

# Faculty Conference Speech

## October 3, 2014

### Introduction

During the past three months, staff and faculty colleagues have regularly asked me how I am doing and how the transition is going or has gone. I am appreciative of the seeming genuine interest on the part of the questioner about my wellbeing; rarely have I detected any expression of pity or sense that I am clearly clueless about my new position (although I will confess that my spouse considers my social sensitivity to the unspoken subtexts of conversations such as these less than stellar!). More specifically, though, no one has yet concluded a conversation with that wonderful Southern expression, “Well, bless your heart!”

From another - and far more positive - vantage, what has most impressed me has been the overwhelming willingness of colleagues to provide me information and insight into various areas with which I previously only had secondary or tertiary awareness. These expressions of graciousness have been extremely helpful in making the transition not only easier but also thoroughly enjoyable. For that help and support, I begin this morning by thanking a multitude of you in this audience.

Years ago, I presented an invited luncheon address with the title “Why can’t we have ourselves for students?” The title was intentionally ambiguous, knowing that I would be speaking to an audience of scholars whose professional lives involve exegeting and critiquing the syntax, grammar, and nuances of every sentence, if not word, in oral and written texts. More importantly, the title was intentionally ambiguous because, at the time I was invited to speak, I had no idea what I was going to say! This morning I find myself in a similar situation. From my perspective, the only glitch in an otherwise fairly smooth transition to the Provost’s office has been the securing of a qualified keynoter for this faculty conference. After extending approximately half a dozen invitations (that were declined), I realized that people I thought might have something of value to say were already doing that elsewhere! I mention that because it is important to acknowledge what this address is *not*. This is neither a position piece nor a definitive proclamation of who we are, where we are going, or how we will get there. Rather, my comments this morning

reflect the reading and reflection I have been doing since becoming provost – especially reading and reflection that seemed most relevant to the educational enterprise at Pepperdine. I hope my thoughts will trigger in you reflection and insights we might share in the coming year concerning the role and function of Pepperdine University in the landscape of higher education.

For the next few minutes, I will focus my thoughts in three primary areas: 1) current dynamics in American higher education; 2) current dynamics in Christian higher education; and 3) the place and role of Pepperdine University in higher education. While each area offers a multitude of topics for discussion, I have chosen to present a snapshot of one aspect of that area and scholarly resources I have found helpful.

### **Current Dynamics in American Higher Education**

I have spent my entire adult life in higher education. Like many of you, I first fell in love with my discipline of study as an undergraduate; the world of ancient languages and the messages contained in those ancient texts not only fascinated me, they also inspired me. Again, like many of you, I only later developed a theological rationale for my life's work. For me, it was somewhat painless; for one who spends his life with the central texts – “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and *mind*...and your neighbor as yourself,” the justification was fairly easy. Higher education, specifically Christian higher education, is focused upon the offering of the mind fully to the task at hand. The vocation of teaching in a Christian university easily conjoins with the call to “love our neighbor as ourselves.”

To acknowledge my vocational worldview is not to suggest I received any *help* in this regard from my doctoral education. Attending The Johns Hopkins University, the self-proclaimed first thoroughly secular university modeled entirely upon the German research model, provided no inspiration or insight into effective engagement of students who were not already attracted to the discipline of the professor. (The educational insights I received from Hopkins came in other areas.) Pedagogy and concern for the educational experience of the student merited no recognition in the professorial reward system.

This morning I begin by acknowledging that the task of the professor today is significantly more challenging and daunting than when I entered the professoriate more

than 30 years ago. Just as life as a child was considerably easier for me than for my children, and certainly for my grandchildren, so academic life presents more challenges and demands upon today's professor than previous eras. I would add that academic life is also more challenging at an institution that prizes excellent teaching coupled with research than at an institution that rewards almost solely upon scholarly productivity and fund procurement through grants. Not surprisingly, given my position, almost daily I am informed by colleagues that being a professor has become an almost overwhelmingly time-consuming task with far too many expectations; these conversations are matched by comments from non-academics with whom I interact outside of the academy who, when learning what I do, refer to the "cushy life of an academic!" While polls show that this country continues to have a fascination (and now to a lesser degree) admiration for who we are and what we do, critiques and criticism of the higher education enterprise surface weekly, both from within and outside the academy. Articles appear daily in highly respected journals and periodicals lamenting the state of higher education in America and asserting that American higher education has *lost its way*. At the same time, polls consistently show that American higher education remains the envy of the world, with numerous nations attempting to transplant it in their settings.

The state of American higher education is no longer simply a topic of interest to accrediting agencies; state legislatures, corporate executives, investors looking for secure profit margins, and the federal government all articulate strong opinions and varying degrees of "solutions" for the future of higher education. The discussion is sufficiently robust that several writers on this subject have published sequels to their first forays into the topic. Derek Bok, former president of Harvard, last year published *Higher Education in America*. More recently Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa have published *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates* [2014] (a sequel to their earlier *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* [2011]). (Not surprisingly, they note there is "mounting evidence" that demonstrates American colleges need to do a better job improving the requisite 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of critical thinking and complex reasoning.) Just this past month, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* printed a dialogue between Harry R. Lewis, professor of computer science at Harvard and author of *Excellence without a Soul* [2007] and William Deresiewicz, former professor of English at Yale and author of *Excellent*

*Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* [2014] (the latter work marketed brilliantly through an excerpt in *The New Republic* entitled “Don’t Send your Kid to the Ivy League”). Common to the plethora of works in this area are a sense of confidence in surfacing and diagnosing the problems and semi-arrogance in proposing the “fix” (although, not surprisingly, the fixes vary radically depending upon the presumed problems!). Lest I be accused of being “Seaver-centric” in my reading, I have noted similar criticisms or critiques relating to legal education (see Brian Tamanaha, *Failing Law Schools*) and business education (though of a different genre, I recently read the engaging and best-selling work by Steven Silbiger, *The 10-day MBA: A Step by Step Guide to Mastering the Skills Taught in America’s Top Business Schools*, where the author argues that all MBAs are essentially the same; they simply arrange the furniture differently to market their product more effectively!). Perhaps our education colleagues at GSEP and Seaver have the greatest challenge – I dare you to find someone in our society who does not have a strong opinion about K-12 education in this country and how to fix it!

As academicians, how should we respond to such strongly voiced critiques (an especially pertinent question for professors whose life vocation is critique)? From my perspective, some of the criticisms lodged against the academy are understandable. The quantitative evidence clearly shows that a striking preponderance of faculty today manifest far more allegiance to their discipline than to their institution. (Interestingly, many attribute the origins of this phenomenon to Max Weber, who argued that such *should* be the case. An unintended consequence of this may be reflected in low alumni institutional loyalty, since many alumni connect to their alma mater primarily through respected faculty mentors.) For many scholars, rewards and recognition are far greater through one’s discipline than through one’s institution. Similarly, departments when hiring often select colleagues solely based on scholarly reputation and prestige; typically absent is any sense of “fit” with the mission of the school or educational needs of the students. Couple this practice with a current societal obsession with individual rights and prerogatives, and with the academy’s tendency at times to engage in mild self-absorption and aloofness (bordering on arrogance), one finds a recipe for discontent from multiple angles. The academy, historically created to benefit society by providing an educated and informed citizenry and to help society effectively address challenges, now finds itself the recipient of

criticism with critics questioning its long-term sustainability. Rather than debating how we arrived here, it seems preferable to acknowledge the legitimacy of those charges that are valid, counter those assertions that are specious or inaccurate, and engage in serious conversation about the best way forward.

Although many acknowledge that one element of the genius of American higher education is its manifestation in diverse forms, a significant challenge for schools such as Pepperdine is the pressure to succumb to a “one-size-fits-all” form of educational delivery and mission. Professor Edward L. Ayers, recently retired president of the University of Richmond and noted Civil War era historian, has spoken and written extensively and eloquently on the value of retaining multiple forms of higher education in this country, from community colleges to land grant and large public institutions to private liberal arts and private and public R1 institutions. He has also enriched the conversation about the definition, nature, and value of scholarship in the academy. Wedded to the larger definition of scholarship embodied in the writings of Ernest Boyer, Professor Ayers argues that scholarship, rightly disciplinary by nature, flourishes when it engages other disciplines and the larger non-academic community. He suggests the American public longs to benefit from the scholarly insights and contributions historically provided only by the academy.

If one accepts the dictum that Pepperdine studiously avoids the pressure to succumb to a “one-size-fits-all” model, I would suggest that we continue to find ways to articulate the nature and power of a Pepperdine education. This will necessarily involve finding compelling, while gracious and humble, ways to differentiate our educational goals from those currently receiving attention in the public arena.

The growing conversation about “Competency-Based Education” (CBE) intrigues me. While initially a conversation tied almost exclusively to the domain of for-profit education, the topic is gaining increasing traction among the non-profit educational world. Several non-profit colleges and universities have recently received significant media coverage for declarations that they have put in place systems to assess incoming competencies (so that courses and life experiences may be credited upon matriculation) and to assure their hiring constituencies that they are graduating and providing the marketplace “competent” candidates for employment.

While some might choose to ignore such declarations, considering them either harmless examples of grandstanding or shameless attempts to gain free media coverage, I personally think moments such as these enable Pepperdine to reaffirm the nature and goal of *our* educational enterprise. From my perspective, “competency” is a minimalist standard that sets the bar at the lowest possible placement. Our educational aspirations far exceed mere competency! Perhaps an analogy will help. Although not a chess player, I would still dare to suggest that there is a dramatic difference between a *competent* chess player and a *good or great* chess player. A *competent* chess player is fully conversant with the rules of chess and knows which moves are valid or invalid at any given point during the match. Conversely, a *good or great* chess player not only knows fully the rules of the game but, at any given moment, knows which moves are preferable among the several options and, even more importantly, anticipates future moves based on decisions made! Similar analogies could be drawn for any sport (e.g., the difference between a competent tennis player and a great tennis player) and writers (competent vs. great writers).

At Pepperdine, we aspire to produce not simply competent graduates but good and great graduates! If this is not, and has not been our aspiration, then from my perspective we have been hiring the wrong faculty, matriculating the wrong students, and offering misguided educational programs. For the past several years, I have been directly involved in the hiring of faculty and staff at Seaver College and observed the hiring of faculty and staff at the graduate schools from one-step removed. We have been hiring colleagues who aspire to excellence in their own personal lives and who elicit the same from our students. My point is simple: given the seeming fascination with “Competency-Based Education,” Pepperdine will need to find effective ways to communicate the distinctive nature and power of a Pepperdine education. The marketplace should not assume Pepperdine graduates merely understand their disciplines or know the correct legal moves and allowable entrepreneurial options; they should expect and receive Pepperdine graduates who bring to the enterprise - be it the lab, the workplace, the courtroom, the classroom, or the clinic - the ability to analyze and critique the various options, to anticipate the implications and potential unintended consequences of the several options, and to articulate ethical implications of any selected action. Such are the graduates we aspire to produce at Pepperdine.

## Current dynamics of Christian higher education

If higher education finds itself currently in a somewhat defensive mode in its relationship with the American public, faith-based education, specifically Christian higher education, finds itself in a rather interesting relationship with the public *and* the academy. The largely secular academy typically disregards the place and importance of faith-based institutions, often seeing them primarily as quaint reminders of a bygone era. (I'm often told during interviews with candidates for faculty positions that their doctoral supervisors are baffled that they might consider a faith-based institution over an R1 option.) Not infrequently, the strident assertions against faith-based institutions border on disdain, arguing that Christian universities *by definition* violate the tenets and ideals of genuine intellectual inquiry. Simply put, the assumption is that one cannot be a person of true rigorous intellect and academic integrity and a person of faith.

The latter opinion has been bluntly voiced recently in an op-ed piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Peter Conn in "The Great Accreditation Farce" argues vociferously that accreditation legitimacy is a farce if schools with religious affiliations receive accreditation and are allowed to receive federal and state financial aid. I quote:

By awarding accreditation to religious colleges, the process confers legitimacy on institutions that systematically undermine the most fundamental purposes of higher education. Skeptical and unfettered inquiry is the hallmark of American teaching and research. However, such inquiry cannot flourish – in many cases, cannot even survive – inside religious institutions that erect religious tests for truth. The contradiction is obvious. (2014)

He labels current practice a "scandal." (Interestingly, most of his argumentation is impressionistic and anecdotal; he provides no hard quantitative data to support his assertions.)

The history of American higher education is well documented and need not be repeated here. Virtually all private colleges and universities in this country trace their origins to a particular Christian denomination. Just as today loyalty to one's discipline often trumps allegiance to one's institution, so in an earlier era adherence to a religious heritage diminished at those institutions striving for academic excellence (academic excellence

defined in such a way to eliminate metaphysical inquiries historically associated with religion and theology).

Often, proponents of faith-based institutions argue that the academy rightly and historically was founded upon twin pillars – that of academic excellence and Christian mission. The clear conclusion, whether articulated explicitly or implicitly, is that removal of the “Christian mission” pillar diminishes the academic enterprise. Unfortunately, often left unanswered were numerous questions raised by the imagery. Most notably, the image of twin pillars left unstated the *relationship* of the two pillars, the *relative size* of each pillar, and the *proximity* of the pillars (at several elite universities the “mission” pillar has been relegated to an appended seminary). Most challenging, the unstated inference was that these twin pillars could actually stand alone. The history of higher education chronicles overwhelming documentation of institutions that opted either for academic excellence at the expense of Christian mission or commitment to Christian mission that compromised academic rigor and the fearless pursuit of truth. Further, the image suggests something that is static (i.e., these pillars support something that sits atop them and merits support). Such an image, while appealing, counters contemporary understanding about the fluid and changing nature of higher education.

Let me propose a different image. The image I find increasingly compelling is that of a ladder. In this image, Christian faith and academic excellence function as the twin railings of the ladder. This image offers numerous advantages to the pillar imagery. First, it eliminates a serious, if not fatal, flaw in that imagery. From my perspective, if we adhere strictly to the pillar imagery, we are hard put to deny that many matters of substance can be and are supported by single pillars. As a result, the secular academy can repeatedly argue that the sole pillar of academic excellence provides everything necessary to effectively support the enterprise of higher education. From another vantage, many Christian institutions of higher learning, fearful of the rigorous pursuit of knowledge, ultimately may be guilty of sacrificing academic excellence for the presumed maintenance of the Christian faith. Supplanting pillar image with ladder imagery removes these initial rebuttals. Second, and perhaps most obvious, the relationship of the two railings is clear. No truly functional ladder can exist without rungs connecting the railings. While something substantial can possibly be supported by one pillar, or by a greater and lesser pillar, a

ladder must have two equally substantial railings. Somewhat related, those ascending this ladder, to ascend effectively, must grip both railings. Third, this image allows significant conversation about the several rungs of the ladder. If this image works, every rung of the university ladder must clearly connect with both railings of the ladder. From the first rung to the top rung, our students would experience the integration of Christian faith and academic excellence. Fourth, this image takes seriously what we espouse regarding higher education today. No longer is higher education simply the enterprise of transmitting known truths, truths shored up by the twin pillars of academic excellence and Christian faith. Rather, higher education, at its best, is about movement and progression from one place to a higher place. Only a ladder with the twin railings solidly connected can aid the climber in reaching the ultimate goal. From my perspective, this image comports extremely well not only with the currently stated goals and aspirations of the highest echelons of the academy; an education ladder with solidly connected academic and spiritual rungs at each step enables everyone involved (students, faculty, and staff) to achieve the loftiest goals of academic excellence (critical thinking, clear and compelling oral and written presentation, articulate analysis and synthesis of complex problems and issues, etc.). Similarly, this same ladder finds a home in the world of faith – Christian scholars are exhorted to “set [their] minds on things that are above” (Paul) and engage in the relentless search for “faith seeking understanding” (Anselm).

### **Role of Pepperdine in Higher Education**

Virtually every institution of higher learning presents itself as “unique” in its mission and goals. While numerous institutions allot significant funds to promote the uniqueness of their school, the casual observer is more often than not hard pressed to articulate any substantive differences among the multitude of institutions. While recognizing the danger of engaging in such an activity, I would (hopefully not too presumptuously) suggest that there are key components to Pepperdine’s identity that make it somewhat unique among institutions of higher learning in this country. At least three pieces of evidence support my thesis: 1) to my knowledge, Pepperdine is the only nationally ranked Christian university that is Protestant and carries a DRU categorization rather than the more assumed R1 designation for a national ranking; 2) in my interactions

with people less directly familiar with Pepperdine but aware of it, the overwhelming assumption is that we are 2-3 times larger than our actual size (put differently, we seem to “play far bigger on the national stage” than our size would suggest); 3) while we have some challenges determining peer and aspirational institutions for each of our five schools, we have an *especially* difficult time determining peer and aspirational institutions for the University. Put differently, Pepperdine University has a visibility and impact on the national stage out of proportion to our size categorization. How should we respond?

Some might suggest our impact and influence could or should be even greater! We might whine or lament that our academic colleagues do not take us more seriously, or alternately, we might defensively assert that our academic colleagues are not as impressive as they might first appear and attempt to point out their shortcomings. While such responses might be personally satisfying for a moment, I would suggest another approach. Lately, I have been rereading the works of Mark Schwehn, recently retired provost and noted Professor of Humanities at Valparaiso University, and tributes paid him by colleagues at his retirement.

In an academic conversation often riddled with defensiveness, stridency, and despair, Professor Schwehn consistently manifested an academic demeanor that was balanced in content, judicious in scope, and irenic in spirit. He refused to address pressing (and often controversial) issues with an “us/them” approach or to operate from an “against / anti-” position. Schwehn openly acknowledged the strengths of the arguments of those with whom he disagreed and engaged the most daunting issues facing faith-based institutions with the highest standards of academic rigor and integrity. Schwehn refused to succumb to special pleading – he never intimated nor suggested that Christian scholars have a *right* to a place at the academic table. Rather, he simply produced scholarship of such a quality that no true scholar could ignore his work or deny him a hearing and prominent place at the discussion table.

I would suggest the model of scholarship embodied in the writings of Mark Schwehn might serve us well institutionally. Pepperdine has a place at the table; we have earned that place through our scholarship and reputation for academic integrity, not through any special pleading. Though pressures abound, we have refused to accept the adage that intellectual rigor and academic integrity are incompatible with deep and profound faith.

We refuse to accept the assumption that, having unashamedly affirmed that “God is,” we have sold out intellectually. Rather, to use language currently in vogue in much of the academy, we affirm that our quintessential affirmation, “God is...and truth has nothing to fear from relentless inquiry” produces a far more coherent and compelling metanarrative than competing worldviews. (As a side-note, I would suggest we not apologize for the ethical implications of seeing humanity as created in the image of God and, therefore, creatures worthy of respect. It strikes me as somewhat ironic that numerous scholars are currently employing the techniques of volume, bombast, disdain, vitriol and emotion-laden arguments to deny a place for civility in the academic arena, methods they have previously argued are the hallmarks of faith-based institutions they consider devoid of reasoned thought and measured logic!)

Pepperdine aspires to provide an educational experience that fully intertwines academic excellence with a Christian worldview. Numerous universities offer an education embodying the highest standards of academic rigor and excellence. Alternatively, numerous colleges and universities offer an education centered in the ethics and ideals of Christian faith. Pepperdine strives to join seamlessly these two goals. The University commits to avoiding studiously the twin pitfalls inherent in the pursuit of academic excellence. We will avoid the temptations to achieve academic excellence through either muting the Christian mission of the school or moving to an academic agenda associated with a traditional research-based institution. We will refuse to abandon our faith-based heritage to achieve an academic excellence that, presumably, only belongs to secular institutions.

Over the past few years, the University has engaged in several conversations, formal and informal, regarding the Pepperdine *brand*. A few years ago, an outside consultant asked, “What *hill* in higher education would Pepperdine consider claiming that is currently unclaimed?” He then proceeded to answer his own question, declaring that the *unclaimed hill* that Pepperdine seems uniquely positioned to claim is the hill combining superb academics with Christian faith.

Though several of our schools are rightly scattered across the southern California landscape, the image of *claiming a hill* meshes nicely with our Malibu location and

theological vision. As a University *set on a hill*, the language of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount comes easily to mind:

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

In the contemporary world of higher education, numerous colleges and universities “shine,” bringing honor and glory through their accomplishments to their faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Pepperdine has and will continue to engage in many of these same activities; however, the rationale for our striving for excellence will be fundamentally different – we will strive to achieve the highest standards of academic excellence so that “they may see [y]our good works and *give glory to [y]our Father in heaven.*” In this context, individual and institutional prestige and honors accrued will be rightly considered serendipitous by-products resulting from the studied pursuit of academic excellence in service of the Christian mission.

To return to the fundamental goal of the University, Pepperdine remains committed to providing an academic experience for our students that embodies the highest standards of academic excellence and ideals of Christian faith at the curricular and co-curricular level. *Providing such an education will empower our students to become leaders in all fields of endeavor – thought-leaders in the intellectual arena, service-leaders in their local, national, and international communities, and entrepreneurial leaders who excel in providing an ethical vision to the commercial sector.* As mentioned earlier, this vision counters powerfully the ongoing pressures in our society to offer an education that, while possibly initially appealing, settles for the lowest common denominator (namely, competency-based education). In striking contrast, Pepperdine envisions an educational landscape where a handful of higher education institutions provide an educational experience that is so academically superb that a degree from that institution assumes a graduate who not only exceeds current competency expectations but is fully equipped to tackle professions and societal challenges not yet envisioned. While a handful of research-intensive schools are already there in reputation, that cadre of schools is notably lacking any faith-based institution with a Protestant heritage.

While a vision of academic excellence fully engaged with Christian mission is relatively simple to articulate, the challenges to implementing this vision are numerous and often subtle. For the past several years, Pepperdine has been positioned among, cited with, and in competition with some of the most highly regarded institutions of higher learning in this country. Although this has presented significant challenges for us, the University has also benefited greatly from its association with these premier institutions. Pepperdine, although quite different in focus and agenda from many of these institutions, envisions not only maintaining its academic reputation but also increasing its reputation for academic excellence and Christian mission. Penultimate challenges include allowing the economic climate and limited resources to blur the vision and focus of the academic agenda, assuming a Doctoral/Research University (DRU) cannot compete with research-intensive (R1) schools, or more enticingly, succumbing to the temptation to become a research-driven school. However, the greatest challenge for the University is likely not external but internal – settling for a status of good rather than striving to become great. To return to the opening assertion, Pepperdine has the opportunity and potential to claim a place currently unclaimed in higher education in the United States, providing a first-class academic experience that simultaneously engages the intellectual and ethical greatness of the Christian message. No Protestant-affiliated university currently claims this place in American higher education. Pepperdine aspires to provide an academic experience that can compete with the academic reputation of the most elite institutions of higher education in this country, without offering the *pedagogical* disadvantages encountered at most research-intensive universities. The University also aspires to provide an educational experience that embodies the noblest ideals of the Christian faith, without compromising the highest standards of academic excellence.

To place the University among the top echelons of academic excellence (as defined by the larger academy and “national perception”) will necessarily involve recruiting and retaining faculty who have the intellectual acumen, academic credentials, and moral will to engage the pressing issues of the day at the highest levels intellectually and ethically. To offer our students an educational experience that fully prepares them for the world of graduate or post-graduate education or the professional world requires that we continue to hire and retain faculty fully conversant with and respected in those worlds. We must

employ a faculty fully equipped to provide our students not only *proficiency* in the traditional skills associated with a superior liberal learning and graduate or professional education but also *conversancy* with the great global, societal, and natural issues past and present. It also means we hire faculty from various faith traditions who bring a spiritual vibrancy and theological inquisitiveness to engage the perennial and compelling questions that surround academic excellence and Christian mission. The University is passionate and unwavering in its single-minded commitment to deliver a transformative education that seamlessly intertwines academic excellence with Christian mission. Realizing this vision will empower Pepperdine to stand unique as a Christian institution providing a “brand” that is synonymous with academic excellence.

I close with an observation from Robert Benne, known to several here for his work, *Quality with Soul*. Perhaps less well known to many is that Professor Benne several years ago delivered a paper at Pepperdine in which he articulated *his* vision of our University’s potential role in the drama of American higher education. Not unexpectedly, Benne began with the famous quip of the early church historian Tertullian, “What do Jerusalem and Athens have to do with each other?” Professor Benne noted that the secular academy has largely abandoned the wisdom of Jerusalem for the knowledge and insights of Athens, assuming that one had to choose either the “presumed” wisdom of Jerusalem or the scientifically reasoned knowledge of Athens. Benne denied the exclusive nature of this choice. Rather, he argued that the wisdom Jerusalem offers is equally compelling to the knowledge of Athens. However, from his perspective, bringing the wisdom of Jerusalem once again into the center of academic intellectual thought and discussion would require a university respected and recognized for its familiarity with and expertise in the ways of Athens! Put differently, it would require a university with the academic gravitas to be taken seriously in the arena of public discussion. He considered Pepperdine such an institution. May we rise to the challenge.

Thank you.