

# ENGAGING



**Seattle Pacific University**

## GREATER SEATTLE COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

APRIL 4, 2001

**Featuring Former Secretary of Education  
William Bennett**

**Transcript of Opening Remarks by  
SPU President Philip Eaton and  
Keynote Address by William Bennett**





## TEXT OF PRESIDENT PHILIP EATON'S OPENING REMARKS

### Welcome

I would like to add my words of welcome to you all here this morning. It occurred to me as I was coming down here this morning that five years ago we began this breakfast with 300 people in this room, and now we are filling this room with close to a thousand people, and there is a waiting list to get into this breakfast. So, welcome. We are really glad you are here.



Since we gathered last year at this time for our business breakfast, a lot of things have happened. A-Rod moved to Texas and an earthquake shook us to our bones — those two are not necessarily connected. Of course, Boeing decided to partially leave town, shaking our confidence a bit and taking a little swagger out of our step here at the moment in Seattle. The Sonics were sold, bringing good coffee to the games at least. And then there was Mardi Gras. It's been quite a year, to say the least.

But it's just great to have you all here this morning. As I look out across this audience, I see so many friends: business leaders, political leaders and professional folks in this city. And we are glad you are here. We are glad to count you all among our friends. My sense is that people are discovering what we are all about at Seattle Pacific, and are coming alongside us. We appreciate that very much. Thanks for being here this morning.

Let me add my thanks just briefly to our sponsors this morning. To John Rindlaub and all of the people at Bank of America, thank you for your partnership. We thank Bill Clancy and the folks at Cornerstone, so many of whom are SPU alums. And then to Skip Li and your partners at Ellis, Li & McKinstry, we thank you. Thank you all for your support and your partnership.

And let me say a word now about our distinguished speaker, Dr. William Bennett. Each year we try to find someone, one of the really strong voices speaking out in the public square today. We look for someone who speaks on the issues of the day — that's the reason for this breakfast — someone who speaks with a voice that shares what we value at Seattle Pacific. And I want to say I believe that Bill Bennett is one of the truly important moral voices of our day. And Bill, it's just great to have you here today.

I also want to remind all of the Democrats in the room that we did have George Mitchell here last year. And while this is not in any way a political breakfast, we do try to find some balance, and establish that balance, in terms of the people who are speaking on the issues of our time.

I want to recognize two former presidents of Seattle Pacific. Dr. Curtis Martin and Dr. David Le Shana are here with us today. I am so grateful to both of you for your enormous contributions to our fine university, and we thank you. I want to thank Bob McIntosh and Alec Hill for providing leadership for this breakfast this morning, and I want to thank the steering committee for all of the work that has been done behind the scenes working on the details of this breakfast. My thanks to all of you. And thanks to David Anderson, by the way, our choral director, and these fabulous students who are up earlier than they want to be, and yet come out here to perform for us. I am so proud of this group. This is an award-winning choral program, and we're proud to present them to you.

Let me mention that this is Alec Hill's last time to be with us here in this role. As so many of you know, Alec is moving on to become the president of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship. And the good news here is that we know how to grow leaders at SPU. The bad news is we will miss Alec. Alec has given tremendous leadership to the School of Business, and we appreciate him so much, and wish Alex and Mary and their family all the best as they open this new chapter in their lives.

This breakfast has been a great success for us at Seattle Pacific. We are delighted, and

**Success and purpose  
of the breakfast**

sometimes really astonished, by the response we have received from the community. And I think I know some of the reason for that success. It's because we have good friends. It's because we are making lots of new friends. It's also because we are willing to raise important issues in this community, to seek together to have meaningful conversation about what's happening in the world, and to discuss how we might make a difference.

The purpose of this breakfast grows right out of our vision for Seattle Pacific. As I often say: We want to be at the table of change in this community. We want to make a difference. We want a university that is engaged, relevant and helpful. This is our vision. We are trying to turn a university inside-out, to focus outward in all that we do. We are trying sincerely to be helpful in the community, to make our contribution. We have some big problems in the world. Some of these problems have us deeply troubled and confused about what to do. And I'm not sure we know how to talk about those problems. We need some lessons about how to talk. We need to listen to people like Bill Bennett.

**Talk about culture**

I was working out one morning last week and happened to remote my way into hearing Bryant Gumbel confronting our new attorney general, John Ashcroft, with some measure, I felt, of disdain. He said, "So, what is the Bush Administration going to do to keep our schools safe from violence?" And I thought: What a silly question. As if the Bush Administration — or any administration — is going to solve the problems of our children shooting children. We've got to take this discussion a step or two deeper, don't we?

Here's my premise: I think we have to talk about culture. We have to be able to talk about a moral culture that we have created, that allows and promotes the disregard for human life and human dignity that we see in our schools and in our streets. To talk about culture means that we have to talk about presuppositions; we have to talk about what it means to be human. We have to ask about human destiny. We have to talk about the purpose and meaning of life. We have to talk about community and the common good. We have to learn not to be shrill when we talk about these things.

*Time* magazine journalist Nancy Gibb said that Columbine opened a sad national conversation that promises to be a long, hard talk. And I think she is right. David Horsey from the *Seattle P-I* has said we must face the real ugliness of Mardi Gras and stop placing the blame on the police or the mayor. Nothing less than civilization is at stake here, Horsey suggests, and civilization is not a permanent state. It must be reforged with every new generation.

**The character debate**

In a marvelous and yet disturbing new book, the sociologist James Davidson Hunter says that character is dead. Attempts to revive it will yield little. Its time has passed. The social and cultural conditions that make character possible are no longer present, and no amount of political rhetoric, legal maneuvering, educational policymaking or money can change that reality. Character is dead. What a disturbing, and frightening, conclusion.

I know exactly what Hunter is saying, but I resist it with all my heart. He is saying you can't form character if you don't have a congruent, coherent culture. And I want to say: We are deeply and intentionally committed to character formation at Seattle Pacific. It's part of our vision. Are we naive to think we can make an impact on the lives of our students? Are we whistling in the wind to think we can contribute to reshaping a culture out of which our children and our students, our young people, learn to be good people?

**SPU's character**

We are a Christian university. And I think that provides us an opportunity to ask about underlying assumptions and presuppositions. Of course, we try to do this with appropriate respect for everyone. But we also know that our faith tradition has been pushed to the margins of the public square. And I say: What a shame. What a danger. We need all the voices

we can get. We need the Good News. We need wisdom. Let's show our younger generation we can grow up and have a talk about things that really matter. This is culture work. This is the work that must be done, I think. And I am convinced it is the real work for our time.

**SPU's vision**

In a minute we are going to show you a brand new film that we are working on, a bit of a work in progress that you are the first audience to see. I want to say this is not really a promotional film. This is a film where we have really tried to capture our vision. We've tried to capture some of the stories of character formation that we are so deeply committed to; some of the stories of our students, our graduates and our faculty making a difference; some of the culture-shaping work that is going on in our place and beyond.

So, is character dead, as Hunter tells us? Is civilization coming apart at the seams, as Horsey suggests? Can we do something about it? I want you to listen to these people in the film. Watch these students. I'm banking that we can make a difference. We had better be trying at least. We had better learn how to talk together. But you know what? That's exactly what we're doing with this breakfast. Gathering together, thinking through the issues of the day, lifting up those important issues, trying always not to be shrill as we talk together. And then seeking to move out and make a difference in our community, to make our community a better place to live.

So, we thank you for being here. Really, we thank you most of all for engaging with us in this important conversation. Thank you.

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TEXT OF DR. WILLIAM BENNETT'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Greetings**

Thank you very much, Mr. Wallace, Mr. President. Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Although after listening to President Eaton and watching that film, now I'm not so sure why I'm here. I think you've already got the point, and I will just be dessert and comment on what you have already heard in the minutes remaining.



Seattle Pacific recognizes the importance of a productive economy, and your role in it, so we don't want to keep you very long from that role and responsibility. Therefore, this talk will not be as long as it may seem to some of you.

**Pride in U.S. leaders**

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: He's bigger than I thought he'd be. I'm bigger than I thought I'd be, too.

But first of all, let's do away with the fictions. President Eaton welcomed me here and said, "Look, you have a full house." I certainly do. Condoleeza Rice has a full house. You may not know this, but Condoleeza Rice was invited to give this talk this morning, and the place sold out for that breakfast. I am Condoleeza Rice's substitute, and nothing, nothing could make me happier, because she was a worthy person to invite, and I hope to fill her shoes.

She is about the nation's business, no doubt, considering the situation in China. And I am delighted that I am here, and she is there.

There have been some comments to the effect lately, I've noticed in the last few months, wasn't this just tokenism, you know? That Colin Powell is Secretary of State, and Condoleeza Rice National Security Advisor, and Rod Paige Secretary of Education. I don't think it's tokenism, but I will tell you this: When people around the world see the Condoleeza Rices and Colin Powells of the United States, they will be looking at the face of the United States. And at that, we can be very, very proud, because I'm not sure we have

**SPU's choir, president  
and other recognitions**

a whole lot of better people than Ms. Rice and General Powell. We should be very, very proud of that.

I will congratulate the choir for a beautiful, beautiful start on the day. But I have a bit of a bone to pick with President Eaton. He said, "I hope you don't mind that I'm speaking before you." I said, "I don't mind that you're speaking before me; just don't speak well." And he disappointed me by speaking very well, and very eloquently. In fact, I hope you won't mind this, but I haven't heard a university president make that much sense in a very long time. You could go several years and not hear a university president say anything like that. University presidents are, for the most part, characterized by, as Harold Rosenberg described intellectuals, "a herd of independent minds." This is an original mind.

I was delighted to accept. I said I loved morning speeches. So Bob McIntosh said, "Fine, I'll pick you up at 6:50 a.m." I said, "Morning speeches, not late-night speeches." Anyway, this seems to me to be a reasonable compromise. Bob, would you stand up a second? I just want Bob to stand up. The reason that Bob is the way he is, and I am the way I am, is for your protection. There are two contingencies here. If my plane didn't get here, he was going to give the speech, and you wouldn't have known the difference. And second, if the speech doesn't work out, we're going over to the Seahawks camp to see if we can help. It's all right; I'm not making fun of him. This is the new look, because this is called "bulky chic." And we hope you pay attention to it.

**In the beginning**

In terms of balance, I was a Democrat until I was 40, so really I've been a Republican for 16 years. So I could speak here every year, and then you would get a perfectly balanced view. So, if you want to invite me back, that's fine. But, speaking of politics, it looks like George Bush won again. Isn't that interesting? I'm sure he's pleased. *USA Today* has declared him the winner.

I come at this business from something of an unusual direction. I was a professor of philosophy, teaching in North Carolina, when Ronald Reagan asked me to be chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Now, that's not the National Endowment for the Arts. That's the one with the pictures — and we're not going to show any of them this morning.

**Becoming secretary  
of education**

This was the National Endowment for the Humanities. It's the one with the books. And they told Ronald Reagan he had to have a professor of philosophy, or a professor of history or literature, run the agency. So, they began a nationwide search to find a professor of the humanities who had voted for Ronald Reagan. There were three of us in America at that time. And, even though I was a Democrat, I got the job. Surprisingly, none of the three of us were tenured.

So, anyway, I got that job; it was an interesting job. And then I became Secretary of Education of the United States. Which was a real blast; that was a lot of fun. When I got the job — some of you know this story — my wife, who is a former elementary school teacher and special ed teacher who still works in the public schools in Washington, DC, runs a program called Best Friends. It promotes abstinence from drugs, sex and alcohol for high school children. And people have remarked what a remarkably interesting and original idea. It's not original, but in our times it seems original. In any case, it's a very successful program, and many of her supporters are here. And when I became the Secretary of Education, my wife said, "Don't just stand there and make pronouncements about things you don't know anything about. Go out and find out what you're talking about first." And I said, "Well, why should I be different from the other guys?"

And she said, "Because you're the Secretary of Education. Do your homework." I said, "Well, what do you think I should do?" She said, "Well, go teach school. Go to class. Teach students; find out what's going on. Talk to children, and their parents, and their teachers,

and school board members. And then make your pronouncements.” I said, “Laine, I am the Secretary of Education of the United States. I don’t do retail, I do wholesale.”

And she, the daughter of a very successful salesman, said, “Do good retail and you’ll do better wholesale.” So, before I knew it, I was in 120 classrooms around the country — third grade, eighth grade, eleventh grade — teaching George Washington, the Declaration of Independence, and the Federalist Papers. And it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. I was in Louisiana, where I started, and we were doing the Declaration of Independence in the seventh grade, and I asked the children what was the most important word in the Declaration of Independence. We? Equal? God? Creator? Truths? And we had a long talk about it. At the end of class, three students came up and I said, “All right, who’s equal?” The class said, “Well, you’re all equal.” I said, “Well, who’s the biggest?” They said, “You are.” I said, “Who’s the oldest?” They said, “You are.” “Who’s the smartest?” They said, “You are.” I said, “Well, who’s equal?” They said, “Well, you all are.” I said, “Well, fine, thank you very much.”

If there are any former classroom teachers or present classroom teachers in the audience, you know if it works one place you’re likely to use it again. So on my next stop I was in Osburn, Idaho. Well, you may know where Osburn is, a little closer to it here than I usually am: about 40 miles from Coeur d’Alene. That doesn’t help a lot of people back East, but anyway. And I went to Silver Hills Junior High School. I was introduced by the principal as the highest-ranking federal official to visit Silver Hills and Osburn since Theodore Roosevelt was there in 1904. When I returned, I told Ronald Reagan I was the highest-ranking federal official to visit there since 1904. And without a pause, he said, “Oh, yes, I remember that visit.” Be the straight man for the boss; it’s okay.

Anyway, I addressed the class, and we did the Declaration of Independence again. And there was — I’ll never forget — Sarah, Jack and Kyle. And Sarah, Jack and Kyle came up to the front of the room, and I asked the children, I said, “Who’s equal?” And they said, “You all are.” And I said, “Well, here’s Sarah, here’s Jack, here’s Kyle. Who’s the biggest?” They said, “You are.” “Who’s the oldest?” “You are.” I said, “Who’s the smartest?” and to a person, the class said, “Kyle. Kyle’s the smartest.” And, I said, “All right, Kyle, you may sit down.”

He said, “Fine. But before I do, I have one question for you. Why — you’re an expert on this, Mr. Bennett — why do we celebrate Independence Day on the fourth of July rather than the third of July, which is when Adams gave Jefferson the final draft?” And I said, “You may sit down now, Kyle.”

Anyway, he’s a wonderful, wonderful child who graduated from college many years ago, and we’ve stayed in touch.

This education on the road, this piece of advice from my wife, was the best piece of advice I got: Go find out what’s going on. And I talked to teachers and I talked to students.

When I finished that job, I became the nation’s first director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, or drug czar. And that was a ridiculous title. The only redeeming thing in that title is I could refer to my wife as “czarling,” and to our then-young boys as the “czardines.”

But it was a great job. It was a job with a very stiff, steep learning curve for me. I didn’t know anything about drugs. I not only didn’t inhale, I didn’t go near it. So I didn’t know much about it. I was around it. I don’t know if there’s such a thing as passive smoke for narcotics. I was no doubt inundated with it, because I spent all of 1965 to 1975 on or around a college campus. So it wasn’t foreign to me, but I did not know drugs intimately.

**Signs of hope**

I did the job the same way. I went to 110 communities around the country. I went to places I'd never been, and don't need to go again. I came to Seattle two or three times, went out on the border here in helicopters looking for some things. We were over in Yakima, which was a very serious, critical transshipment point for illegal drugs in those days; I don't know if it is today. And we spent a lot of time in places that were unpleasant. If you see the movie *Traffic*, the drug czar there takes a tour — I think they took that out of my book. It's the tour I took down on the border with Mexico, at San Ysidro and El Paso. In any case, what we saw there was enough to frighten and alarm you: very serious matters, very depressing matters. Drug houses, crack houses, hospital wards where babies were born prematurely because their mothers were on drugs, and the like.

**Attending to the character of the young**

But we also saw some very hopeful things. I asked, whenever I went, to go to the place where the problem was the worst. And we saw terrible things. But we also saw people working. The pictures of Reverend Reynolds in the streets of Seattle reminds me of some of the encouraging and inspiring people I met. You should know, as a matter of fact, that those were very good days in this nation's effort against drugs. You may not know it, but from 1985 to 1991 drug use went down by 45 percent in this country: about a 70 percent reduction in cocaine, and about a 50 percent reduction in marijuana. There were some increases in some other drugs, giving an overall net loss of 45 percent, or a decline of 45 percent. That's a very good number. It's not the number we'd like to have at the end, but it's a good number. Most people, I think, believe that we haven't affected drug use at all and that it's time to legalize or decriminalize drugs, which would be, I believe, a disaster. A 45 percent decline is not bad. If you had a 45 percent decline in teenage pregnancy, or 45 percent decline in high school dropout rates, we'd be celebrating. And so I think people need to be sober and look at the facts before we shift drug policy.

**Teaching values in diverse environments**

But the reason I'm telling you this is by way of prelude to really back up what President Eaton was talking about. The interesting thing for me is that in both the education job and the drug job there was a distinct overlap of message. Because of my wife's sound advice to go out and find out what was going on, in both jobs I received very clear and unequivocal messages. You might think abstractly, if you stepped back, that Secretary of Education and drug czar, these should be jobs with pretty distinct — “clear and distinct,” as Descartes might say — jurisdictions. But, in fact, what I heard from adults, responsible adults, in both jobs was pretty much the same message, which is: We need to attend to the character of the young. We need to attend to the culture and to the messages that the culture is sending to the young.

In the schools, people were saying: “How do we teach values? How do we teach values to a diverse student body?” That's how *The Book of Virtues* got started. It was a set of materials that we hoped to put together — for a book — but also for use by teachers in the schools. Because teachers would say, “Well, the values questions are critical, but the students are so diverse. We have students from so many different ethnic backgrounds.”

**Countering society's messages**

And we would say, “Do you have children from backgrounds who like to be beat up? Do you have girls from backgrounds who like to be raped, or taunted? Do you have children from backgrounds where little boys like to be made fun of, called cowards? Do you have children from backgrounds where people like to have their lunch money stolen? What are the cultures where children like those things to happen to them? No, ladies and gentleman, there are some values, or virtues, which are universal, which have to do with the fact that we are all — whatever our ethnicity — God's creatures, moral and spiritual beings. And there are ways to teach those virtues, or at least to have the young pay attention to what they mean.” So we put those materials together and it became *The Book of Virtues*. But its original intent was to help the education of character in the schools.

In the drug czar job, we heard something very similar. Which is: What are the messages that society is sending to young people and to everyone else? “Forget it. Break the

rules. Go your own way. Fly high. Find your own boundaries. Do whatever you want. If it feels good, do it. You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can.” These messages, sooner or later, have an impact. And clearly, they were having an impact as manifested in the numbers that we saw in increasing use of drugs in the late ’70s and early ’80s.

**Our responsibility to  
the next generation**

But the more poignant message I received on visiting the front lines — if you’ll allow me to say that — was from those responsible adults, be it police officers, or judges, or people running treatment centers, or chaplains in the street. Which is: We need to counter this culture. We need to send a different kind of message. We need to take the issue of the culture on. The culture is the most important thing. With all due respect to earthquakes, the problem with the natural order has been solved, by and large, by this country, by our civilization. It is now questions, if you will, of the supernatural order. Or, if that’s too abstract, or too difficult, problems of the cultural order, that have to be addressed and become prominent now.

What did those people in the drug front lines and the drug war say? The cops would say: “Doesn’t anybody teach these children anymore that things are wrong? These kids can make more money being runners for the drug guys than they can working at MacDonald’s. The job security isn’t as great, and you don’t get many of the benefits, and you may have your knees busted, but they can make more money. Isn’t anybody teaching them that this is the wrong thing to do? Where are the parents?” I heard that both in the schools and in the drug effort. People in treatment centers who told me — and I saw with my own eyes — “This is a spiritual problem. It is a moral problem.”

**Depending on  
institutions like SPU**

I talked to drug addicts who said, “Cocaine is the devil. Crack is the devil. It promises everything, and gives you nothing. It lures you with everything that’s in your mind and imagination, and then gives you nothing.” A judge in Detroit said to me, “You know, Mr. Bennett, I sentence these guys year after year after year. And I’ve been doing it for 30 years. But something’s different in the last 10 or 15.” This was in 1990. He said, “I ask these young men: Didn’t anybody teach you the difference between right and wrong? They look at me and they say, ‘No, sir.’ And you know, Mr. Bennett, I believe them. I think for a lot of kids nobody did teach them right and wrong. Or the teaching was weak compared to what they were taught on television, what they were taught by the movies, what they were taught in the street.”

**Teaching character**

The responsibility of adults for the next generation is to make sense of the world in which we live, to educate character, to say what is important, to talk about what deserves to be loved, what deserves to be defended, and what deserves to be avoided and disdained. This is the solemn responsibility of every generation.

It is most encouraging to find a university that is unembarrassed to say: “This is what we are about. We seek to engage this issue. We seek to engage the culture and to talk to our students about character.” In doing this, engaging in the discussion of the education of character, my guess is that President Eaton and his colleagues at Seattle Pacific will do those things which through time have been shown to be the most effective ways to teach character.

That’s my topic: the education of character. Now let me just say a few more things about it by way of telling you why I think this time-honored tradition is critically important today. The Jewish theologian Martin Buber says that all education is the education of character, because no matter what you teach — whether it’s math, or physics, or business, or law, or fishing — you stand before a young person as witness to the kind of person you are, to the kinds of values that you think are important. And how you teach — I don’t mean your teaching method so much, but whether you are thoughtful, deliberate, kind, open to interchange and discussion, accessible; whether the young person looks at you and says, “this is someone from whom I can learn” — matters almost as much, and sometimes more, than the explicit subject matter to be taught.

**Three steps: precept,  
habit and example**

Looking at the film — Dr. Fitch and Reverend Reynolds — and the others in the film, one sees these are people you would want to have your children around. These are people from whom you can learn. The critical thing for adults to do, it seems to me — in our time, but in every time — is never surrender their responsibility for the education of the young.

One other person I'll mention, in addition to Buber, is Hannah Arendt. She wrote an essay about 30 years ago called "The Education of the Young," in which she said the problem of modernity is that many parents are tempted because of the complexity or the seeming complexity of modernity to throw up their hands and say, "We don't understand this world. We don't, this is a strange new world to us. We don't get it. We don't understand the Internet. We're not aware of what you're doing. We don't understand these movies and these books. You're on your own. Good luck." That is an abandonment of responsibility. Arendt says it is a surrender, which can never be allowed.

Well, if those things can't be allowed, and if the education of character is so critical, how do we do it? I think Aristotle was right. I think there are three principal ways we do it. Starting with the very young, we do it through habit, we do it through precept, and we do it through example.

Let's talk about precept first — rule, or precept. We teach character, or we try to teach character, in part by having rules, rules for young people. Said over and over and over again, in hopes that sooner or later they will be understood or followed. Even if they're not understood, we hope they'll be followed. "Be nice to your brother. Be nice to your brother. For God's sake, be nice to your brother! Soon it will just be you and your brother. We will not be around. Be nice to your brother."

And one day you look, and the older brother is nice to the younger brother. That's rules. There are more sophisticated and less sophisticated versions of this. There are the Ten Commandments. There are other rules, other principles. But we teach character by trying to give a message, by trying to cite established authority and important rules of conduct.

Second, there is habit. We try to encourage in the young the right habits. And if I can use another mundane example: I turned the other day and my 12-year-old was taking out the garbage — without being asked to. And I said, "What have you done?"

Now, this isn't the best attitude to have as a parent. But if you knew Joe like I know Joe ... No, Joe's all right. He's, as we say, a work in progress. And he's going to get there. By God, he will get there. We will, we will make sure he gets there. Isn't it remarkable how two large grown-up people, facing two small children, can lose so often? We have so many advantages, and yet still we are occasionally outsmarted.

In any case, the development of habits: Learning to do things, and learning to do things from an early age, Aristotle says is critical.

But the third thing is, I think, most important for our purposes today — and I think it is illustrated by the film. And given the state of the discussion about the culture, it is clearly the most important. Aristotle says we learn and develop character by example, by being around people who have it. This is the irreducible fact of our time to which I think insufficient attention has been paid. And this is why institutions like Seattle Pacific University are so important.

If you want young people to take ideas of right and wrong seriously, you must put

them in the presence of people who take right and wrong seriously. You can have *Book of Virtues* after *Book of Virtues*. You can have courses in honesty, perseverance, trustworthiness and faith. And it will mean nothing, in my view — and I think my view is backed up by good empirical science, social science. You must put them in the presence of people who take these things seriously. If you say to them, “Children, be children of faith,” you must put them in the presence of people who take their faith seriously, so they may see with their own eyes people taking that faith seriously.

**Finding answers  
amidst horror**

Let me talk about another educational institution for a moment. I guess we call it an educational institution. This thing that jumped out of our televisions at us a few weeks ago, the Santana High School in Santee, California, where we saw this shooting, by this child, of classmates and teachers. The media blared. Televisions were running commentary. The basic theme for several days was: How could something so horrible happen? If you look closely at the case — and I’ve taken some time to look closely at the case — it seems to me the conclusion you should come to is: How could something disastrous *not* happen in the life of this child?

We know certain things about children. We know certain things about life. We know certain things about human beings. They are bodies, but they are also souls. They are creatures of God, and they are made in the image of God. This child had almost everything wrong done to him that could’ve been done. Except for material advantage. By one standard of success, he was successful. He lived in a middle class environment with, as *Time* magazine said, all the typical accoutrements of the middle class.

But then, let’s look at the other side: His parents had been divorced; he had not seen his mother in 10 years. He called other women whose houses he visited, “Mom.” Message there? His father, with whom he lived, was indifferent to him. Very, apparently, mean, even cruel to him. One day when the boy was very sick at school and called his dad to come pick him up, his father just yelled at him and hung up the phone. He listened to a steady diet of stuff that’s on the air: some of the worst kind of deranged — truly deranged, and sick, and decadent — music. And such was much of the entertainment in his life. Not just music but movies. In his room he had posters, not of athletes, not of saints, not of brothers and sisters, not of winning teams, but of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Is there a message there for someone? The boy has the picture of the Columbine killers in his room.

*Time* magazine reported that his behavior, his enjoyment, his recreation after school was pretty typical for a child his age, and then nonchalantly writes: “His day was fairly typical. After school, he would hang out with his friends skateboarding, smoking marijuana and drinking.” Typical behavior for a 14-year-old child — or so we are to now expect, because of lowered expectations. The alcohol use was such that on one day little Davis, the boy, is said to have had sex with a 12-year-old girl after she had consumed a bottle of tequila. But she could not say whether it was true or not, because she was passed out and had no idea what had happened. And on goes this account, wondering how such a horror could have taken place. How could some horror *not* have taken place, if you were putting the building blocks for this catastrophe together?

**Pushing as hard as the  
age pushes against you**

The great sociologist Robert Nisbet said that what matters in life is whether the forces of composition outweigh the forces of decomposition. Well, he’s an academic, that’s pretty fancy language, but the drift, the direction, I think, is very clear. In this little boy’s life, the forces of decomposition way outweighed the forces of composition. Will we see more of it? Sure, we’ll see more of it. My friend Charles Krauthammer, a syndicated columnist, also a psychiatrist, said, “It is a wonder to me, given the alienation of so many young people from their parents, from the roots of their culture, from their churches, from the best parts of their schools; and the negative impact of the influences they are taking in, why we do not see more tragedies of this sort.”

Well, what’s the answer? If you want people, young people particularly, to take right

and wrong seriously, you will put them in the presence of people who take right and wrong seriously. That would mean, it would seem to me, a fairly simple plan of attack, or a simple plan of raising children: Strengthen the institutions where children live, work and go to school. Have stronger families. Have stronger churches. Have stronger schools. Have the bonds be closer. Have the work of character education be more explicit. And particularly — I'll say it for the third or fourth time — put them in the presence of people who know right and wrong, and who are trying to live that difference in their lives, so they can see it.

**The moral ecology of life**

Flannery O'Connor, one of my favorite writers, writes in her diaries a wonderful phrase, which I've used in a lot of contexts. She said, "You have to push as hard as the age that is pushing against you." And for any of you who are parents, grandparents, teachers, counselors, ministers or treatment experts, you know how hard the age is pushing against you. And it is time to push back. And this very great and special place, one of my favorite places in America — and I would say to Miss Bernadel in the video, who said she wasn't used to it 'cause it was cold: It's not cold, it just rains all the time. Sorry. You do that just when we come so we'll go home; I know that.

**Evidence of character**

And then the sun comes out. But in this marvelous place, where so much attention is paid to the natural environment, it's important as well, I think — indeed, it is more important — to remember — and here I use the language of Pope John Paul — that there is an important dimension to the natural order that we must pay attention to, what he calls the "natural ecology of life." But, he says, more important than the natural ecology of life is the "moral ecology of life." We pay so much attention to disturbances, and corruption, and pollution of the natural order. We must pay equal attention — indeed, I would argue more than equal attention — to the pollution of the moral order, because that's the order in which our children are growing up or are failing to grow up. I don't agree with Professor James Davidson Hunter that character is dead. Maybe it's dead in Charlottesville, where he wrote that book. I don't think so. Basketball doesn't seem to be alive there either.

**The moral future of civilization**

Sorry. I'm sorry; I do this to myself all the time. Mrs. Frankfurter used to say of Justice Frankfurter, "Felix makes two mistakes when he speaks. First, he digresses from his text. Second, he returns to it."

I don't think character's dead. I think it's an open question. I certainly know it isn't dead in some places. I gather it isn't dead at Seattle Pacific. It isn't dead among the circle of my friends. It isn't dead among my friends who I see here. It's a very live issue. Whether it's dead for children, whether they will have it or not, depends on the efforts of adults. It depends on strengthening those institutions of family, church and school, on adults not abandoning the field or surrendering, and on recognizing that everything they do is an example of the education of character. So, the question is really up to us, up to our institutions.

I want to stop by coming back to the context with which I started: Seattle Pacific University inviting Condoleezza Rice to come and speak, which was a great and terrific idea, because you want someone — and I hope she'll come back after her tenure — to give you a perspective on the world, and the state of the world, and the role of the United States in it. In no international drama is the role of the United States more important than the one we are talking about this morning. There's the matter of China, you bet. There's the matter of terrorism, you bet. There's the matter of nuclear weapons, you bet. But in no international question, no question for the world, is the United States more centrally involved than this one: the question of the moral future of the United States, and with it, civilization. Why? Because it's the United States, because it is the most powerful and consequential country in the world.

I was telling my friends Bob and Pat Herbold last night about visiting in Switzerland and talking to some representatives from southern Africa. And a woman from the health

services department in Swaziland came up to me and said, “Can you do something about your television? Can you do something about the things that our little children see in Africa, which give them an idea of what the mightiest and most powerful and most successful people in the world believe is important?” And she said, “It is corrupting them. Can you do something about it?” I said, “Well, we have this huge industry, and we have free speech. Nevertheless, we are trying to do something about it. At least some of us are trying to do something about it.” Never forget the importance of the United States in this regard.

But to get it right for people abroad, we’ve got to get it right at home first. So let me close with a story, a picture I will try to put in your mind. A few years back, it was clear that the Cold War was ending and that we had won. And it was a great thing that we had won.

A number of people had the good idea of inviting Lech Walesa to the United States. You remember Lech Walesa; he was the Polish shipyard worker who started Solidarity to fight the Communist regime; a great admirer of, and a man who became a great friend of, this pope. Two Poles very important to the history of Western civilization: this pope and this dockworker, who took Flannery O’Connor’s advice and fought back hard.

One more digression: If you read George Weigel’s book *Witness to Hope*, which is the biography of Pope John Paul — it’s a wonderful book — he reports that in 1979 when this Polish pope went back to Poland for the first time, Jaruzelski, who was the Communist leader in Poland, said, “Let them have mass. It won’t matter.” Eight million Poles showed up for mass when the pope came back. Jaruzelski’s assistant turned to him and said, “There are too many of them. We can’t kill them all.” The pope knelt, kissed the ground of his Poland. And most of the seven million followed suit. Weigel argues — I don’t have time to go into it this morning, but take a look at the book, and I think persuasively — that was the beginning of the end. You bet, Reykjavik helped, and the Stinger missiles to the Afghan rebels helped, but eight million or seven million Poles kissing the ground and having mass said by the pope was also a sign to this Godless, dead empire that its time had passed.

**With freedom comes  
responsibility**

Well, Walesa, who could never quite focus on what he was saying because he smoked cigarette after cigarette, was constantly being interviewed by the Western press. And this, to the Western press, was the most disturbing thing about Lech Walesa. They would always ask, “Do you think you’re going to die of lung cancer?” And he would always say, “Given my views, are you kidding?”

He said it in Polish; I’ll find out what that is some day. In any case, someone had the foresight and wisdom to invite Lech Walesa to come to the United States, to thank him for his role in bringing down the Evil Empire. And Walesa, in turn, very graciously took the stage in a number of places in America — he may have visited Seattle; I don’t remember — and thanked the American people for their support of freedom. And his last speech was in New York Harbor, with the Statue of Liberty in the background. He thanked the American people for their support and he said something much like this.

“Thank you for teaching the world the great lesson that all countries must have freedom, must have liberty at their cornerstone. You have taught the world the great lesson that men must be free.” He said, “Now there is a second lesson. You must teach the world that men must not only be free, but must walk in fear of the Lord, and must be responsible in their use of that freedom.” He said, “You have taught the world the great lesson of freedom. Now teach the world the great lesson of responsibility with freedom.” Good lesson, good charge, and I think Seattle Pacific is doing its homework.

Thank you very much.