WESTMINSTER ACADEMY — STUDENT CHARGE SPEECH
8/20/25 30th anniversary Opening Convocation
John Hodges

I. It is a great honor on this, the 30th anniversary of Westminster to be asked to speak with you this morning. Thank you, headmaster, faculty, staff, students, parents, and board members, past and present for lending me your ears.

It dawns on me as I look out on all of you students, that when we started 30 years ago, not one of you had even been born…and as I think about it maybe some of you FACULTY had not been born…

When the six couples first gathered to consider starting a Classical Christian school, we could see that the project would need to have a multi-generational vision: we would be creating something not for our children, but for our grandchildren. And here you all are! We couldn't be prouder grandparents.

It was clear from the first that God was leading us. Not one of us knew all the others to begin with, John and Alice Dudas, Rick and Gina Hall, Bill and Martha Martin, Ruben and Leslie Avila, Sandy and Libby Mayer, and my wife Day and myself. And each of us brought a different facet of what we needed to get going: knowledge of lower and upper school curricula, banking, real estate, fire codes, board leadership, but we all shared an appreciation for the kind of education that our culture had lost.

Those 6 couples represented five different churches in town. But we quickly became the kind of friends that you keep for a lifetime. Out of our firm desire to glorify God in this crazy project, we set the nearly impossible bar of moving forward as a board only when we had a unanimous vote on the issue at hand. The questions we were addressing were so foundational that we wanted a six to zero vote before passing anything. It made for some very long board meetings…. But this built in a kind of trust

in God and in God's use of each other, and I am convinced more and more that it was this trust that is the real foundation of this school. It is my hope that you can find colleagues of their caliber to work with in your lives — the sense of community was rich and glorious.

II. What we call Classical education is really more than Greek and Roman thought — it really comes through the Christian lens of the Middle Ages, a borrowing of the recognized wisdom of the pagans turned to the service of the God of the Bible. All truth is God's truth.

The Seven Arts are tools that we use to prepare students for a lifetime of unlocking the most important information in the world: the self-revelation of God to men. If we finite people were to try to comprehend the infinite God we would fail completely. But thanks be to God, He has revealed Himself to us — and that revelation comes in two languages: that of Word, and that of Cosmos.

So the wise monks of the Middle ages turned these seven arts toward their end of knowing God's revelation — the Trivium to unpack the language of words, and the Quadrivium to unpack the language of the Cosmos, namely numbers. So the real purpose of the invention of what we call "education" in the West is theology, the Queen of studies. And that means that the truly educated man is not the one with all the credentials, necessarily, but rather the one who knows and walks with God.

III. So, how does one become educated? Now we get to the charge to the students: What we want to cultivate in you is a life-long love of learning. Learning requires study, and most people think of study in a very unflattering way. It seems we have to use a combination of rewards and punishments to get us to study, and as soon as we can get out of that rat race, we want to. But it turns out human beings are naturally curious, and we like study under one condition: that we love what we are studying.

Think of folks you know who love hunting, or sports betting, or exercise, or following Taylor Swift — they study the details of their love with laser-like focus. We only truly study that which we find lovely. So how do we generate a love for study? By finding the beauty in the subject. We only study what we love, and we only truly love what we find beautiful.

So - my charge to you students this morning is to set your wills to come to school each day to find the beauty in each subject or class you attend. This is a tough task because we as a culture think that beauty is a matter of personal preference, but it is not entirely. So what is beauty? it is the harmony of diverse elements. Everything in God's creation is made up of parts that work together to form a whole. God has brought together these parts in a kind of harmony with one another. Your job — your charge is to discover these parts in your classes. Can you find beauty in the harmony of Latin endings? In the order of a syllogism? What about in the elements of a living cell? There is beauty to be found in paintings, music, literature, but it is far easier to see when you look into the forms of these things, like you would the cell. Could you find harmony in the beauty of the physics of light? Or in the retelling of the history of the Battle of Hastings?

Discovering this beauty will have some great rewards: you'll find you love coming to school, you will be less worried about grades, because you will find more joy in learning than in the evaluation of how much you have learned. You'll also suddenly find that you have built a culture of community here with like-minded students and teachers. You'll have no interest in cliques, you will want to exclude no one from the adventure. And it will secretly build in you a way of looking at this world: you'll find you expect to find beauty and throughout your life you will continue to seek it out and enjoy it when you find it. The harmony of a good marriage, the harmony of a beneficial business deal, the harmony of the Body of Christ. Your daily classes will be doorways to adventure and discovery.

It shouldn't surprise us then, that our Lord told us that the greatest commandment was NOT to know God and know our neighbor, but to LOVE God and LOVE our neighbor. To love, we must first find the beauty in both God and neighbor. We will WANT to study them out of love for God, and our love for God is founded in His beauty. In Him is the model for the love of harmony in this world: He is the perfect harmony of 3 Persons in One God. We love Him for His perfect harmony, and we love our neighbors because we find His image in them — in beauty we find the best reason to obey the greatest commandment and that is to love. Can you find beauty in your fellow classmates?

So you'll find we have come full circle — because the goal of our study is to know God's revelation of Himself to us. So this is the mission of Westminster: to give you the tools to crack the code of language and cosmos. Education turns out to be not a collection of facts to know, but rather the discovery of beauties to love — we are to learn to love those things that are worth loving.

IV. And if I may add a charge to the faculty, seek out and encourage this love for the beautiful/harmonious in your students. It sets the culture of the school, and without that culture we will lose our distinctive purpose. You and I will not always be here. We are only links in a chain of God's unfolding purposes in this world. We are given the sometimes uncomfortable position of denying what a student (or a parent) wants in order to give the student what we know he needs. Your client is not the student but Wisdom itself. We are offering an education that has been lost for many years and we need to pass this wisdom on to the few who will in turn pass it on to their descendants to keep God's civilization going.

V. And this leads me to one final point. I offer a warning to us all not to allow Westminster to fall into the way of all institutions in a fallen world. Please don't assume that Westminster is immune to this trap — far better men than we have fallen into it. This place was founded to offer a particular, even peculiar education to the small

percentage of the local population that longed for it. To lose that peculiarity will be to lose our very essence.

What is the way of all institutions in a fallen world? The assumption that “bigger is always better”.

It always begins with the question, “How can we attract more people to our cause?” It is a benign question — who could oppose winning more people to our good cause? But be very careful because in this question often hides the greatest temptation to mission drift — you can, with the best of intentions, lose track of our cause, or the way to accomplish it, by trying to appeal to greater numbers, which nearly always means appealing to students’ and parents’ wishes. Just remember, wisdom never tears down a fence until its purpose is fully known. If you find the reason no longer applies, well then, take it down, gently, and incrementally without listening to those who say you are not moving fast enough. Tell them to read Burke. But if you find the reason is valid still, defend that fence even if you are in the minority. In doing so you will do a great service to students 30 years from now.

If the goal of our work here is to teach our students to see…losing sight of our goal, means losing sight itself.

Thanks to all who make up this very important institution.