An Address to the Faculty of Pepperdine University—October 6, 2000

"Living on Fault Lines"

by Provost Darryl Tippens

***"Intellegue ut credas; crede ut intellegas"* – St. Augustine**

Introduction

Meeting with the entire faculty on this occasion is, I assure you, a very special honor. While I am not yet on board officially, while I stand somewhere "betwixt and between," I relish this opportunity to meet you, and meet *with* you, to offer some preliminary thoughts, and—perhaps—to initiate some new dreaming.

I wish to convey my deepest thanks to Andy Benton and Steven Lemley for their invitation to be with you on this occasion. Both Andy and Steve have spared no effort to help me in my transition. I am immensely grateful.

Over the last few months, I've had the opportunity to read various documents that describe the history, goals, and direction of Pepperdine. Knowing something of the history of higher education in America in general, I find this institution's accomplishments extraordinary. I am unaware of any university that ever came so far or achieved so much in so short a period of time.

And so, as I face the awesome prospect of joining you, I wish to begin by paying my sincere respects to everyone—the faculty, deans, provosts, and presidents—past and present—who have brought the University to its current place of achievement. I do not take their labors for granted. Like each of you, I am the happy recipient of the vision and labor of countless others. We owe a debt beyond payment. It was Sir Isaac Newton who first said, "Dwarves who stand on the shoulders of giants may see farther than the giants themselves." As we aim to better our predecessors, as we dream new dreams, we do so, always remembering on whose shoulders we stand, by the grace of God.

I'll be honest. I am humbled by how much I have yet to learn. But let me also say that I am pleased with what I already know about this University. I am heartened by the broad consensus that I see, either already existing or clearly emerging. In the numerous documents that have been forwarded to me, such as the University Mission Statement and the WASC Report, in my several conversations with faculty and administrators, I perceive a growing agreement about the mission of the institution. The bedrock values of the University—the desire to manifest Christian values and ethics in all quarters and strata of the University—encourage me. In fact, it is this deep sense of shared mission that finally made me want to join the enterprise. I am convinced Pepperdine is the place to be for anyone who wants the ride of his life.

I admire the themes that recur in the documents I have read: the affirmation of a central Christian mission; the emphasis upon student learning; the honoring of scholarship and service; the high value placed upon international experience; the emphasis upon appropriate forms of assessment; the search for coherence; the balanced view of technology; the respect for the

unique traditions of the five schools; the balanced emphasis upon liberal arts and professional education; the respect for academic freedom; the commitment to ethical distinctives; the emphasis upon faculty growth and development; the continuing search for ways to integrate faith and learning; and the passionate desire to hire and nurture academically distinguished faculty members who are committed to the Christian faith and the University mission. In this litany of common goals I find much to celebrate, much to commend. All of these items might provide useful topics for comment and discussion. But as a newcomer to the scene, that doesn't seem to be the best use of my time.

Of course, I am tempted to describe some of my own dreams for the provost's office—and perhaps by extension—for the whole University. But I really think that such forecasting is premature. I still have plenty of discovery to do. Furthermore, I have a strong sense that I am joining *in medias res* a rather exciting plot. Since I am coming to the story very much in the middle of things, I need to do some additional listening before I predict what ought to appear in the next chapter. For some of you, I am a mysterious figure who has rather suddenly appeared in the narrative. Perhaps it would be best for me to tell you a little bit more about who I am and what I deeply value. With this knowledge, you may gain a sense of how our new and shared story might unfold in the coming chapters.

Perhaps I should begin by telling you why I'm here, why I accepted the invitation to enter the Pepperdine story. Something significant happened to me between May and September that radically changed my professional direction and sense of vocation. In brief, I caught a vision—the exciting prospect of joining you and your colleagues in realizing the dream of a great Christian university that takes its rightful place at the table of the premier institutions of our land.

To begin, I should say that I am here today because I discovered that I was looking for a *certain kind of space*. The space in and around Malibu is rather attractive, so I have noticed. One of my colleagues at Bethel College in Minnesota, Daniel Taylor, wrote me this week to congratulate me on my imminent move to Malibu, which he called "an extension of paradise." Since Dan has roots in a town up the coast, you need to hear the full context. He wrote: "Malibu is an extension of paradise (of course, paradise itself being Santa Barbara)." We all know that Southern California is a place of remarkable natural beauty.

Interestingly, through the centuries, when people considered founding institutions of learning, they often considered the importance of physical location. For example, in his great 1644 treatise, *Of Education*, John Milton began by emphasizing the importance of a proper physical environment: "First, to find out a spacious house and ground about it fit for an academy…" Colleges were often founded on lovely prospects or hills, often *places set apart*. I too am looking for a particular space for my own development and the development of others.

However, the space I am talking about today is not really located on the map. (Indeed, as one novelist once quipped, "the *truest* places are never on the map.") As lovely as Southern California is (and, believe me, I have noticed), another kind of space has a greater claim upon me. I am looking for *spiritual*, *psychological*, and *moral space*, where authentic learning occurs and souls flourish. Education occurs best in a particular kind of environment, within a particular space.

This space is characterized by a certain freedom from daily necessity. It offers room for thinking, reflecting, wondering, speculating, and creating. Above all, it offers ample room for the imagination, as Einstein knew: "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world."

This space is not overly constrained by the clock. At the core of the words *scholar*, *school*, and *scholastic* is the Greek root word *schola*, which means "leisure," that is, leisure for study—mental space for creativity, growth, and productivity. It is a place for discovery, for which very few people in our world have the time, commitment, or resources. In his novel *The Moviegoer* Walker Percy writes:

> The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life.
> . . . To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be on to something. Not to be on to something is to be in despair.

I am troubled by a society that seems to allow less and less time for the escape from everydayness, that seems calculated to cut us off from the possibility of being "on to something." For me, a Christian university goes against the grain of things in its openness to ideas. It provides a special place that honors curiosity. It recognizes the continuing need for discovery and wonder. Albert Camus observes: "If there is a soul, it is a mistake to believe it is given us fully created. It is created here, throughout a whole life." I am attracted to Pepperdine, then, not primarily for its physical location, but for its spiritual geography. This is a place where people—students and faculty alike—are invited to explore and create their souls.

Pepperdine, it seems to me, is well positioned to be the place where remarkable gains are made in the generation of knowledge, the transmission of culture, and service to a world in need of the Good News.

Yet, where I see opportunity, many see problems.

The Problem of Fault Lines

A few days ago one of my colleagues in Texas gave me a map of California, which is now displayed on my office door back in Abilene. As my friend handed me the map, he remarked emphatically, "I meant to mark all the fault lines on the map before I gave it to you." This was Bill's not-so-subtle way of telling me that Southern California is a dangerous place, geographically speaking. Of course, my friend Bill is right. I went on the Web this week and typed in the word "faults." An array of Web sites popped up, offering detailed maps of California, pointing out the fault lines, the fault branches, the fault zones that run up and down the coast. It's enough to keep a timid soul awake at night. Yet I must tell you that I am exhilarated at the thought of living on the fault lines.

As I think of the university life, particularly Christian higher education, I feel called to live on the fault lines. In other words, the space I long for so much, the space where real education occurs, is necessarily a place that is scored by fissures and tensions. Rather than being frightened by these boundaries of difference, I rather think they are *essential* to the enterprise. The space for learning requires some tension between these tectonic plates. For a few minutes, let me describe some of these academic fault lines:

1. Between Athens and Jerusalem. For centuries, Christian intellectuals have debated how Christian learning is to take place. "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?" Tertullian asked centuries ago. And ever since, we've been trying to learn how to occupy that unstable space between secular learning and commitment to God. That seems to me to be one of the fault lines we must learn to live upon and live with. It would be easier if we settled down in Athens or Jerusalem, but Christian teachers and scholars accept the hard task of being spiritual commuters and engineers. We seek to build suspension bridges over the fault lines; and we

must spend a lot of time in earnest discussion with one another, so that we do not slight either domain.

If I didn't think Pepperdine was very serious about occupying this liminal space, I would not be here today. I know that the twin claims of academic excellence and spiritual duty seem antagonistic at times. Perhaps they are. I've wrestled for years with the ways in which I can honor my faith while also practicing radical intellectual inquiry, and I can only say it is worth the bother. I am glad to be among many scholars on this campus who have already thought deeply about this topic. I know many of you are veterans at integrating faith with your own disciplines, and I am eager to join you in the continuing conversation about this complex task.

I believe that we live at a particularly happy moment. As the Enlightenment recedes, it is possible to see new ways in which faith and scholarship can flourish as complementary goals. Only within the Enlightenment and Modern periods did scholars assume that faith and reason were inveterate enemies. Now, as scientism retreats, Christian intellectuals can surmise that the fault line between faith and knowledge need not be fatal. It is time to rediscover the great Christian minds from Augustine through the early Christian humanists who first demonstrated how faith and learning work in tandem.

2. Between the Individual and the Community. The university is a curious, anomalous place. From the beginning, it has been a *community*. Hannah Arendt speaks the orthodox line when she says that, for learning to occur, the presence of others is necessary. Universities have never been hermitages, solitary places, but living, vibrant *communities*. If you look at the architecture of the most venerable European foundations, you see that they were designed for communal practices, a shared life—refectories for common meals, residences, libraries, and lecture halls sharing the quad. A college was a communion and a community, a society of learners. Today, the university remains a place for fertile, endless conversation. We study, discover, and write in order to be heard, to be received, to be understood. Education, like all of life, is inescapably social. In the words of Paul Tillich,

> We are only in a world through a community of men [and women]. And we can discover our souls only through the mirror of those who look at us. There is no depth of life without the depth of the common life.

You will find that I am a profound believer in such ideas. If Pepperdine is not a place where real community flourishes, then it will not be a university, no matter what our credentials or ranking may be.

A Christian university is a distinctive place "animated by a spirit of freedom and charity" (John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*). And this means, implicitly, that we not only respect and honor our colleagues, but we respect and honor our students. We see them as full partners in the enterprise of growth. Perhaps you know John Ciardi's painful definition of a university: "*A university is what a college becomes when the faculty loses interest in students."* So many colleges have grown into research institutions where the generation of knowledge obliterates the care one once felt for students. May it never happen here.

Yet we know the other side of the fault line, don't we? True scholarship at times requires isolation, fierce independence, solid mental courage, tenacious curiosity, and a critical spirit. The intellectual system rewards the lonely scholar in the garret, in the library carrel, or in the field, who produces important books and articles.

The university is "a place where the world's hostility to curiosity can be defied," says Edmund Morgan. Tensions naturally arise because curiosity is really the search for truth, which can be dangerous:

> The search for it has again and again overturned institutions and beliefs of long standing, in science, religion, and in politics . . . The search for truth is, and always has been, a subversive activity. (Edmund Morgan)

Hence, scholars seek to preserve "their university as a sanctuary within whose walls any question can be asked." Hence, we protect the essential tradition of academic freedom.

Some would make primary the intellectual's right to radical, autonomous inquiry; others would make absolute the university's social duties. But, of course, we need not choose between these competing claims. The most independent scholar never seeks knowledge in some value-neutral way, as though it had no ethical implications; being human, we will always be ethically constrained; but neither can we ignore the damage that occurs when honest searching is suppressed for dogmatic or political reasons. Surely our mission is to honor both claims: to stand on the fault lines.

3. Between Withdrawal and Engagement. I have already described the university as a place for retreat, a place of learned leisure. Without the opportunity to withdraw from what I have called "everydayness," there can be little opportunity to mature or excel. And yet there is the other side—the call to serve the external community. We are here to be called to account. That rare space called the university is not for the idle rich to play intellectual games. We are here to think and to discover in order to grow. Our souls are matured, not for our own narcissistic delight, but for the pleasure of God and his glory.

Our world is in desperate straits, and we have been given opportunities to help others. Augustine was on target with his "*crede ut intellegas*" ("I believe in order that I might understand"). Understanding is a terminal good; but it is also an instrumental good, leading to informed action and service. I am attracted to Pepperdine precisely because it is an institution, so it seems, which truly recognizes the vital constellation of *faith*, *learning*, and *service* that, historically, has guided the higher education enterprise throughout the Western tradition. I believe that Pepperdine is committed to the advancement of knowledge, the transmission of Christian culture, and the improvement of human culture generally. In this respect, I would hope that Pepperdine's mission would be similar to that articulated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* "From the Heart of the Church," Pope John Paul's 1990 encyclical, in which he urged the university to "become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society":

> Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing of the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimension.

This means, too, that "a specific priority" must be given to the evaluation of "the predominant values and norms of modern society and culture in a Christian perspective" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*).

The dual claim on us—to retreat and to engage the culture about us—has particular relevance when we consider our relationship to the larger arena of secular scholarship. Alan Wolfe's recent essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* (October 2000) is a kind of volley across the bow of the Christian academic vessel. He cajoles us not to abandon the work of the larger academic world. He invites us to enter into the fray and to be fearless in our engagements.

The time for engagement with the culture is propitious, for the field has altered greatly in recent decades. There was a time when the criticism of Christianity seemed like a favorite academic sport, and Christian intellectuals felt intimidated and marginalized in that tiny, windowless universe called modernity. But those times are passing away. Indeed, the assumptions of modernism are themselves under assault. Eugene Peterson describes it like this:

> There is a groundswell of recognition spreading throughout culture that all of life is at root spiritual, that everything we see is formed and sustained by what we cannot see. Those of us who grew up during the Great Spiritual Depression and who accustomed ourselves to an obscure life in the shadows of arrogant and bullying Technology can hardly believe our eyes and ears. People all around us—neighbors and strangers, rich and poor . . . want to know about God.

As one writer in the *New York Times* puts it, "You may be sure that the 21st century will be the most religious in 500 years . . . We have come through a long and bloody century, and something new is stirring everywhere." Such a new environment has taken some Christian academics by surprise, but we must catch up to the new realities. It is time to leave the cloister and the enclave. As one of my colleagues told me recently: "This is a wonderful, exciting time for the bold and brilliant synthesis of faith and culture, a time when the prestige of the merely secular is waning and when the believing scholar can not only have his turn at the podium but help put on the whole conference."

It is like hearing the arguments of Milton restated for our times. In *Aregopatitica*, his passionate defense of a culture animated by free and open debate, he wrote:

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. . . That which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.

The sequestered life, if it becomes total, will not mend our condition or help us contend with the world. Rather, this side of Eden, we have been placed squarely in the midst of the fray. So, Milton argues, let us be true warfaring, wayfaring Christian scholars, ready to meet our adversaries and our friends in the vigorous competition of ideas and values.

At Pepperdine I see twin ideals: the retreat into quiet space for discovery and reflection; and the open field for active, courageous engagement and service to the larger community. Our love of the active and the contemplative make us agile transients across the fault line between engagement and retreat.

4. Between Past and Present. Periodically in the West, scholars have engaged in a "battle of the books." This struggle between the Ancients and the Moderns surfaces periodically. Do we honor the past, or shall we move on and be truly contemporary and focused on the present? Issues over the canon and postmodernity have occasioned recent fierce skirmishes. Let me say that Pepperdine needs to rest squarely on this fault line.

To be honest, I believe that a great Christian university must be deeply devoted to the past. A university is precisely in the business of cultural recovery and transmission. In Medieval England there was an office called the remembrancer. The remembrancer recalled the things that everyone else forgot. That is our job today, isn't it? Through our disciplined study, we recall the truths that most people don't know or don't *want* to know. We provide the memory and, perhaps implicitly, the conscience of a culture in the grip of amnesia.

Thus, we are in the vital business of preserving and transmitting social memory. In memory lies the secret of social and spiritual redemption, for a society that cannot remember is as disabled as a person with Alzheimer's. When Franz Kafka called Prague "the city of forgetting," he was prophesying the trajectory of the West. Hasn't the whole world become the city of forgetting? Elie Wiesel says, "The opposite of history is not myth, but forgetfulness." We must get better at remembering. That is why we study Scripture and the Great Books. That is why we revere the past.

Yet we must notice the other side of the fault line. If the past is not made vital and alive in terms of the *present*, it will be dead to our students, no matter how many PowerPoint displays we use, no matter how many films we show, no matter how many field trips we take. The past can only make sense when it is related to contemporary concerns: "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled with the presence of the now" (Walter Benjamin). The past must be understood as a reality connected to our own time. We are people who love the past because it helps us in the present. We live on the fault line.

5. Other Fault Lines. A variety of other fault lines run through the university, which I will not elaborate today. The tensions between the four kinds of scholarship outlined by Ernie Boyer might fruitfully be examined for their implied fault lines. Then there are the fault lines running through the claims of tradition and the radical challenge to tradition. Consider the fault lines long ago discovered by C. P. Snow running between the sciences and the humanities, or the fault line between the liberal arts and specialized professional training, or the fault line between the call to charity and the call to knowledge. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."

Incarnational Vocation and the Mystery of the Incarnate Word

Every day, it seems, geologists discover new fault lines in California. The evidences of these faults lie all about us—some visible, many hidden. Living in a fault zone is cause for nervousness. Many of my friends are worried, but I think the fault lines constitute the risk we take to own a great cause. As Christian scholars, we have accepted the challenge of living in dual worlds. We work at a university whose foundations rest in *two* orders of existence. By *choice*, we rest our weight upon two foundations of reality: one earthly, one heavenly. And we willingly embrace the stresses that come with a dual allegiance.

Let me change metaphors a moment. Sir Thomas Browne, the great seventeenth-century physician and philosopher, described humans as the world's true amphibians "whose nature is disposed to live not only like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds." The great Christian humanists made this point again and again: we live in two climes, two different orders of existence. We inhabit "*divided and distinguished worlds*." The

constant temptation, it seems to me, is to sell out, and move into a single country; to renounce our dual citizenship; to flatten the distinctions and emigrate to places of safety; to fly to the heavens through a Gnostic repudiation of our earthliness or to succumb to our animal nature and repudiate our spiritual essence.

Christian university professors, like all good Christians, I believe, make the difficult choice of dualism over monism. We find our inspiration for this courageous choice in Jesus Christ, the model and the way, for he is the ultimate boundary-crosser: "Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness . . ."

Just as authentic Christianity is necessarily *incarnational*, positing the interconnectedness of spirit and flesh, so also Christian professors practice an incarnational vocation. We inhabit a visible world and an invisible one. Our dual citizenship, as St. Paul and Jesus describe it (this living "in" the world but not being entirely "of" the world) makes us look foolish, puzzling, perhaps schizophrenic, to those who do not share our love of the commuter's life. But we are driven by a deep sense of coherence in our singular search for truth and the One who is Truth incarnate.

Thus, living on the fault lines, we honor tradition, even while we freely critique tradition. Thus, living on the fault lines, we celebrate and transmit Christian culture, even while we seek open dialogue with all other thought systems, traditions, and cultures. Thus, we deeply and completely respect others, however great our differences, for we know the divine image animates every person we meet. Thus, we respect, care for, and examine nature with meticulous care, knowing that the divine signature inscribes every particle of creation. Thus, we continue the endless search for truth, because we believe in One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thus, we believe in the uncanny power of words, those "hyphens between heaven and earth" (Abraham Heschel), even as we worship the one true, incarnate Word.

Thus, we are at home on the fault lines. These intellectual dualities, tensions, and paradoxes are as natural to us as the geologic fissures of Southern California. They are the price we pay to be human. Finally, they are the price we gladly pay to occupy this unique space called Pepperdine University, for they make possible human creativity and the dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity and the glory of God.