

President's Statement
Commencement Convocation
Southern Methodist University
May 15, 1982

by
Dr. L. Donald Shields

LET THE EAGLE SCREAM

Members of the graduating class, honored guests,
parents and friends of our graduates:

In addressing our Class of 1982 I am quite aware that in my brief comments this morning, there is little that I can add to your total educational experience here at SMU. However, I hope my contribution to this occasion will not just be the establishment of a fast tempo so that you soon may be relieved of your academic regalia and quickly returned to the status of normal human beings!

Clearly, this day represents a significant achievement in each of your lives; and today we are all privileged to share in a celebration of that achievement. Looking to the future, many of you will go on for further formal studies - and this only represents the beginning. All of us will continue our experience with life-long learning.

Long ago the British army began the custom of presenting a shilling, a small piece of English currency, to every recruit. "Taking the King's shilling" meant the recruit understood the obligations of the soldier's life he was pursuing.

During World War II, officer candidates in our own military were often told of the dangers they would be facing and given one last opportunity to "back out" before the training began.

In addressing a commencement audience a few years ago, a well known speaker said that he had just one word of advice for those who were about to go out in the cold, cruel world: "Don't!" But today you are here; you already have been living in that world. However, shortly many of you will venture into your chosen careers and professions for the first time.

No one could stand in this place at this time and not feel the importance of the hour and the happening. We are here involved in a ceremony that has its origins in the

distant past. It speaks eloquently to the value of learning and the unquenchable determination of human beings to make a better world. It says that each of you has experienced a certain intellectual satisfaction - that you set aside a significant part of your lives to attain various skills or intellectual answers. Now some of you might say, "The only reason I did this was to establish a career - financial success is what I'm after!"

If you have not already discovered it, you will soon find that large incomes can buy houses but not homes, eventful living but not purposeful lives. We must never confuse the things we value with values. Behind every choice we make, there is a fundamental precept that dictates direction whether it be a professional, business, or personal decision. Most of the decisions you make will not be procedural, but substantive. They are at the level of values.

The fact that we have poverty in our midst does not, of itself, guarantee that we will sacrifice and work to help others. The fact that many areas of the earth are in the grips of bitter turmoil does not, of itself, make us peace-loving or peace-seeking. The fact that the minorities of America still do not have the kinds of equalities that our basic documents guarantee, does not, of itself, make us crusaders for equal rights. No, these facts do not change us. If we change, it will be because of our values and not the conditions of others. Facts and conditions may tell us something; but only our values will motivate us to action.

As we observe in ourselves and in others narrow, self-centered behavior, lack of trust, and examples of substantive depravity of the human spirit, we must be reminded that our heritage contains giants among our business, political, and religious forefathers who were engaged in the positive and constructive development of a just and caring society for the future. This is what we have to rededicate ourselves to today or we will be the holders of false hopes ringed by the patrons of pity. In our day-to-day lives we have to consciously try to do what is right. Rightness is determined by one's value system.

If the bald eagle be the symbol of America, then let it scream out to us with its ear-piercing cry, telling us

that over two hundred years later a new revolution must be fought, a new declaration must be issued, another war must be fought and a new affirmation of human rights must be inaugurated. Let it descend from its dizzying heights and say to us: "You inherited the best government ever known to man, the best system of commerce and the highest standard of living. Now you stop and consider what your responsibilities entail."

Laws, institutions, politics, moral integrity are all reflections of our individual and collective values. There can be no national value system unless it is based on the amassed morality of its people. This is where I am most concerned. We have a system of government that is based on the consent of the governed. Our representatives in Washington and Austin should not be telling us what to do; they are our representatives and they represent us. Let's tell them that our expectations are high, morally demanding and value-oriented. I would suggest to you that we do have a sense of urgency and destiny in revitalizing this nation and it will take the determined efforts of governing and governed if the grand experiment is to succeed.

Over two hundred years have come and gone since our founding as a nation. The world of business and commerce has changed. We communicate with others around the globe with the speed of light. We travel faster than sound. We educate, we heal and we counsel. We accumulate and store unbelievable amounts of data in ever more sophisticated computers. We build lavish houses and drive splendid automobiles. We have personal libraries that are larger than those of some towns a hundred years ago. We know what is happening around the world minutes after the event. We have explored the moon and continue to probe outer space.

But many of the substantive problems of the world are basically human problems. Confidence in government will be restored when integrity is the basic criterion for candidacy. Education will rise in esteem when its teachers again include discussions of values in their teaching. Business and industry will find new prestige when their purpose and product unite to ease the burdens of mankind.

But, one might ask, what about me as a person? What do I do to establish values and build ideals? Mark Twain said it very well: "Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

In closing may I say that as you commence from this ceremony this afternoon you have the sincere congratulations and the very best wishes of the Board of Trustees, the faculty, the staff and the administration of Southern Methodist University. With your families we share pride in your past accomplishments and we look forward to your future contributions, many of which we are confident will enhance the quality of life for us all.

Thank you.