

# “NOR TOLERATE THOSE WHO DO”

Remarks for the Honor Convocation  
August 20, 2020

Let me tell you two stories that have been shared with me by Hampden-Sydney alumni.

In the first story, the alumnus was taking a Biology test in Gilmer Hall when the lights went out. The building was totally dark so the professor told the students to go to their rooms to finish their exams reminding them that they had signed the Honor Code. The alumnus told me that he got back to his room in Venable and sat down to finish his exam. He hadn't been doing very well on the exam and he knew he wasn't going to get a good grade on the exam. About that time, he looked up and saw his Biology textbook on the shelf above his desk and knew that everything he needed to get a good grade on the exam was in that book. He told me that that moment was one of the most powerful moments in his life because he realized what kind of a man he wanted to be and that the kind of man he wanted to be would never cheat on an exam.

The second story was shared with me by a relatively recent alumnus who works for a major commercial real estate firm in Atlanta. He told me that he and his boss had been working on a very complicated deal, a deal that was so complicated it offered both sides many opportunities to try to take advantage of the other side. So, our alumnus and his boss were dreading the negotiations. But as our alumnus and his boss arrived at the negotiation, they saw that the other side was represented by a lawyer who had gone to Hampden-Sydney. Our alumnus told me that all of the tension just evaporated because they knew they could trust him to be honest with them during the negotiations. He went on to share that the negotiations were quickly concluded and the sale of the property was easily completed.

I'm sharing these two stories with you because I think they illustrate very vividly that what you see tonight as a set of high expectations becomes a way of life for Hampden-Sydney men. In the first story, on the day of the test was the day our alumnus decided he didn't just want to keep the honor pledge, but he decided he wanted to live a life of honor. In the second story, living a life of honor had already become the way of life for the alumni involved in the real estate transaction.

These stories also illustrate two other important points about honor. First, honor is doing the right thing even when nobody is watching because that's just the kind of man you want to be. In the Biology exam, the alumnus might not have gotten caught if he cheated, but you see, he decided at that moment that he wanted to be an honorable man. Contrast that with some of the phrases you've no doubt heard—phrases like, “it's okay if nobody gets hurt,” or “it's okay if you don't get caught.” Both of these phrases are about as far from honor as you can get. They are examples of taking shortcuts on the road of life, and I want to emphasize tonight that shortcuts on the road of life are almost always dead ends.

Second, notice in the real estate deal how easy it was for two honorable people to carry out a tough business negotiation. Honor and virtue are the way we are supposed to live, and it is easy to imagine how great the world would be if we all lived honorably. While our students were on spring break last spring, we had to make the decision to close the College and keep our students home. When it

became clear that we weren't going to be able to bring our students back later in the semester, the Bortz Library staff had to go around and gather student belongings from the desks and carrels in the library. You see, even before going on spring break, a lot of our students had left their books and other belongings in the library knowing that they would be safe there until they got back to campus. Now when you graduate, you'll probably have to lock the door to your apartment and your car, but you will know from your Hampden-Sydney experience what our society would be like if the rest of the world lived as honorably as we do here.

I will finish by talking about the second half of the honor pledge, the "nor tolerate those who do" part. Now this phrase can be a stumbling block for many of us. We probably say to ourselves, of course I will not lie, cheat, or steal," but we then say to ourselves, "but I don't want to rat on my friend or the guy who is sitting next to me in class." What you must leave here tonight knowing is that the second part of the honor code, and upholding the second part of the honor code is every bit as important as the first part. You might say to me, but how can ratting on my friend be a good thing? Think about it this way: Your friend knowing that you will report him if he cheats may be exactly what he needs to keep him from cheating and to help him commit to living a life of honor. What I am saying is, you should not think of the second part of the Honor pledge as requiring you to rat on your friend, think of it instead as helping your friend become a good man and a good citizen.

This second, "nor tolerate those who do," part of our honor pledge is especially important now, when we need every member of this community to do his part and to hold his brothers accountable for doing their part. We all want the College to remain open for face-to-face instruction this fall. The key is going to be some very basic, commonsense steps that we all have to take, including wearing a mask, social distancing, and contacting the Health Center if you don't feel well. I had a senior tell me yesterday that his greatest hope is that he can spend every day of his senior year here on campus. He asked me to ask everyone to do their part. You, too, I'm sure want to spend every day of your freshman year here on campus, so hold yourself accountable, and promise one another that you will hold each other accountable as well.

Earlier this afternoon, I hope you heard loud and clear how happy we are to have you here, how much we want you to thrive here, how much we want you to accomplish here. Nothing would give your fellow brothers, our faculty and staff colleagues, and me more satisfaction than to have you commit to becoming honorable Hampden-Sydney men tonight and graduating from here four years from now.