



**Duke
University**

Speech Text

**Duke University's Convocation 2000 Address
President Nannerl O. Keohane**

August 24, 2000

On my own behalf and that of the faculty, I am delighted to welcome this class and to receive them from your (Admissions Director Christoph Guttentag) hands, and we will do our best to sustain the high level of involvement that you have given.

We are very pleased that all of you are here. I know that you've been looking forward to this moment ever since you received that envelope last spring. We have been eagerly awaiting your arrival. We're very glad you're here.

Every year, when Christoph Guttentag welcomes the class and mentions a few cameo things that some of you have done, and you all sort of look at each other and think, "Wow, is it you? Is it you?" I always think, with mixed emotions, I never did anything like that before I went to college. And it's very important for us to recognize that he could, if there were world enough and time, say something about each one of you that would make everybody else say, "Wow, did you do that?"

And that's why you're here.

We make bets on you, or if you prefer, we invest in you. We have faith in you as people of great promise, and we are all here to help you realize that promise.

I also want to give a special welcome to the parents and the families who are attending the ceremony virtually in Page Auditorium. Duke has a well-rounded reputation for being especially welcoming to the families of students, and welcoming them to the Duke family. And we hope that you will all feel very much a part of our -- and now your -- university in the years ahead.

We can't predict what changes will occur in each of you as students at Duke over the next four, or three or five, years before you graduate; but we can be sure that you will have a fascinating journey, and that you are very likely to become a deeper and more interesting person, with a stronger sense of how you want to make a difference in the world.

And I'm sure that you are very curious about what those years will be like. What can you expect from your Duke experience? How can you use these first few weeks of orientation to ground and prepare yourself to take best advantage of those precious years.

So I want to provide this morning a few guideposts, and make a few predictions. And I will use as my model one of the classic literary accounts of a journey, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I doubt that any of you have read this book in preparing for Duke, but your predecessors in the Trinity College Class of 1904, would surely have done so. Today, it's too musty, too explicitly religious, to be part of a high school canon anywhere. But it includes some very vivid images and some amazingly apposite analogies to the journey that lies ahead

of you.

The hero of Bunyan's 17th-century allegory set out from his hometown, "the place of all evil," on what is at times a lonely journey, leaving his family and the playthings of his former life behind in order to reach finally the Celestial City, his destination. Along the way he encountered "molestations, troubles, wars, captivities, cries, groans, frights, and fears." However tough your Duke experience, it will be a piece of cake compared to that. In the end, the pilgrim gets to live in company with the Shining Ones and walk in white, like Duke parent Tom Wolfe, the author of *A Man in Full*. And he makes quite a lot of friends along the way.

Now, Huck Finn once described *Pilgrim's Progress* as being "about a man that left his family." It didn't say why. "I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough." That may be a fair summary of an education here, interesting but tough. Huck had the golden heart of a Dukie, even though his prose lacked some of the polish that you will get from the University Writing Curriculum on your own journey.

Bunyan's hero was called Christian; to make him relevant to your own multi-faceted class, I will call our pilgrim Chris -- which could be short for Christian, or Christopher or even Christine. During the summer before he arrived at Duke, Chris checked in often with the Class of 2004 web site, where he followed discussion threads about FOCUS courses, Project WILD, Project BUILD, bands, partying, a whole lot more. He learned some interesting things about his classmates, but it all seemed unreal until he finally arrived on campus and checked into his dorm and met his roommate. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian's closest companion is called Hopeful. We will call Chris' roommate Joey -- he's sometimes hopeful, but not always, like most of us.

Chris and Joey's class is the first to engage in what we call Curriculum 2000, in Trinity College. As those of you who are in Trinity have discovered by now, this includes foreign language and cultural studies. This is a way of allowing you to become better prepared for the global world that you will lead, but it will also rewire your habits of thought.

One of professors, Alice Kaplan, who directs our new Institute for French and Francophone Studies, talks in one of her books about learning French. And this is what she says, "It's violent being thrown into a new language and having to make your way. Violent and vulnerable: in a new language, you are unbuttoned, opened up." But it is also incredibly eye-opening, as you discover that there are whole ways of looking at the world and naming it that you have never conceived.

But being violently thrown around isn't very comfortable. And even though Chris thought he was eager and ready for Duke, he soon finds himself somewhat confused and, even against his expectations, a bit homesick. In Bunyan's terms, our hero may have tumbled into the Slough of Despond, which is a quicksand of depression that is familiar to new students who are concerned they haven't quite got the right stuff. He cannot find his own way out and has to be yanked out of the mire by his resident adviser, his RA. Now, that is why we have such an elaborate and wonderful Student Affairs system at Duke. It gives you a network of counseling and support, medical service, advising and much more.

Chris quickly understands why we stress a balanced body and mind, educating the whole person. He loves to play racquetball, he finds his way to the Wilson Recreation Center, which

is filled with weight machines and cardiovascular equipment, and basketball courts, an indoor track, aquatics center, dance room, wellness center, pool and juice bar. He thought he'd already died and gone to heaven.

Just outside WilRec, there is a grassy lawn that we call Krzyzewskiville, after our legendary men's basketball coach. Krzyzewskiville comes equipped with traditional Duke lampposts along the side, but they have Ethernet connections in their base, so that students can "rough it" while they're camping out for tickets, plug in their computers and do their homework, email, and other online learning. Chris was given a new tent for high school graduation, and really looks forward to camping out with his friends outside Cameron this year.

Bunyan's pilgrim pointed out to one of his own companions that "the body without the soul is but a dead carcass," and our student, too, fosters *religio* as well as *eruditio*. (In case you didn't catch that allusion, *eruditio et religio* is Duke University's motto). Chris not only discovers the uses of tolerance but the outright joy of celebrating diverse forms of *religio*. Joey invites him to some great Kosher dinners at the Freeman Center for Jewish Life on Campus Drive, which is open to, and used, by everybody.

Chris occasionally visits this chapel, which, when it is not filled with people, is often very quiet and very beautiful. Sometimes he listens to the organ practice, and sometimes he listens to the silence. He also tutors a local school child as part of Duke's Neighborhood Partnership Initiative. This is a major university outreach program into the city of Durham. And Chris and Joey are involved in a pilot project in their dorm called Neighborhood Connect, and taking part in this project has helped them learn about Durham and pitch in where they can. They join more than 100 Duke this initiative, and they find that Durham is full of interesting places to visit--terrific restaurants, Durham Bulls baseball games, the Carolina Theater, the Hayti Heritage Center, and much more.

However, Chris is no saint, and very shortly after he arrives here, he makes his way to Vanity Fair, where all kinds of enjoyments are available, both legit and forbidden. He has a great time -- Duke parties are deservedly famous; but I have to admit that once or twice he falls prey to temptations that he chooses not to write home about, even though he is in regular e-mail contact with his family. But, he is a pretty sensible guy; and after he spends a couple of nights worrying about one of his friends, called Pliable, who gets into binge drinking, he can understand why his advisers talk so much about the alcohol abuse. He and Joey have to clean up after Pliable gets very sick in their room. They take turns waking up in the night to make sure that Pliable is sleeping on his side, so he won't choke on his own vomit; and they worry about whether they should take him to the emergency room at the hospital, and in general, it was a pretty bad scene.

Well, after his sojourns at those Vanity Fair parties, Chris has to pull several all-nighters to catch up with his work. Fortunately, he comes to a way-station. According to Bunyan's test, "He lifted up his eyes, and behold, there was a very stately palace before him" where he gets a square meal and some shuteye.

Now his dorm, the Palace Beautiful, may not have seemed that beautiful at the outset when he and his family crammed all his stuff into a room that seemed much too small for two guys and all their belongings. But once he gets tired enough, that room passes muster. And he and his friends become quite fond of East Campus, Lilly Library, the Market Place, the playing fields for Ultimate Frisbee and other games, and Ninth Street as their own college drag.

Now, Chris' companions are 1,601 souls, with its record-high SAT scores, and many different backgrounds, as you have heard. Duke is an intentionally diverse community, and we recruit a very diverse faculty, student body and staff. We do so not just because of affirmative action or moral responsibility, but scholarly research, which shows that diversity enriches education in every possible way.

So, Chris' advisers tell him to reach out, to take some risks in his friendships, to learn how other people see the world in order to broaden his own understanding. They tell him that if he stays huddled in his "comfort zone" by spending all his time with people just like himself he'll miss some of the best things about Duke, and emerge with a dangerous ethnocentrism that will not sit well on the adult shoulders of a leader of the 21st century. They advise him to get to know people who come from a different country, speak a different language at home, have skin of another color, worship God in a different way. People with a lot more or a lot less money than he has, people whose moral and political views are more conservative than his, or more liberal.

But here, as is often the case, Chris soon finds out for himself the importance of what these advisers tell him. He begins to have long conversations over meals or late at night in the halls of his dorm, and he learns first-hand that diversity is important to a good education. Not only his roommate, but also several of his new best friends have had experiences quite different from his own, and he finds that telling stories to each other about their lives is as educational in its own way as his classes.

At the end of the first semester, during final exams, our hero, like Bunyan's, wanders into the Valley of Humiliation and fights with a rude monster called Apollyon, the foul fiend who presides over that country. The Valley of Humiliation I interpret as the way Chris felt when he got a much lower grade in one of his courses than he expected. It was a shock because in high school he got mostly As; but then it occurred to him that so did everybody else at Duke; and that things are just tougher here.

Apollyon is clothed with scales like a fish, but his roars and fire-breathing only slow Chris down, they do not stop him. I suppose, by the way, that although Apollyon should refer to whatever discipline Chris finds toughest, the reference to scales could also be a reference to the Florida Gators, who knocked our men's basketball team out of the running in the NCAA tournament last year-and they won't get away with it next time.

And then, like many newcomers, at the end of that first semester Chris comes up against Bunyan's Mr. Worldly Wiseman, a fellow student who gives him bad advice about what courses to take. Although Chris was horrified when the class schedule he received didn't match what he'd asked for, after meeting with his adviser, it turns out all right in the end. She reminds Chris that never again in his life will he have such intellectual freedom to explore many different parts of human knowledge, with the vast resources of a great university at his disposal every day to do so.

After his encounters with Apollyon and Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Chris is ready for an inspirational uplift. Bunyan's Christian, we are told, espies from a great distance "a most pleasant . . . country, beautified with woods, vineyards, fruits of all sorts; flowers, springs and fountains, very delectable to behold." For Bunyan's pilgrim, this view was to be had by looking South. For most, but not all of you, the same is true of your decision to come to Duke. And indeed Duke provides our pilgrim with glimpses of Delectable Mountains too, with teeming woods and gardens and fountains, the Sarah P. Duke Gardens and the huge

expanse of Duke Forest, where Chris runs regularly with his friends.

By the way, the folks who call this university "the last stop on the New Jersey Turnpike" (because of all the students from that state who migrate south each year) will feel vindicated by the fact that the lovely rock garden in Duke Gardens, just behind the fish pond at the foot of the terraces, was actually constructed from 50 tons of New Jersey limestone in 1938. So if any of you New Jersey-ites feel homesick, you can go over and pat the limestone and feel at home.

The Gardens also specialize, though, in native Southern plants and there is a huge and beautiful variety of Asian flora in the Asiatic Arboretum as well. And they provide a tranquil environment for "chilling," solo or with friends. Of course, that depends on Chris's making time enough to get over to the gardens. And in the spring, he is persuaded by Joey to take a study break and he discovers that no where in the world is more beautiful than Duke Gardens in the spring. The amazing beauty of the azaleas of all colors and the canopy of wisteria (which the English once called "Carolina kidney bean"). He also gets to know the resident blue heron who takes out the goldfish from the pond.

Chris and his classmates spend a good deal of their time in cyberspace, as you will. There are wonderful new instructional technologies in every part of the curriculum - classics as much as chemistry, art history no less than physics. There are virtual labs, but also virtual journeys through the world's great museums and archeological sites, and data bases in all areas. E-mail flies regularly from faculty to students, students to students. It has the great virtue that it can accommodate the different habits of the different generations. So Chris sends e-mail to his professor at 2 or 3 a.m., when he is awake and studying, and the professor is sound asleep. And then the professor replies at 6 a.m. when Chris's 9 a.m. class is still a dim dream way far in the future.

The place where all this really comes together is the library. And the role of the library in virtual learning gives news meaning to its historic place at the heart of the university. I would advise you to make a point of entering the actual library soon, on your real-time feet because both Lilly, on East Campus, and Perkins, on West, are really treasure houses of fascinating information with great and knowledgeable guides.

Although, in the interests of full disclosure, I must reveal that even though Chris and Joey spend a great deal of valuable study time in both Perkins and Lilly, they do sometimes find it hard to stay awake. In Bunyan's version, when the two friends reach a certain country "whose Air naturally tended to make one drowsy," called the Enchanted Ground, Hopeful dozes off and has to be roused by Christian, who says "Do you not remember, ... beware of sleeping... let us watch and be sober." Libraries can indeed be "enchanted ground" in more ways than one, and an occasional nap will not expose you to the danger of death (as it did Bunyan's travelers and the sojourners in the poppy field in the Wizard of Oz) but it's probably better not to make a habit of it.

Speaking of technologies, if you look up *Pilgrim's Progress* on the World Wide Web, the first you will find is a travel agency in Kathmandu specializing in Nepal and Tibet. And that is appropriate in that Chris and his friends take full advantage of Duke's own global character, study abroad, many lectures, visitors and fellow students.

In the end, after all *his* journeying, Chris will have made his way to the Celestial City, where the men and women who enter at the gate are transfigured by new robes and mortarboards,

and, in Bunyan's words, "All the bells in the city rang again for joy." That would be, of course, the carillon in the Chapel tower. So Chris and Joey both make their destination successfully in the spring of 2004, and they watch sadly as one of their companions, called Ignorance, who tried to take an easy shortcut to the Celestial City, is denied admission at the end. But Chris and Joey shake an administrator's hand, they receive their degrees at last-but here is where we must depart from Bunyan's text. When *our* students finish, they go back out from the Celestial City to regenerate the world; a world that is always in the process of being created.

And I would also point out that you don't have to wait until graduation to become aware that this "Gothic wonderland" has some celestial features of its own. The stone of the buildings on this campus makes them as sturdy and serviceable as the education you will get within them, but I like to think the stone does not so much confine as liberate the minds and lives that it touches. The buildings themselves may be beautiful, but they are nothing compared to the spirit that inhabits them. And this institution will engage your full powers of intellect. You, in turn, will help refine it. It is a work for the ages.

You, today, are taking your place in a long line of men and women who have preceded you and who will follow you at Duke. You are the product of everything and everyone that has come before, and the choices you make while you are here will determine what happens next - here at Duke, to yourselves and in the world.

One immediate action that you will take, which has its own historic significance that you'll hear more about in a moment, is to be the first class to engage in the collective signing of the honor code agreement. Your commitment to this code makes Duke a better place, and makes your education more meaningful for every one of you.

I honor our contemporary pilgrim, and the energy and potential that all of you bring -- and with my young friend Chris, I salute you all. Welcome to your new university.