COLLECTION SPEECH
by
President Robert D. Cross
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I am honored by this opportunity to speak at the First Collection at Swarthmore this year. It was a wise decision last year, I think, to change Collection from a required assembly to an occasion where members of the college community come together, not only in the expectation of fellowship, but on the hope that something worthwhile would transpire.

At the same time that I feel honored, I feel nervous. The Phoenix has been conducting a war of nerves with me. Last week I was editorially enjoined to deliver a major address. (Nothing they could have said would be more conducive to making me feel like a congenitally minor poet.) Then a week ago, a friendly reporter asked, "What are you going to say that will bring the boys up from ML?" This was truly a stunning question to one like me who lived in Mary Lyons for 7 years, and had by the end of that time come to realize that one of my duties was to make a weekly report to at least one of the student residents there about what was happening on the other side of the tracks. The Phoenix this past Tuesday reported I was indeed going to speak, then headed the remaining section of the article, which referred to subsequent Collection speakers under the hopeful term "better quality." To the Phoenix, I can only respond: (1) Paul Ylvisaker and Jean Cahn are remarkable people, and I don't mind an invidious comparison with them. (2) I don't know whether the ML boys are here or not; it will be up to the Phoenix to carry the news up there. (3) My own intention is to present a view of Swarthmore College; (whether it is a "major address" is for others to decide) I do not presume that my view will coincide with that of all others, though I hope to persuade at least a few dissenters; but that my main purpose is not to carve on stone a creed for the college, but to raise some issues that I hope can be muttered about, or discussed, or, hopefully, clarified as the year goes on. I invite any and all to meet with me in Commons after this talk to pursue the discussion.

When I was introduced to many of the upperclassmen last Spring, I acknowledged that the last time I had spoken from this platform (in 1959) I had discussed what students who had finished Swarthmore faced, as they left the College, thereby immediately confronting the problems of old age. And I said last Spring, in the decade that I had been away from Swarthmore, I had come increasingly to wonder about the institution of a college; I had come to regard it as a gamble (but a gamble worth taking); and that I intended to spend as much of the summer thinking what sort of a gamble or game it was. Then, ten days ago, when I addressed an audience in the Meeting House, composed of 8 faculty and administrators, 45 upperclassmen helping with orientation, 360 freshmen, and 413,000 mosquitoes, I tried to suggest some of the purposes which had motivated the Founding Fathers of the College, and by implication, some part of the ethos which the past had recommended to the present and the future of the College. I'd now like to concentrate more directly on the present existential situation of the College. Because I need to save some of the ideas that have occurred to me for my inauguration speech

next week, I propose to consider today what the internal relations - the domestic state of the College - seems to be and what it ought to be. Next week, I shall concentrate on our foreign relations, in short, with our society and our world. In making this distinction, I acknowledge its artificiality, and misleadingness. "Everything correlates," as a brilliant college book of a few years ago proclaimed. And the time has long since passed, if it ever existed, when a college, any more than this nation, could pretend that its department of health, education, and welfare could be conducted oblivious of what the department of state and department of defense (in more straightforward days, we called the latter departments of war and navy) were up to. But since it is primarily students and faculty here today, and since next week many alumni, Board members, and friends from the community will be here, I shall use the distinction, hopefully with appropriate reservations.

I don't suppose that there has ever been a time when people generally agreed just what a college was or ought to be. Historians of the language, of the law, and of education instead make clear that there have always been pronounced variations, even within the same culture and the same period. And in the United States, one is tempted to paraphrase the late Bill Klem, the greatest of all baseball umpires, who, when questioned what his definition of a strike was, declared that a strike was what he called a strike. A liberal arts college in America, one might be led to conclude, has been what the man or men with the loudest voices declared was a liberal arts college. It is probably true that in our own time there has been a greater lack of agreement than at any other time, and at the same time less and less inclination to admit that there is any legitimate umpire to settle the dispute. I suspect these developments stem partly from the enormous increase in colleges, and the even greater number of people attending them, sending their children to them, or paying taxes to support them. It also results from the acceleration of social development - at a rate which would have staggered even Henry Adams - which have rendered all previous definitions suspect and made all institutions seem anachronistic. And this at the very time that most people have retained a faith that education, even liberal education, may just be more important than ever. To sum up, our culture, with no clear tradition of what liberal arts education consists of, has simultaneously insisted that more and more of it be provided, at the same time that it has, more passionately than ever, disagreed on what liberal arts education should be, should so, should mean.

In formulating my own conception of liberal arts education, I have been helped by trying to describe two models, two "ideal types"; I do not imagine that anyone, now or in the past, ever subscribed to every detail of these models, but I have tried to avoid constructing men of straw, from whom it would be too easy to knock the stuffing. But let me say here that after criticizing these models, I do not intend to present a wholly coherent one of my own, but simply to advance, later on, some notes towards a strategy of action appropriate to Swarthmore.

The first model I shall, with some sense of risk, call the Establishment model. At its most glorious, it flourished during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance; at its most banal, it still exists today, though as a parody of both premise and practice. Informing this model was the conviction that there was what can be called an encyclopedia of learning, comprising not only a summa of what was known, but also tested methods for extending the body of knowledge, with respect both for the intrinsic subject, and for the other areas of knowledge. It is an admirable conviction. If, for convenience, specialization of knowledge and inquiry proved desirable, it would be specialization within an overarching conception of knowledge, and in the conviction that knowledge reached its fruition in being and doing. An educational institution dominated by this conception would seek to initiate all comers into both the awareness of the grand schema, and the techniques by which knowledge could be advanced, at least in some area or discipline. Professors acquired a hearing by their ability both to outline the whole framework of knowledge, and to tell students how to develop specialized competences of their own. If the Ranaissance University constituted the apogée of this educational model, perhaps the old-time liberal arts college in the early 19th century illustrated the nadir. Students disenchanted with their college experience might find it illuminating to read Edward Gibbon's comments on Oxford in the 18th century, or Henry David Thoreau's account of his years at Harvard. Discontent with this model is not an invention of the contemporary generation.

The second model was prefigured in Thoreau's participation in the first great romanticist revolution in Western culture; we are, I think, nearly drowned by the in-flow of the second surge of romanticism today. In contrast to the belief that an encyclopedia of learning existed (at least in the mind of educated men), Thoreau believed that he would learn more by rowing up the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, or gazing intently through the ice of Walden Pond, or, perhaps most importantly, by looking into his own mind and soul, in the isolation of his own hut or of the town jail. Instead of disciplining himself to what his friend Emerson called the "corpse-cold" knowledge of Harvard and State Street, he preferred to instruct himself, listening to the discourse of neighboring farmers and itinerant Irish laborers, and reading only that which liberated him from the conventional wisdom of his times - such as the books of Eastern religion, and the literature of contemporary English and German romantics. Like some students today, he could accept a college only if it helped him learn what he himself knew and thought; all that others knew and professed and believed in was obstruction and interference. He could echo Melville's complacent remark that the world of experience was his Yale College and his Harvard.

In referring to these two types I do not mean either to lampoon them, nor to idealize them. I should hope that we could learn from them, and especially from their sense that the crucial aspect of the college lies in the quality of transaction between those who are gathered together in the artificial relationships that comprise a college. In the first

model, the transaction was a flow of knowledge and skill from the learned professional toward the young amateur; in the second, the student was uniquely active; if he did not regard the learned professor as irrelevant, he might be inclined to treat him as a simple resource, like books which Emerson declared were fit only for the inquirer's idle moments. As one modern romanticist would have it, students should come to college not to learn what a professoriat knows, but to find out what they themselves know, and feel, and believe.

My notion of the college is one that presupposes a more dynamic interaction among students and teachers than either model stipulates. Both students and teachers are active, though not necessarily at the same time, nor in the same way. There is room and need, for both tradition and innovation. There is a responsibility to seek out not only the encyclopedia of learning as it has been perceived, however dimly, but to restore its coherence - or, what I think is much the same thing, - to sense its many-faceted relevance to all the activities of all of us as we are and as we would want to become, - as our society is now, and as we would want it to be in the future.

For a college to realize such a notion, there are, I am afraid, no easy guides, no simple organizational charts. I do confine myself to offering here some criteria, or notes toward the definition of an appropriate politics, or ethics, or tactics for an evolving liberal arts college of the kind I would admire. These criteria are directed not so much at defining the ultimate goal of the liberal arts college, as toward the conduct by which all of us at an institution which yearns to become one can advance that likelihood. Let me sum up a variety of suggestions under two main headings: authenticity and civility. Other terms, or broad categories might be equally appropriate, but these allow me to celebrate some important characteristics. By stressing two themes, I mean to give emphasis to their complementarity. Authenticity without civility may produce chaos; civility without authenticity is certain to mean stultification.

By authenticity, I mean nothing more nor less than the achievement of true individuality. Certainly nothing is more difficult. The popular slogan of "doing your own thing," however admirable as an injunction, is no invitation to an easy, or unexamined life. Only the most romantic would assume that it means simply "doing what comes naturally." It is probably true that the steady development of contemporary mass culture has made the task steadily harder; yet it remains one of the most important responsibilities of liberal education to help the individual achieve true individuality, or authenticity. I certainly do not imply that formal education can hope to do the job alone, do it for everybody, or do it rapidly. But I am persuaded that it is one of the supremely important jobs for liberal education to be concerned with.

It is a sad fact, but a true one, that the roles we play in a college sometimes conspire to hamper the development of authenticity,

rather than to foster it. (Since I am a newcomer to the modern Swarthmore, I shall speak mostly in general terms, making specific references to other places and other rooms; if there are analogies to the Swarthmore you know, I imagine that you will be able to draw them.)

To profess to be a teacher at a liberal arts college is an act of confidence, at times even bravado. For he must, given the role he has chosen to play, respond to the claims of both the art or science to which he is committed, and of the students with whom he must relate. Times may have changed, and hopefully changed in the right direction, but when I was a graduate student, I was given to understand that my aim in life was to be an historian. It seemed to me then, and still does, to be a most demanding profession. I took my cues from my professors, and other already-practicing historians. I attended many meetings of scholarly associations, and produced several scholarly papers, before I ever taught a class, or gave much thought to what teaching involved. Much of this was wholly proper, if seen as an emphasis for a phase of my training and not a whole preoccupation for a whole life. Surely, to be carefree or oblivious of the intellectual claims of one's discipline is not only irresponsible; it obviates the possibility of becoming the serious scholar that every teacher purports, or ought to purport to be. It was my good fortune to do my first substantial amount of teaching at Swarthmore, where I very swiftly came to realize both the intrinsic pleasure and the absolute necessity of establishing rapport with my students. This, too, is hard to accomplish authentically. Neither the student nor the professor benefits if in fact the professor, out of an excess of fellow-feeling or insecurity or responsiveness to the needs and interests of the student, becomes nothing more than a mirror to the student's glance. Emerson, in describing "The American Scholar," pointed to the best possible escape from the predicament I have sketched, by arguing that the scholar must above all else be a man, - one who stands on his own feet, and thinks his own thoughts, and speaks his own mind. Anxious to respond wholeheartedly to the legitimate demands of his discipline, and also to the ambiance of his students, he must above all else find his own stance; he must, in short, be authentic.

The task is, if anything, even more difficult for the student. He will be aided by great teachers, - defined as I have just done as men so committed to authenticity that they mean to reward or acclaim nothing less in their students. Every college I have known has been defaced by the spectacle of students - whether encouraged or not by faculty members is not in point here - who resolutely emulate a teacher, in his intellectual, social, or emotional style. Sadly enough the teachers emulated frequently are resolutely authentic themselves, yet somehow, in a manner perhaps obvious to members of the Psychology Department, convey to students the message that to respect is to emulate, or, if I may be explicit, to imitate, or to ape.

A much more potent threat to the student comes from his peer-culture. It is devastatingly simple, and for much of one's psychological life profoundly reassuring to submerge oneself in the opinions, the preferences,

the behavior-patterns of one's peers. Usually, of course, one does not drown in the mores of all one's peers, but rather in those of a select group, - those of one's precise age, one's own sex, one's dormitory, one's ethnic group, one's academic field. I do not wish to be misunderstood as advocating a hyper-individualism. It is right and proper, even healthy, to receive cues from one's fellow-students; to prefer the company of some to that of others; to unite in pursuit of goals that are common to a few other students, or common to all of them. What I hope for, - what I think essential, is a self-conscious balancing of these legitimate claims with the steadfast pursuit of individual authenticity.

Lest I assume the character of a common scold with admonitions for everyone but myself, may I add that the quest for authenticity is an important obligation for those whose chief task in a college is administrative. So long as we continue the curious custom of having a president in a college, it seems to me essential that he be more than a supremely other-directed man, however great his temptation to try to be all things to all men - or at least to all students, faculty, alumni, trustees, the foundations, the environing public, the government, and every other reference-group. Administrators need to cherish convictions of their own, need to know who they are (not just who is beating on them, or whom it might be pleasurable to beat on), and what they stand for. All those of you who encountered, if only briefly, Courtney Smith, the late President of Swarthmore College, recognized that you had met a man, a unique man, a man of authenticity. That is the kind of recognition all of us, - in administration, on the faculty, in the student body, should like to deserve.

Complementary to the need for authenticity is the need in the College for civility. As with authenticity, it is both a goal and a precondition of liberal arts education. In a traditional society and in a traditional college, this point would not need to be argued. In a society like ours where tradition is not abandoned, but simply ignored, and in a college like Swarthmore where convention is more respected in poetry than anywhere else, the point may not be so obvious; but I think it is a persuasive one.

All societies, and all colleges, have codes of conduct; some favor elaborately explicit, detailed, perhaps even written-down codes; others like Swarthmore, with a high regard for the wisdom and faith of the individual, have tended to promulgate relatively few hard-and-fast, and legible rules.

The ultimate justification for civility, however it is sought, is not some abstract order - not some supernal calm - not some fastidious distaste for the dissidence of dissent - but rather the fostering of a climate in which it is plausible to hope that true authenticity, (among other goals) may flourish. Its pragmatic rationale is respect for the reasonable pursuit of authenticity of others. Its presupposition is that the reasonableness of others' enterprises may always be questioned, and that, if found to be in fact unreasonable, that they can be either rendered reasonable, or abated, promptly and reasonably.

Last year, on many college campuses and at Swarthmore after the occupation of the Admissions Office, there developed a widespread feeling that there was no longer any consensus on what constituted the legitimate demands of civility on a college campus. At Swarthmore, a student-faculty-administration-Board of Managers committee produced after thorough discussion a lengthy document outlining the arguments for what I call civility, and stipulating general ground-rules for dealing with occasions when it would seem to have broken down. The three student members on the committee added concurring opinions which noted a measure of dissent from one part or another of the document. (Both the report and the special opinions are available, in the Library or the President's Office.) Subsequently last Spring the faculty approved, though not unanimously, the main report; the Board of Managers approved it in principle, though believing it might well be briefer and more explicit; the Student Council took no formal action on it.

At the beginning of this new academic year, I feel obliged to make as clear as I can where I think the College stands in regard to this report, to the principles it enunciates, and the actions it suggests in the case of the breakdown of civility.

(1) I believe the Report has served a useful purpose in advancing the College as a whole towards at least a partial consensus. I do not think it is likely to be fruitful to continue the search for fuller and more complete ratification of this document. On the other hand, I welcome continuing discussion of the issues, and continuing efforts not only to define the characteristics of a genuinely civil college community, but also to propose mechanisms by which felt grievances, which are frequently the provocation for breaches of community rules, can be received and relieved sympathetically and promptly. The Wise commission, concerned as it is with matters of governance, may make recommendations in these matters. But in the meantime, it is certainly highly appropriate for individuals or groups to advance proposals which may advance our understanding or develop plans which may improve our practice in these areas. I should certainly like to be helpful - either by participating, or keeping out of the way, of such enterprises. (2) In the meantime, as the chief administrative officer of the College, I ought to make as clear as I can at what point I am likely to conclude that the bounds of civility have been overstepped, and what I would be prepared to do if such an overstepping occurred. (Obviously I do not refer here to the occasional and individual transgressions that occur in any society. I assume that the College community has adequate judicial and disciplinary procedures to deal with them.) I do refer to occasions when individuals or groups, acting out of an authentic desire for authenticity or a perverse desire for perversity, or some mixture of motives and drives, undertake to deny to other members of the college community access to, or use of, college facilities to which they are entitled. I construe my job to be <u>to see to it that this denial does not take place</u>. I hope to be able to accomplish this responsibility through the kinds of transactions that are normal to civility, - that is, by discussion and persuasion. (3) But if these enterprises of mine fail, and functions of

the College are obstructed, then I shall take what seem to me to be appropriate steps, leading towards disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or expulsion. I should say, too, that if those persons - should there be any, God forbid - disrupting college functioning who are not led either by my persuasion or by the imminence of college disciplinary action into abandoning their obstruction, then I shall feel obliged to ask the police or the courts to intervene.

I imagine this kind of discussion is as distasteful to you as it is to me. Be assured that I entertain no illusions. A college in which frustration is at such a high level that the most attractive recourse for serious, concerned people is disruption is not in a healthy condition. We must do everything we can to make the opportunities that civility offers for change, reform, even radical reform, a wholly reasonable recourse. Furthermore, let me say that having seen at close range the effects of both extended acquiescence in the obstructing of a college and the use of force to end the obstruction, I devoutly hope that Swarthmore experiences neither eventuality.

Whether a liberal arts college in the America of today can successfully foster both authenticity and civility I do not know. If any college can, I imagine that Swarthmore can. That, at any rate, is why I came here, and I imagine that these considerations, perhaps phrased more personally and persuasively, were among those that moved you. We are embarked together on an experiment. I wish you and me and the College a successful voyage.