectations of its new role of survival, education may have to undergo some fundamental value changes. It will have to assert the values of uniqueness over sameness, of diversity over conformity, of exceptions as much as rules. Some indications of the necessity of this shift of values may be gleaned from an interdisciplinary look at some current popular, yet scholarly, works: Rene Dubos, a biologist, tells us to look for a "God Within"; Charles Reich, a law professor, speaks of a revolution through change in consciousness, a screening of America; Philip Slater, a sociologist, warns that our culture is at the breaking point if we continue in our "Pursuit of Loneliness"; the late Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, urged us a few years ago to seek the health of self-actualization as he moved toward a "Psychology of Being"; Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, educators, call for "Teaching as a Subversive Activity" against ideas which are false and useless.

To accomplish this goal of the survival of the unique individual who has a sense of continuity and community, education can no longer engage merely in the business of disseminating information or "transmitting the cultural heritage." Perhaps what is needed is the development of what Postman and Weingartner call "anthropological perspective." Such a view allows one to participate in his own culture and, at the same time, maintain an objective view of it. It's the position that the best contribution the school can make to the survival of the individual and society is to help the individual "learn how to learn."

This expression is not new among academicians. But what are some of the things we, as educators, would have to do to help people "learn how to learn." First of all, we must indicate that we value critical thinking over quietly sitting and passively accepting; that independent judgment is to be trusted more than the authority of a teacher or textbook; that the search for new questions is better than finding the "right" answer. We need to foster the kind of freedom which allows people to "assign" meanings to their environmental rather than simply to "get" meanings from it. We need to develop

workers who are not immersed in material values – people who don't have to look for toothpastes to provide sex appeal, for shortenings to make husbands love their wives, and for soft drinks to bring the world together.

In order for these seemingly utopian values to become reality, all of us must commit ourselves to the challenges of a new struggle. This new struggle is not one of establishment versus anti-establishment, of culture versus counter-culture, of administration versus faculty versus students. Rather, in an age when the predominant values appear to be the material ones of production and consumption, it is a struggle for the priority of human values.

Though some of my remarks today may be more ideal than real, someone once said that dreams are the stuff of which reality is made. I hope, then, that you will join me today in two wishes. First, let us wish President Williams well in the new challenges which lie ahead in his life. Secondly, my wish for Florida Atlantic, as we begin this new year, is that we will be a community in which high priority is given to the "human values of peace, of love and of laughter."

Thank you.