

YOU NEED TWO EYES

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President Byker, members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, friends and relatives of the graduates, and you, Calvin College graduates of 2006: I warmly congratulate you on reaching this important transition point in your lives. We call this ceremony both graduation and commencement: you are graduating from one phase of your lives and commencing another. That produces mingled feelings: pride and gratification for what you have achieved, nostalgia for what you are leaving, anticipation and probably some anxiety for what lies ahead. But whatever the mingled feelings, graduation from Calvin College is an achievement to celebrate. So enjoy the day!

I tell you a true story. Some years back, when I was doing some teaching at the Free University of Amsterdam, my wife and I had a discussion with an obstetrician on the academic staff of the university hospital. The question arose of how he taught prospective nurses to deal with mothers whose babies were still-born or died shortly after birth. "I tell them," he said, "that when you go into the room, you need two eyes. With one eye you have to check the I.V.; with the other, you must cry. I tell them one eye is not enough. You need two eyes."

Everything I want to say to you, graduates of Calvin College, is contained within that brief story. President Byker left me in no doubt that my speech had to be short. Since the story makes my point, nothing much would be lost if I sat down right now. My guess is that he didn't mean it to be *this* short, however. So I'll say a bit more. You probably won't remember the rest of what I say. Nobody ever remembers commencement speeches, unless they are truly awful. People don't come for the speech, they come for the graduation – for that moment when the president says, "I hereby declare you to be graduates....." But I hope you remember the story.

When you walk and drive around this campus, you see banners attached to the light poles with the motto, "Minds in the Making." That refers to the first eye, the one that checks the I.V. It's the eye of the mind -- the eye of knowledge and discernment.

Every college and university is in the business of trying to see to it that its students know more when they leave than when they arrived. So those who devised this motto for Calvin, "Minds in the Making," must have had something else in mind than just knowing more. They must have believed that there is more to the mind Calvin College seeks to nourish in its students than mere increase in knowledge.

What might that "more" be? What is the mind that Calvin has sought to nourish in you? What is the mind that for generations Calvin has sought to nourish in its students? In my travels, every now and then I come across somebody about whom I say to myself, "He thinks like a Calvin grad." "She thinks like a Calvin grad." Will I say that about you if I meet you ten years hence? If I do, what will I mean?

At a minimum, the mind that Calvin has sought to nourish in you is the mind of competence. You know how to use the English language properly, even skillfully, and perhaps

another language as well. You are well trained in the skills of your future occupation. People can count on you to do things right and do them well. You know how to check the I.V. and how to correct it when something goes wrong.

But that's only the minimum. The person who thinks like a Calvin grad isn't just good at doing things the way things are done. She asks questions. She asks why things are being done this way. Why is it important that they be done this way? Why is it important that these things be done at all? In doing things this way, what assumptions are being made? Are those assumptions correct? What are the moral implications of doing things this way? How does doing things this way serve God's cause of justice and shalom? Is there integrity in doing things this way, or do you have to sell your soul to the devil? Can this way of doing things stand the light of day?

When I come across a person who thinks like this, I feel that I have found a soul mate. This person has the sort of mind that I tried to nourish when I was a professor here. This person has the mind of a Calvin grad. He may not be a Calvin grad. But if he is, I feel deep pride in this institution to which I devoted so many years of my life. This, I hope and believe, is the mind Calvin is referring to when it speaks of "Minds in the Making."

The best term I have for this way of thinking is *critical engagement*. You *engage* the world of nursing, of business, of law, of art, of medicine, of education, of politics, of recreation, whatever; you don't pull out, not unless integrity requires you to do so, as it sometimes does. But you engage it with critical discernment; you don't just run with the crowd. You say No when No must be said, and also, let me add immediately, Yes when Yes is to be said.

Be forewarned that critical engagement is likely to get you into trouble; it's not a recipe for popularity at the office. People don't like having somebody around asking whether their customary ways of doing things are worthwhile, whether they are important, whether they have integrity, whether they serve God's cause of justice and shalom.

That was the first eye, the eye of the mind, the eye of knowledge and discernment. Now for the second eye, the eye of the heart, the eye that weeps. It may have occurred to you that you don't need good eyesight to have the eye of knowledge and discernment; you don't need eyesight at all, literally speaking. That's even more true for the second eye; in fact it's probably easier for the blind person to have the eye of the heart than it is for the rest of us.

We all recognize the need for the eye of knowledge and discernment. You yourself may not have described it in quite the way I did; but it's easy to see its importance in this knowledge-saturated world of ours. The need for the second eye is less obvious; and colleges and universities are much less good at nourishing it.

What good does a crying eye do? What good does it do the mother? What good does it do the nurse? What good does it do anybody? Why not stifle the cry and get on with knowledge and discernment? Why the eye of the heart?

The nurse weeps because the mother weeps. And the mother weeps because she loved her child. It was right that she loved her child. For her child was a creature of great worth, a creature of God's own making meant to flourish until full of years, and a creature of Christ's

own redeeming. Now the child is gone. The mother's weeping is the pained recognition that this is not how God meant things to be. It is her pained recognition of the fallenness of our world. Things have gone awry in God's world – which, of course, is why God has committed himself to redeeming it. The nurse weeps for the same reason the mother weeps. “Weep with those who weep,” said Paul to the Christians in Rome – to which he added, let me emphasize, “Rejoice with those who rejoice.” The obstetrician that my wife and I talked with surely did not mean that if all goes well in childbirth, the nurse needs only the eye of knowledge.

Do you begin to see why you need the second eye? It's with the second eye that the pain of the world and the hope for a new day enters your heart. “Blessed are those who mourn,” said Jesus. He was not blessing those who go around moping. He was blessing those who discern all the ways in which life in this world falls short of justice and shalom, who then go on to say “This must not be,” and who struggle to change things when they see the chance of doing so. The mourners are discontented visionaries. They will be comforted, says Jesus.

I hope I have not given you the impression that the eye of the heart is relevant only to such professions as nursing and medicine. It's not. Every occupation and every profession touches human beings. Every occupation and every profession either advances justice and shalom or hinders it.

Some of you will be going into business. For that you need two eyes. With one eye you have to check accounts receivable and accounts payable, overhead and profit margins, payroll and insurance costs. With the other you have to attend to your employees – are they receiving just reward for their labor and can they find fulfillment in their work, and you have to think of your clients – do the products or services that you provide enhance their lives rather than diminishing or debasing them. One eye is not enough.

Some of you will be going into law. For that you need two eyes. With one eye you have to check the law books, dig out precedents, keep up with the courts, figure out what's best for your clients and fair to their adversaries. With the other you have to discern and share in the pain and grief that almost always lie just below the surface of court proceedings and legal briefs. One eye is not enough.

Some of you will be going into teaching. For that you need two eyes. With one you have to make lesson plans and read student papers, keep up with theories of reading and developments in math. With the other you have to discern and feel the tender hearts of the students with whom you are dealing. One eye is not enough.

Some of you will be going into politics. For that you need two eyes. With one eye you have to figure out the intricate details of what justice and prosperity for all require in the present situation, both at home and abroad – not what keeping your own party in power requires, not what flexing your nation's muscles requires, what justice and prosperity for all require. With the other eye you have to weep with those who are abused, wronged, killed, and demeaned by all that goes wrong in politics. One eye is not enough.

Graduates of Calvin College, in whatever walk of life you find yourself, you will need two eyes. Whatever your walk, you will need knowledge and discernment, critical engagement. And whatever your walk, you will need compassion. You will be touching the lives of human

beings, creatures with minds like yours and hearts like yours, minds that seek understanding, hearts that suffer and rejoice -- kinsfolk, creatures whose differences from you fade away before the fact that the creator of the universe and restorer of all that is fallen is mirrored in them and you alike. Do not be so focused on knowledge that you neglect compassion; do not be so overcome by compassion that you neglect knowledge.

The eye of the mind without the eye of the heart is heartless competence. The eye of the heart without the eye of the mind is mindless empathy. You need both eyes, both the eye of the mind and the eye of the heart, both the eye of discernment and the eye of compassion -- one eye to check the I.V., the other to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

One eye is not enough.

You need two eyes.