

President Charles J. McCann  
Inaugural Address  
Friday, April 21, 1972

The words and music we've heard earlier come from a golden age of exploration--of the physical universe and, most of all, of man--the reaches of his spirit, the limits of his competence. The venture we solemnize here today shares some of the renaissance character--an age of exuberant beginnings made in deep awareness of long-held values.

Our kinship to that age goes deeper yet. If we describe life at Evergreen in the most general terms, the qualities that stand out resemble those that surface again and again in what remains to us from the renaissance: A sense of adventure, not for its own sake so much as for envisioning fresh arrangements of economies and politics; and from this daring, a strong sense of brotherhood among those engaged in common enterprises, and a robust faith in what man can accomplish. The presence of these attributes at Evergreen to so high a degree makes it one of the most exciting places to be in the American collegiate scene today; so much so that a paraphrase of what Shakespeare makes Henry V say would not violate the original sense: "Scholars in America now abed shall think themselves accursed they were not here."

Let me name you, groups responsible for Evergreen, for the honor is yours today: (In something like historical order) The 1967 Legislature of the State of Washington, the Governor of the State of Washington, the Trustees of Evergreen (Roger Camp, Halvor Halvorson, Al Saunders, Trueman Schmidt, Janet Tourtellotte, and Herbert Hadley), and of course, the faculty, the staff, and the students of Evergreen.

All of you--students, staff, faculty, trustees, governor, legislature--have made great acts of faith in each of the other groups involved.

To form new arrangements in higher education, even when the goal is not to change the whole field but simply to establish securely a new option, is to undertake a major human effort. To establish new economies and politics entails risks, personal and professional, and you have brought ready courage to them. All of you who have contributed something to the beginning of Evergreen are due some share in the first return--the sense of adventure that comes from facing risks worth taking, which must be taken if a profession, a country, mankind, is not to regress. All responsible for the existence of Evergreen today, therefore, are leaders in the clearest sense of the word: Being in the lead.

Turning specially to those whose full-time commitment is to Evergreen, members of the faculty and staff and students: When I think of the unnumbered acts of imaginative help to colleagues and to Evergreen, it fills me with gratitude that it has been given me to spend some of my life working with you. When I think of the obstacles, historic, emotional, economic that we've overcome and that we have yet to surmount, I begin to understand how that great renaissance figure could be sincere when he has King Henry, on a night full of forboding, call his little outnumbered band of comrades "we happy few."

I touch upon the renaissance again here because, obsessed with the search for the qualities necessary for leadership, their scrutiny made them look unblinkingly at the obverse of all the qualities. In view of those obstacles we have yet to surmount, we should use, if we would remain leaders, what that age

teaches us. We're warned, for example, to guard against mere foolhardiness, often taking the form of adventure for adventure's sake, quite divorced from the goals of the enterprise--in our case, any risks not furthering learning, integrating, solving, and communicating. Another false version of courage is the wordy variety that doesn't cost the speaker anything, sometimes not even thought; this kind, the renaissance play usually cast as a figure for ridicule; today, unfortunately, we too often feel we must listen and nod. We must guard very carefully against the variety most dangerous to us, which we don't know we have until we're suffering from: The false courage and adventuresomeness that melt away as soon as the going gets rough, as soon as we find ourselves a little farther out from what is presently the mainstream, and hence a little more nervous and uncomfortable.

The brotherhood of leaders, resulting from a shared cause, had many reverse sides. Let me suggest a couple of modern versions: The bigotry of fashionable conceptual positions, to which some who think of themselves as "intellectuals" are often prone. Or, among us faculty and staff, that false brotherhood born of self-serving--not conscious and gross--most of the time unacknowledged, even unrecognized. The sharp, sturdy renaissance mind, Francis Bacon, reminds us that we are debtors to our profession; I paraphrase this freely into: If we're going to be understanding and patient with anyone, let it be with students and supporters, the citizens who keep us in existence. If we're going to be tough and demanding, let it be of each other, fellow professionals.

With regard to the human faith we share with our forebears, let's avoid the arrogant confidence they often warn against, or that silly foolishness that results from a refusal to have anything to do with the facts. Let's, however, be prepared to be called foolish; for, "almost all really new ideas have a certain aspect of foolishness when they are first produced." Let's keep the faith in what we can accomplish, strengthened by what we have accomplished.

During my term as president of Evergreen, as leader of this band of leaders, I trust you'll remind me of qualities lacking in me at any given moment. I promise to perform the same, sometimes uncomfortable, service for you.

At the end of our first year, Evergreen is being taken seriously and watched carefully by those concerned with undergraduate study in most of the English-speaking world. I pledge in my term as president to help insure what we've well begun: To maintain the utmost flexibility in matching individual students' programs of study with individual faculty expertness; to maintain our integrity, by doing only what the talent here at the moment can do honestly in the best traditions of teaching and scholarship; to work with the businesses and professions, helping students forge their career links directly as an alternative to the academic curriculums; to continue working toward a tradition here at Evergreen of firm, unsentimental expectations in the professional performances of staff and faculty. All this so that Evergreen students, as they already richly promise, will be productive members of constantly changing groups; be capable, confident acquirers and communicators of what is known, be practitioners of those sciences that will grace our country, and be adept in that responsible, clear discourse on which our commonwealth's well-being depends. So that they will have abilities to help our country solve seemingly insoluble problems, like, for example, this war; abilities that are no substitute for wisdom and experience, but are absolutely necessary along with wisdom and experience.

In the spirit of the centuries-old custom in which the monastic orders every evening pray for their brothers or sisters absent from the house, I would like to remember here in closing the scores of Evergreen students working and studying away--a few abroad, many elsewhere in the United States, most in Washington--

their work strengthens ours on campus, and ours theirs, if both are done well.

To all of you here today who have contributed to this ceremony with talent, work, financial support, or by your welcome presence: My heartfelt gratitude.

I hope that you share my pride in the directions we've established and that you share my determination to pursue them.