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Trustee Greetings

David G. Wilkins '74

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Commencement

Trustee Greetings

May 7, 2017



David G. Wilkins '74

David G. Wilkins '74

Illinois Wesleyan University Trustee

Graduates, Parents, Family Members. . . Faculty, Staff, and Friends of Illinois Wesleyan --

Greetings from the Trustees and Alumni. On their behalf, I say to each graduate -- Congratulations, Welcome and Thank You.

Congratulations on your individual achievements. **Welcome** to the fellowship of Illinois Wesleyan Alumni. And **Thank You** for your contributions to the University community.

To Parents, Family, Friends, Faculty and Staff -- we share your pride in the accomplishments of these young people, and we join **them** in **Thanking You** for all you have done to help them on their way to this important occasion.

At Illinois Wesleyan, we strive to help our students develop the intellectual and moral capacity to think deeply about the important things in life and to live in a manner that is consistent with the values reflected in our University motto -- *Scientia et Sapientia* – which is generally translated as “**Knowledge and Wisdom**”.

Knowledge implies the acquisition of true information and understanding, grounded in objective observation and logical reasoning. *Wisdom* has been defined as the capacity to **exercise sound judgment** and **act rightly** in matters of life and conduct -- choosing **proper means** to achieve **good ends**. This requires personal engagement that goes far beyond the search for objective truth and reaches deeper into the realm of what it means to be part of humanity in all its historical, social, esthetic, moral and spiritual dimensions.

Those who have heard George Vinyard's remarks at prior Commencements know that he always cites the University motto as I have just done, and then seeks to illustrate the point with quotes from recently deceased authors and cultural icons.

One of these was John Glenn -- a true American hero, Marine combat pilot, pioneering astronaut and United States Senator -- who said:

“If there is one thing I’ve learned in my years on this planet, it’s that the happiest and most fulfilled people . . . are those who devoted themselves to something bigger and more profound than merely their own self-interest.”

Glenn also joked:

“As I hurtled through space, one thought kept crossing my mind -- every part of this rocket was supplied by the lowest bidder.”

Which, of course, brings me to the late Robert Pirsig, author of a philosophical inquiry into values and metaphysics entitled *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* that improbably became a best seller with more than a million copies in print after being rejected by publishers more than 100 times.

Pirsig completed high school at the age of 14, flunked out of college at 18, served in the military in Korea, studied biochemistry, philosophy, Eastern religions and journalism, taught creative writing, underwent electroshock therapy after being diagnosed as a schizophrenic and wrote technical manuals.

As a philosophical thinker, he was particularly concerned with the conflicts between rationalism and romanticism in Western thought, the relationship between humans and machines and how we perceive and create Quality.

He once remarked:

“Traditional scientific method has always been at the very best, 20 - 20 hindsight. It's good for seeing where you've been. . . . testing the truth of what you think you know, but it can't tell you where you ought to go.”

With regard to machines, he said:

“The Buddha resides as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a [motor]cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain.”

“The test of the machine is the satisfaction it gives you. If the machine produces tranquility it's right. If it disturbs you it's wrong until either the machine or your mind is changed.”

Commenting on technology, Pirsig now seems prophetic:

“The way to solve the conflict between human values and technology needs is not to run away from technology.

That's impossible. The way to resolve the conflict is to break down the barriers of dualistic thought that prevent a real understanding of what technology is -- . . . a fusion of nature and the human spirit into a new kind of creation that transcends both.”

And he had this to say about Quality:

“Care and Quality are internal and external aspects of the same thing. A person who sees Quality and feels it as [s]he works is a person who cares. A person who cares about what [s]he sees and does is a person who’s bound to have some characteristic of quality.”

Finally, Pirsig offered this observation about life:

“You look at where you’re going and where you are and it never makes sense, but then you look back at where you’ve been and a pattern seems to emerge.”

In your time here on campus we trust that you not only developed your intellects but also cultivated the essential curiosity, perceptiveness and values to set a pattern that will serve you well as you strive to live with Care and create a future of greater knowledge, wisdom, Quality and fulfillment.

As you look back at where you have been, may you always warmly Remember and Honor your University and fellow Alumni; and think of us as your family and this campus as your home. Please return often. You will always be welcome here and wherever Titans gather.

Thank you.

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