

50th Anniversary Celebration,

Greetings and Remarks

T. Laine Scales

Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Professional Development

Bill [Bellinger] is really too polite to say it, but as you might guess, I am second choice for representing the Graduate School today. Our Graduate Dean, Larry Lyon, was not available for today's luncheon. He attends your welcome lunch faithfully every year and then comes back to the office describing the new students, how impressed he is with whomever he sat beside in the entering class. So, I do bring his sincere regrets. And if he were here, he would not surprise you at all when he rolled out his statistics, charts, and graphs. He loves statistics because they draw a very particular kind of portrait of your excellence in this program. They are a combined look at all of you together so they include everyone, but they are not personal, so you are not sure exactly where you are the portrait. For example, if we say that our average GRE score is the highest its ever been, we really don't know who falls below or who falls above that average. It's a good thing probably, because we can all be proud together of what we have accomplished without singling out someone like me, for example, who would not have scored well enough on the Math portion of the GRE to get into your program!

But I want to sketch for you an altogether different kind of portrait, one that is very personal. Because unlike my boss, and maybe because I scored so low on Math, I like to measure the quality of a program, not by the numbers, but by the people who represent it. The students, faculty and administrators of this Graduate program in Religion represent excellence every day by the very lives you lead.

Higher Education is my area of teaching and research and in most recent years, alongside some of your associates like Chris Rios, Julien Smith and Jenny Howell, I have been studying the work of the Carnegie

Foundation as they explore the purposes and the future of doctoral education. [Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, 2005]. Lee Schulman, who headed up that group (and came to Waco a couple of years ago as Judge Starr's inauguration lecturer) describes the Ph.D. as "the monarch of the academic community." The monarch. It is the highest accomplishment that can be sought by students. And with that position comes great moral responsibility to **steward** the discipline, the academy itself, and we would add here at Baylor, to steward our faith, an enormous responsibility that this department leads at Baylor.

Stewardship is an idea that that Schulman and the other Carnegie Scholars use to describe the chief result of doctoral education done well. A steward thinks beyond her own career goals and imagines herself sustaining and growing her discipline for those that come after. A good steward, as we know from Jesus's parable, does not bury her treasure but invests her talents in service to the master and takes risks in that investment...for the sake of learning, for the sake of sustaining the faith.

You have so many good stewards among you; A few examples.

Good models start at the top and at the head of this department is Bill Bellinger. Not only is Dr. Bellinger an outstanding teacher and scholar of the Psalms, he is able to use that scholarship to grow the faith of the people in the pew. Every Sunday he teaches a Sunday School class at Lake Shore Baptist Church. And my dad, who is NOT a scholar, but who is a Bible-loving Southern Baptist boy from Tennessee, my Dad loves Bill Bellinger's class! Because Bill stewards his faith and his discipline by translating and enlivening what he knows as a scholar into a lesson for those who are not scholars. Now many academics of his stature would not be willing to do that. They would either fumble by talking above the heads of everyone in Sunday School to show what they know or, more selfishly, think themselves just too smart to have to translate for those who are not scholars. Bill Bellinger teaches, not for a year, not for a few

years, but he has done this for decades each Sunday since he has been at Baylor.

With leaders like this to emulate, it is no wonder that the faculty in this program share themselves in good stewardship as well. It has been my privilege to walk alongside Jonathan Tran as we have served as faculty in residence. The Tran family has moved into the residence halls with the undergraduate students. Folks, this is not easy work; I did it for six years and I know. Jonathan Tran LOVES his studies, he could be completely immersed in his books from sun up to way past sundown and never look up. And what he offers us through his writing and teaching from that study is rich indeed. He is a scholar; (and here, is where Dr. Lyon would want me to be sure to point out how highly folks like Jonathan would score on Academic Analytics, our tool for counting scholarly publications; back to those numbers), And because frankly, those numbers matter nationally. Those numbers provide a reason for the rest of the nation to listen to Baylor and to take us seriously. But we all know there is more, right? Or there **should** be more in a Christian university. In stewardship, academic Jonathan Tran does put down the books and lives life with our undergraduates, eating in the dining halls, exercising, problem solving, taking them out to volunteer in the community. Of course the undergraduates don't always realize what a scholar they are rubbing elbows with; to them he is Jonathan living life with them. But **we** know, and we are grateful for how, with the many gifts God has given him, he is generous and stewards his daily life to form this next generation that will lead us all.

Your Ph.D. students. Stewards. Jim Nogalski knows that I seek out the Religion students to work with us in the Graduate School, to lead the formation and professional development of our programs. Chris Rios was one of the first, about 10 years ago and now he works with us full time in the Graduate School to develop Baylor's graduate students for what comes next. But Chris was **formed** in this department, where he learned to teach, to think and to write, and he watched carefully the

excellent administrators in the department of Religion until it became his turn to lead.

It's been my privilege to work alongside students like Jenny Howell or BJ Parker, Stephanie Peek, Nick Zola, Craig Clarkson. And here is why it's a privilege: This next generation of scholars in religious studies is thinking seriously and dare I say **lovingly, yet critically** about the academy they will inherit. And it is with some anxiety that they face the coming decades of university life because things **are** a bit of a mess in some ways. I'll be speaking at AAR/ SBL this year, along with Nick Werse, to graduate students who are asking the question "How do I work within the academy without losing my soul?" Just the question itself shows you their impression of the academy they stand to inherit. And **yet**, even in these rather dark times for Religion graduates, our students at Baylor have courage.

Because they really do view themselves as standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before, those leaders of 50 years ago who began this program. And taking faith in this department and in Baylor itself, they are brave and they commit to learning and living and giving all they can to prepare themselves for their callings, even as they continue to figure out exactly what they are called to. And they, much better than **my** generation of doctoral students did, they view themselves in healthy ways as whole people who want to grow spiritually and socially as well as intellectually. When they have families, they attend to their families, they lead in their churches, and yes, they take time to go and, led by Tim Orr and the GSA, they take time to go and hang out in Cameron Park. Healthy.

These students are investing their talents, risky as it may be. Following models like they see in their faculty and administration, they invest themselves now in their own formation not **only** as scholars, but as leaders, as church members, as citizens contributing to Waco while they are here. They get it! Your students are my heroes, really, and I can

sometimes lay down my own anxiety about the future of the academy when I see it is entrusted to a generation of stewards like those coming along next from the Baylor department of Religion.

As you can see, my gratitude for this program is just overflowing today. I have tried to draw a portrait of the excellence of this department, not with numbers, but with a little snapshot of the contributions of those who are walking among you. While we are looking **back** 50 years today, we have much to look forward to in the years to come and it's a privilege to be here to celebrate with you.