

## The Aims of Education III 1995

Departures: Knowledge is the Ticket

An Address to New Chapman University Students at the Fall 1995 Orientation

By Marilyn J. Harran

Faculty Chair, Professor of Religion and History

Preface: First presented two years ago, the annual Aims of Education Address is an academic tradition that symbolically opens the school year during Chapman's new student orientation week. This year, I invited Marilyn J. Harran, Professor of religion and history Faculty Chair for 1995-96, to share with students and their parents her unique perspective on knowledge and the many opportunities it creates for us all. Dr. Harran's speech was presented to a standing-room-only crowd in Memorial Hall on August 23, 1995. Because of your dedication to higher education, I know you will appreciate Dr. Harran's views on knowledge as the ticket to limitless possibilities. You are enthusiastically invited to share your comments with Professor Harran or with me.

-James L. Doti, president of Chapman University

### I. The Orientation Theme: Departures

By Marilyn J. Harran, Faculty Chair Professor of Religion and History

*Departures*: What could better describe the journey you are about to begin than the image of flight – and the freedom that comes with flight? And for that journey *knowledge is the ticket*. What you are receiving today is a first-class around the world ticket (some of your parents may feel that you are in fact purchasing the equivalent of several tickets on the Concorde!), a ticket with a bonus.

After all, normally when we buy our airline tickets, pack our bags, and head to the airport we know where we are going. Airport check-in counters tend to frown upon people who arrive there and respond the question of “*You are flying today to?*” with the answer, “*I'm not sure; I think I have a destination in mind, but I would like to have the freedom to change my mind mid-flight.*” Generally, airport security arrives shortly thereafter!

Not only may you begin your Chapman flight knowing your destination, but you may change it several times with no penalty. You also have the benefit of visiting – at no extra cost – exotic locations you may not even have known existed. In addition, Chapman offers you the opportunity no airline ever will, to go from a passenger to becoming the navigator and pilot – receiving your wings- by the journey's end. *And for that, knowledge is the ticket.*

On this day of departure, I want to share with you a few thoughts about the experiences ahead of you: first, about the knowledge you will gain here to become the successful pilot of your life and career; second, about the nature of the flight academy you have chosen, Chapman University, and third, about the responsibilities and challenges that come with your pilot wings.

### II. Learning to Fly: The Navigational Instruments

First, just as no pilot and no airplane set out on a flight without a compass and other far more sophisticated navigational equipment, so too will you need to master a variety of skills to be successful in your life and career. Over the next few years you will be learning from experts about those instruments that will guide your flight; that will allow you to change direction and to respond to challenges posed by unexpected storms and turbulence.

How many of you have seen “Apollo 13?” Then you know how a few brave astronauts and scientists used the knowledge and tools at hand to respond creatively to a very unexpected challenge. That same ability to adjust to new situations while keeping your bearings will be essential to your success too.

In earlier centuries, the occupation with which you began your working life was more likely than not the one you would have when you retired. Today the situation is dramatically different. In fact, studies suggest that you will not simply change where you work, but you will change your career three times. While that means that none of you will become bored in your jobs, it also means that you must have the abilities – and the self-confidence – to be able to analyze your situation and to make the necessary adjustments to respond to new opportunities.

In their recent book *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave*, futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler argue that we are living in an extraordinary time as the industrial age is being transformed into the Information Age, a change as dramatic as the earlier one from the agricultural to the industrial age. To succeed in this Third Wave information age society will take special skills.

What are those skills? They are ones you have heard and read about and probably have already begun to develop – the ability to analyze a problem or situation, critical thinking; to convey your analysis clearly and persuasively whether in writing or orally, good communication skills; to use proficiently the tools provided by technology, above all, the computer; and to have a working knowledge of the principles of many different disciplines so that you can understand and respond intelligently to the complex world around you, from politics to economics to medicine.

Although technology is transforming our world into a global village, the benefits of technology will mean little if we do not understand the cultures, histories, and languages of those with whom we are communicating. Thus, among the tools you will be mastering at Chapman is an understanding not only of the culture in which you live, but of those which surround you. And, just as no pilot would begin a journey without a compass, so too, through courses in philosophy and religion and peace studies, will you gain a better understanding of your own moral compass – the ethics and values that will guide you in choosing directions.

The computer will be the contact point for learning about diverse cultures and ideas. It will be the entry point to many fields of knowledge, many places where you may choose to land and learn about the terrain. Thanks to new technology you can check the on-line catalog in the Thurmond Clarke Library to see what books and journals are available on a particular topic or you can peruse such CD ROM journal indexes as Medline for Medicine or the Art Index.

Yet, marvelous as it is to communicate by Internet and the “surf the net,” this is only the first step. The real challenge comes in transforming *information into*

*knowledge*. For example, learning Japanese grammar is information that becomes knowledge when you are able to talk with a Japanese exchange student or survive on your own as a student in Japan.

Learning the historical facts about the origins of World War I may seem irrelevant to your life in southern California. But those facts become knowledge when they enable you to understand how the same factors that led a young Serbian nationalist to assassinate an Austrian archduke – and thereby provide the pretext for war – continue today as conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, conflicts that now involve many people your own age, and may possibly draw in young Americans. The information you obtain in a course in economics or biology becomes knowledge when it enables you to read the newspaper or watch the evening news critically and to ask questions of the information you are receiving. When you do that, you are making the transition from passenger to pilot.

You may feel that you are ready right now to become a pilot. You have chosen your destination, your career. But remember that as you prepare now for a career in business or communications or education that the information age will bring about many new career possibilities which may interest you even more a decade or two from now. Whatever your career may be, the skills you gain here are the navigational instruments on which you will continue to rely and which will allow you to make the changes you choose in your flight plan. Remember that information is the tool; but *knowledge is the ticket*.

### III. The Flight School: Chapman University

Second, you have chosen to come to Chapman University because you think it is the best possible flight school. You will have flight instructors who are committed to success; you will be part of a community of enthusiastic co-learners, and no one will be sent up without a parachute! The idea of community is central to the university. The word *universitas* in Latin means association or community, communities of teachers and students. In fact, in Italy, which, along with France and England, was home to the first universities, the student association ran the universities – even electing the university president, and hiring and firing professors!

Building on the tradition of the university, the Chapman curriculum strives to prepare you to be both a specialist in your field and a liberally educated person. The debate about how best to achieve those two goals has gone on in American education for a long time.

In 1885, President Charles Eliot introduced the free elective system at Harvard University. Until then the curriculum was entirely required. For example, and in case you think you have too many required courses this year, freshmen at Harvard before 1885 were required to take (in one year!) “Latin, Greek, mathematics, French, elocution [speech], and ethics.” In addition, freshmen had to read some twenty chapters of Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*. However, a curriculum made up entirely of electives did not take hold at Harvard because it failed to establish a common meeting ground of ideas, a common basis for opening a conversation.

In our new information age, that common meeting ground may even be more important. At Chapman, general education courses, and especially the core courses, will provide that common ground. For example, this fall many of you will be participating in the Freshman Seminar Program, "*The Global Citizen*." Utilizing case studies, this course will take you through issues that are crucial to citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However different your careers may be, you also share a common identity as citizens of a wonderfully diverse global village. And so during your years at Chapman you will have the opportunity to take courses in both western and non-western cultures. The debate over the content of those courses continues, as it should, for the debate over who we are as Americans and how we should define ourselves in relation to the cultures from which we came is central to the American experience in a way quite different from any other country with any other set of universities. It is different, because we are above all a nation of immigrants; the ebbs and flows in the tides of immigration define the character of much of our national debate.

There is much discussion in Washington – Newt Gingrich's new book *To Renew America* is only one example – about the challenges facing the United States and about the nature of the American Culture. Thanks to the mass media, that debate has reached more people than ever before, but the debate itself is not new.

Just as Mr. Gingrich is doing now, Americans in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century looked at the tidal waves of new immigrants and wondered how their civilization might be changed as a result. Universities invented the "western civ" course as a way of reminding people of diverse backgrounds of their common heritage and as a way of addressing President Woodrow Wilson's concern about "hyphenated" Americans."

The problem then as now lies in defining precisely what we mean by American civilization, a term that takes on new meaning with each generation and each new tide of immigrants. The university plays a vital role in this discussion, and thanks to a diverse campus, you have the possibility of contributing to that discussion and learning from it, transforming for yourselves information into knowledge.

Alvin and Heidi Toffler suggest two very interesting points about the time into which we are moving. On the one hand, they assert the "Third Wave is accompanied by a growing non-interchangeability of labor as skill requirements skyrocket." That rather dense sentence means that no one else will be able to do your job, but that you will also need to be the best as your job to keep it. On the other hand, they affirm that new models of production will be based on a "systematic and integrative view... [in which] parts of the process... cannot be isolated from one another."

In other words, to be effective in your job you will also need to have a sense of the whole process, of how all the parts fit together. The information age will require both expertise of a specialist and the knowledge of a generalist.

The information age will also require us to keep on learning. Throughout your Chapman career and after, you will constantly be making choices about what information you will need – and what to do with the information you have. To

transform *information* into *knowledge* requires the tools of analysis, organization, and judgment that you will develop here. People who lack those navigational instruments and a reliable moral compass, risk becoming intimidated, feeling besieged, not challenged, by the information that is enveloping them. Remember information is the tool, but *knowledge is the ticket*.

In fact, the most recent research about travel itself tells us that the information age will lead to some dramatic changes in the airline business. The information age will mean less need for business travel as executives share information and engage in conversation electronically. The whole marketing approach of the airlines will change. No longer geared to selling seats, they will instead be selling the *back* of the seat, offering a wide range of information services – videos, telephones, faxes, marketed to particular segments of the traveling public. In the future you will decide on an airline not only on the basis of destination, fare, and convenience, but on the type of information possibilities the airline offers you while in flight.

#### IV. From Passenger to Pilot: Opportunities and Challenges

Your years at Chapman will mark your progression from passenger to pilot. There will be times when simply being a passenger may seem like a tough enough job – let alone taking on the role of pilot. The completion of your flight training is symbolized by graduation, but for many of you the transition from passenger to pilot will happen long before. Many of you may choose to accept internships or to begin working while you are still a student – some of you may be working many hours already. Some of you may choose to study abroad, which also will bring new experiences and challenges. Hopefully all of you will accept as students the responsibilities of citizenship symbolized by voting.

You may at times feel that you are too busy to read the newspaper, but I urge you to remember the social activism of other generations of students both here and abroad, and the price they have been willing to pay to be both students and responsible citizens. Modern technology gave us the visual image of the protesting university students in Tiananmen Square, a stark reminder that universities may also challenge and shake society.

Universities have a long history of contributing to social change. The sixteenth century Protestant Reformation (since this is my own area of study, I can't resist at least one reference!) began at a university when Martin Luther on October 31, 1517 walked over to the university bulletin board and posted a flyer with some 95 ideas for discussion. It must have been a bad time in the semester since no one appeared for the debate, but Luther had also sent these 95 Theses to some of his friends, and they in turn passed them on to the printers – the first best seller. The Reformation occurred not only because of the ideas of one person and the desire for change on the part of many, but because of the new technology of that time – the printing press.

Unfortunately, at other times universities have played less noble roles in their societies. In Hitler's Germany, most professors and students accepted the repressive government and were intimidated by the Nazis into obedience to authority. You know you are in trouble in a university when people stop asking

questions, since asking questions is central to our identity and mission. There was, however, a brave minority who did ask questions. These were students at the University of Munich who formed an organization called the "White Rose." Lest you think that governments don't take students and ideas seriously, let me share with you that these students – whose only crime was using a mimeograph machine to print flyers asking questions about what was happening in their country – were executed. The White Rose movement reminds us that education is the route to freedom, the freedom to think, to make decisions, and to act knowledgeably and ethically.

#### V. Limitless Possibilities Knowledge is the Ticket

The liberal arts bear that name because they liberate, they free from ignorance and fear. Your years here – your study of the liberal arts – will free you to move from passenger to pilot of your life and career. Becoming the pilot, being in charge of your own flight plan and choosing your own destination, is both exhilarating and at times a bit terrifying. The words of Saint-Exupery, the author of *Little Prince*, are worth remembering: "You'll be bothered from time to time by storms, fog, snow. When you are, think of those who went through it before you and say to yourself, 'What they do, I can do.'" In fact, you can do more. You may choose to be not the pilot but the designer and builder of an aircraft we have yet to imagine. Your possibilities are limitless. *Knowledge is the ticket.*