



Engaging the Culture

The 2004 graduating class at Union University includes 820 students who have completed the challenging and rigorous curriculum for either their bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees. Compared with the 388 graduates in the first year of this administration, the increase in the number of graduates is a key indicator of the significant quantitative and qualitative growth of the Union student body. What is exciting to ponder is not just the growth in numbers, but the impact that these men and women can have as they leave this campus to influence and engage the culture for good.

Often across the campus we seek to explore the relationship of Christianity to culture or of the Church to society. These are complex questions which are at the heart of the identity and mission of Union University, which calls for us to serve both Church and society. On the one hand, as Christians we are a part of this world, of culture, of society, and as those involved in higher education we are a part of the Academy. On the other hand, as Christ-followers we are called to be a distinct new people of God who view life from an eternal perspective.

At Union University we are involved in and invested in both spheres. We must avoid the tendency to confuse Church and society on the one hand or divorce them on the other. We are not called to rule over the world, but relate to it and seek to influence it for good within the framework of the great Christian intellectual tradition.

Thus we can and should gladly encourage students to pursue any and all morally upright secular vocations, if indeed that is their calling from God—not as a second-rate vocation—but as a work where they can serve God and others. This can happen not by escaping culture nor identifying with it, but by engaging it through Christian thinking and Christ-like service with the goal of influencing it ultimately for God's glory. Certainly that is our hope and prayer for the 820 graduates in the class of 2004 at Union University.

Our vision is to see the Union community focus on ways that we can with excellence produce quality art, outstanding literature, great music, serious scientific research, and respectable scholarship in the liberal arts tradition, while developing servant leaders who as change agents can manifest what it means to be salt and light in our society. Likewise we must prepare undergraduate and graduate students to perform with competence and skill—especially those called to the professions of healthcare, education, business, social work, and engineering. As we do so we will encourage and enable young men and women to grow intellectually, socially, and spiritually so that they can become leaders in society, in homes, in communities, and in the Church.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of these 820 graduates, we give thanks for the nearly 3,000 students who will be enrolled in programs at Union in the 2004 Fall semester. We greatly appreciate all trustees, donors, friends, and alumni who support this special university with their prayers, gifts, and encouragement. I am convinced that Union University, with our brilliant faculty, supportive staff, and wonderful students, is prepared to give leadership to Church and Society through serious scholarship that will enable the Christian public to make good decisions about issues they face in their personal lives and in society, thus becoming a significant resource where others can turn to find directions regarding the challenges facing both the Church and our contemporary society. We invite you to join us on this exciting journey as we seek to engage the culture by serving Church and society for the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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