

CENTENNIAL SPEAKER SERIES

Some of the highlights of the Centennial year thus far have been opportunities to hear the words of those featured in the **Centennial Speaker Series**. The following are excerpts adapted from the last five of eight presenters for 2005-06.

Kathleen Norris

Award-winning poet, writer and author
FEBRUARY 27, 2006 • Hart Auditorium



GERALD EWING

In 1971, award-winning poet, writer and author Norris was the winner of the Big Table Younger Poets Award for her first book of poems, *Falling Off*. Four of her books have been named *New York Times* bestsellers: *The Cloister Walk*; *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*; *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*; and *The Virgin of Bennington*.

Other books by Norris include *Journey: New and Selected Poems* and *The Holy Twins*, a children's book written in collaboration with author/illustrator Tomie de Paola. She also is the recipient of grants from the Bush and Guggenheim Foundations.

Norris likes to tell stories about theological concepts such as grace, repentance, dogma and faith by grounding them in everyday life.

Her first non-fiction book, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, was a *New York Times* "Notable Book of the Year" and was selected one of the best books of the year by *Library Journal*.

In thinking about Christianity these days, I am tempted to believe that while it survived the tyranny of communism, like in Eastern Europe, very well, even the most brutal totalitarian states of the 20th century did not succeed in snuffing out the flame of Christian devotion. But I am wondering if and how the religion can survive the tyranny of capitalism as it has come to be practiced today by multi-national corporations.

Christians are meant to be free people created by God in the divine image, and the very concept of free people seems to be dangerous in a culture in which marketing and consuming have been elevated to the status of idols. Look at the Sabbath, for example. It was given by God to a free people. It is only slaves who cannot observe it, who can't take the time off. Well, what does that say about us in a workaholic society that

pressures so many of its productive, well-trained, and well-compensated people to be available 24-7? Do all the cell phones, PDAs and laptops come with little invisible chains almost marking us as slaves?

The usual prophetic suspects, monks like Thomas Merton and poets like Wendell Berry, are asking good and necessary questions about the meaning of work and what it means to be fully human in the world today, and also what it means to be free. What kind of freedom is it that allows us only to choose from among a variety of new and improved secret ingredients? What kind of freedom is it to be offered any number of fancy gizmos when selecting a new car, but not to be free to live without a car or a cell phone or Internet service?

As technology advances it seems that the poor who must do without such things pay more. Extra service fees, for example, for the privilege of writing a check and mailing it rather than paying bills online. All these issues that are emerging with new technology are questions worth our consideration. They are religious questions because they touch on issues of justice and our identity as human beings, and the religious perspective is very important here because it insists that we are people created by God.

It is that perspective that allows and maybe even insists that we ask: "Well, did God create us to be free just to earn more for the sake of earning more?" [It is] epitomized in the remark of an Internet billionaire who came right out and said that his goal in life was to die with more toys than the next guy. He'll probably succeed. But as people created with souls, can we insist, "Wait a minute; we



have to look out for that other guy as well as ourselves”?

Can it be that each and every person has a value that can't be quantified, but that transcends that of the marketplace? The corporate world's cruel assumption seems to be that human beings have little value as employees or shareholders, but only as consumers, preferably ones who can be easily seduced by effective marketing techniques such as branding. We can resist that; we need to resist it.

We can look more closely at what is being asked of us and when we're presented with all the enticements, bells and whistles that the marketers have to offer, we can say, "I don't care. Life is too short and it matters too much." We can say that life matters and that each child of God matters because we have been told this by an unimpeachable source, the Word of God. If Jesus' incarnation means anything, it doesn't simply mean that the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ – because it doesn't stop with Him. Didn't His incarnation charge us all with becoming the Word of God to each other?

One little girl I will never forget, out of the thousands I worked with in North Dakota elementary schools, wrote that I [should] remember to take my soul with me wherever I go.

That is a good motto and very good advice. I remember to take my soul with me wherever I go.

But the relentless noise of the world of American culture can convince us that we don't even have a soul. It would seem easier many times not to have a soul, an inner and sensitive core that belongs not to us but to God; a soul that wants to lead us away from selfishness and meanness and into self-giving and love. It is easier to act as if we are invincible and self-made and independent of others and their problems, and the more things we profess to care about, the less we need be concerned with our soul.

But Holy Scripture will not let us off the hook.

In it, God keeps insisting, "You are my people and I am your God." Perhaps we ourselves were meant to be like God's Word in Isaiah 55: the Word that God sends into the world in the certainty that it will not return empty, but shall accomplish the purpose for which God sent it. Maybe each one of us is meant to be a Word of God in that sense. Our true vocation as human beings means finding what word we are to bring into the world.

Dr. Stephen Carter

Best-selling author and professor of law at Yale University

MARCH 30, 2006 • Teague Special Events Center

Carter is the William Nelson Cromwell professor of law at Yale University, and has been recognized by *Time* magazine as one of the top 50 leaders for the next century. He has authored seven critically acclaimed nonfiction books on law, ethics and politics, and he has helped shaped national debate ranging from the role of religion in politics to the role of integrity and civility in our daily lives.

The Emperor of Ocean Park, his first novel, was a *New York Times* best-seller and a best-seller in several European countries. Carter serves as a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Law and Religion*.

I want to suggest that our voting is first and foremost a symbol and a signal.

It symbolizes our commitment to a shared government and what it signals is this: When I vote, I am saying to the people with whom I disagree that I so respect them that I will take my most cherished political convictions and lay them on the altar of democracy and allow democratic decision-making. In other words, the significance of voting is not that I think I'm going to win; it's that I'm willing to risk losing. That's the signal.

The symbol is we share this government, and the signal is I'm willing to lose. That is key. That is what makes it a democracy: that I vote because I'm willing to have your side win. That doesn't mean I want your side to win. It doesn't mean I'm indifferent to which side wins. I'm passionate for my

side, but when I vote I'm saying [that] as passionate as I am, I'm willing to play by a set of rules that says you might win. And that shared experience where we come together on Election Day and invite the other side to win is what makes a democracy.

You can recognize nations that aren't [democracies], because although they may vote, they either fix the vote in advance so the other side can't win or they refuse to leave office.

You might notice that as contentious as people say life is in America and as hard as we struggle over the issues that divide us, the president doesn't just sit in the White House when he loses. He leaves. Members of Congress don't sit in their offices guarded by their teams of bodyguards as people pour into the streets to drag them out of their offices. They leave.

That's the signal that they and their supporters in the end – no matter how passionately they wanted to win – are willing to say, "You know what? I'll get you next time." That is crucial.

That shared faith in the system itself is a sign of a shared



GERALD EWINGS

“The worst kind of partisanship is the partisanship that says that what really

respect. That we respect each other as coequal citizens, and I would say as coequal before God, in a way that leads us to decide that although I’m confident that I’m right, I’m willing to lose and I’m going to prove my rightness by persuading my fellow citizens, and if I don’t persuade them, then they win.

... Often on Election Day the loser, instead of saying what one ought to say because we believe in democracy, “Well, the people have spoken,” will say, “Well, we couldn’t get our message out; the media was against us; nobody was listening; the other side ran a dirty campaign.” What we really ought to say is, “My coequal citizens, whom I love and respect, had a different view. I will fight harder to persuade them next time, but they had a different view and that’s why my side lost.”

The worst kind of partisanship is the partisanship that says

that what really matters more than anything else is that my side should win. Once you decide the most important thing is for my side to win, then that compact we’ve made begins to break down. It turns out that no, I don’t really trust you. I don’t really want to lay my most treasured convictions on the altar of democracy because I might lose, and I don’t want to lose. That is a problem. Democracy itself suffers and withers when more and more people decide the most important thing is winning. Don’t misunderstand me; I’m not saying that you shouldn’t want to win and be passionate about it. The problem arises for democracy, the challenge, when we begin to think, “No, my side cannot be allowed to lose,” and that’s when we start to fix the rules a little bit.

Robin Roberts

Co-anchor of “Good Morning America”

APRIL 8, 2006 • Teague Special Events Center



GERALD EWING

Roberts is one of the most versatile journalists and commentators in television today. She has worked in broadcasting for more than 20 years, often splitting her time between duties at ESPN and ABC News.

She has contributed to “Good Morning America” since June 1995, becoming third anchor in May 2005. She also has worked with ABC hosting “Good Morning America, Sunday” and “Prime Time.” From 1990-2005, Roberts was a contributor to ESPN, hosting “SportsCenter,” contributing to “NFL PrimeTime” and providing reports and interviews from the field. She also worked as play-by-play commentator and host of ESPN’s WNBA games

and specials, covered the Winter and Summer Olympics, and hosted ABC Sports’ “Wide World of Sports.”

She was a standout performer on the Southeastern Louisiana University women’s basketball team, ending her career as its third all-time leading scorer and rebounder. The inaugural Robin Roberts Sports Journalism Scholarship, created by the Women’s Institute on Sport and Education, was presented at the 1996 NCAA Women’s Final Four.

In 2001, she was named a “Louisiana Legend” by Louisiana Public Broadcasting, was inducted into the Women’s Institute on Sport and Education Foundation’s Hall of Fame in 1994, and received the 1993 Excellence in Sports Journalism Award for Broadcast Media from the Northeastern University Center.

I do want to give you a sense of who I am and the things that have helped me in my life. I do believe you [sometimes] have to put yourself in a position for good things to happen to you.

My true key to success is being the daughter of Lawrence and Lucy Marion Roberts, being their baby girl. You know, most parents were very concerned about the three “R’s,” reading, writing and arithmetic. My parents’ sole concern

with raising their kids were the three “D’s” – discipline, determination and d’ Lord. Those were the three D’s at our house. I’m so appreciative now. You know, as a child you are grumbling, “I don’t want to go to church.” But my father was in the Air Force and it was not optional. You were going.

And it is wonderful those things that seep into you that you don’t even realize. You know those games that you play: “I don’t feel well.” My parents would say, “OK, you don’t go to church, you don’t play and you don’t do anything [else].” My parents were very good about making it fun for us, and I could see in their lives what it meant because my parents came from very humble beginnings.

My father grew up in New Jersey, just outside of South Orange. As a young man in the 1930s he would take a broomstick handle, saw off the broom, and pretend it was a throttle and that he was flying a plane. Many people would say, “You’re not going to fly a plane; this is not going to happen.” My father went on to be a Tuskegee Airman, the first black flying air corps in the military. He put himself in a position for that to happen to him. My mother was the first in her family to go to college.

... August 29 of this past year I realized why I was put in the position that I am at “Good Morning America.” The Sunday before Hurricane Katrina hit, I could see that the storm was coming. I was in New York and I was calling my mom. My father had passed away in October 2004, and my mother had some health issues. She wasn’t going to be able to evacuate.

Fortunately, I have a sister who lives in Mississippi with her

on the coast, and she has two daughters. I was calling Sunday and I was like, "Mama, you need to leave." And she said, "No, honey, I'll be all right." The day kept progressing and I could see that the storm was really starting to turn and I said, "Get out, Mama, you need to get out!" If my family could get to Lafayette, ABC was offering to fly them out. My mom said, "Wherever I am, God is ... I can't leave and I have the faith that whatever happens I will be all right. I need you to be OK with that." I struggled with it a little bit and then I got OK with it because I needed to be OK with it for her.

Monday morning hits and we're on the air with "Good Morning America" – Charlie [Gibson], Diane [Sawyer] and myself – and we're watching the storm like you're watching it with what the camera will show us. It doesn't seem to be that bad. We went off the air at noon in New York. We had someone on the air who was a meteorologist who said, "In essence, we dodged a bullet." And I believed him, as many of us did at that time, because, again, we were ultimately seeing what limited cameras were showing us.

So I went to a luncheon I [was scheduled] to attend. I was there for a couple of hours, came out, and all of these messages were on my phone and my superiors were telling me I needed to get to Mississippi **now**. I had been trying to call my family and had lost contact with them about 10 a.m. Monday. So I said, "OK, let's go."

We went to the airport not knowing where we'd be able to land, and when we were in the air we found out we could land in Lafayette, La., which is about 200 miles west of the Gulf coast. Now, "Good Morning America" thought I was going for them, but I was going to find my mama.

We had a satellite truck with us ... and it was slowing us down. We were getting closer to the Mississippi coast and I was seeing for the first time with my own eyes what was going on – abandoned cars, trees down, power lines down and this was just hours after the storm had come through.

We got to the coast about 5 a.m. Tuesday and I was going to have to go on air live at 6 a.m. local time. Finally I couldn't take the truck slowing me down any longer and I said, "You guys hunker down here; I've got to find my family. If I can get back to you, I will. If not, Godspeed."

I left and luckily found a police officer who was leaving a shift. I didn't want his help because he had been up all night, but he insisted. He knew my family from the coast, and he could see the fear in my eyes, and he said he would help me. So we go, and the angels had to be with me. You know, they are sent down all the time; little angels are there to help you.

I get to the subdivision of my mother's home. The trees are down, it's pitch black, and we can't drive any farther. I get out and just start running toward my mom's house and the officer, Ryan Frazier, is a big burly guy with a big light and he's trying to keep up with me. I said, "You just better run to keep

up with me, son." I'm reassured because there is damage to the house, but nothing like some of the homes that I had seen. I got to the front door and started banging on it. I could hear my sister and her girls right there in the front of the house. They said, "Who is it?" And I said, "It's Robin."

... As the officer shined the light in the back, I could hear this little voice, "Robin!" I ran back there and my mom was all clammy because the power has been out forever, there were holes in the roof, and there was all this dripping water. She squeezed me and said, "I knew you'd get here. I knew you would come." She had heard a private plane about an hour ago and she asked if that was me. I said, "No, Mom, I had to land in Lafayette like everyone else and had to drive eight hours, but thanks for thinking I could get a private plane right into Biloxi a half hour after the storm hit."

My family then said to me, "Go out; we're fine. You can make the satellite feed. You need to tell people; people need to know what it is like here."

So I made it back to the satellite truck with about 15 minutes to spare. I'm feeling pretty good. I thought, thank you, Lord, I'm all right. I'm listening to [someone in] New York who is giving me information. We go live at 6 a.m. and Charlie and Diane are there and everything is fine. We were reporting on what I saw, and they were telling me in my ear that we had to go to what is called a sound bite to hear a gentleman, Mr. Jackson, who had lost his wife. Do you remember that gentleman who was just in a daze right after the storm? I hadn't seen or heard [the clip] before. They are telling me the information and I convey that, and then I can hear in my ear – I can't see him because I don't have the capability of seeing – but I can hear his voice.

Now I'm hurting. I said, "That is just one of the stories we are hearing here on the Gulf Coast. Charlie, back to you." And Charlie says, "Before we go, Robin, how is your family?" I thought, oh, don't do this to me, Charlie. He was going right for the jugular. I didn't want to say anything and he kept on and on and finally I just started bawling on national TV. I thought, oh, my career is over. No one is ever going to take me seriously again.

All I could think about at that moment was how grateful I was that my family was safe, but how I was hurting for all those people that I knew were tuning in that morning and didn't know about their loved ones – the same situation I was in just hours before.

... The reason I said I know now why I am where I am in news is "Good Morning America." Eighty percent of my adopted hometown of Pass Christian is gone. You can rebuild a home, but it is difficult to rebuild a town. But we at GMA are going to help the many people who are helping to rebuild. I literally looked up to the heavens and said, "Lord, I know now why you put me where you did." Had I

“God’s delays are not His denials, and you will know what it is”

stayed in sports, I never would have had that impact.

You don’t know what is in store for you. You don’t know your life, the people you are going to be able to touch, and the difference that you’re going to be able to make. I’m so grateful that I am being used in this manner. It comes crashing through as clear as a bell.

There are so many things you have in your mind. You have obstacles and challenges and things that you are not quite certain of, but I’m here to tell you it will become clear to you in time. God’s delays are not His denials, and you will know

what it is that you are meant to do and what it is that you want to do.

If you’re passionate about it and you put yourself in a position for good things to happen to not only you, but to others, and you are willing to make those big sacrifices and never ever lose sight of the big picture, you will know.

Continue to dream and to think big, but remember to focus on those things that can help you get to whatever it is that you are wanting to achieve.

Dr. Jean Bethke Elshtain

Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago

APRIL 20, 2006 • Chapel on the Hill



GERALD EWING

Elshtain is a political philosopher whose work shows the connections between our political and our ethical convictions. She is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago.

Her books include *Democracy on Trial*, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social Thought*, and *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*. *Democracy on Trial* was a *New York Times* “Notable Book” for 1995.

Elshtain previously taught at the University of Massachusetts and at Vanderbilt University, where she was the first woman to hold an endowed professorship in the College of Liberal Arts. She also has been a visiting professor at Harvard and Yale. Elshtain holds nine honorary degrees and in 1996 was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

... Americans historically have

always been more comfortable deploying biblical language than peoples in many other places. This is certainly the case nowadays, when the language of evil and of sin and the like has been nearly banished from the vocabulary of Western Europe, as well as from the repertoire of many of our own intellectual and professional elites, including a wide swath of the Christian clergy. Talking about syndromes rather than sin, about brokenness, is in, but evil seems too archaic and too elemental and perhaps too judgmental somehow.

Now a few years ago, a literary scholar and historian named Andrew Delbanco wrote a book on the death of Satan in American culture. And in this book he fretted about the disappearance of this and other representations of evil, “for,” he argued, “without evil, we will have abandoned any notion of the sacred, of that which should not be violated. Without evil, it is difficult to articulate what is good.” He tells us that a gulf has opened up in our culture between the visibility of evil on the one hand and the

intellectual resources we have for coping with it on the other.

... I submit to you this evening that the *Harry Potter* series – whatever theological or philosophical misgivings I might have from time to time – offers America’s children and children everywhere a picture of a moral universe in which very, very bad things sometimes happen. But none of us, including children, are without the means to fight back. Love and loyalty and friendship and solidarity – all of these help to protect and to defend us. Garden-variety disregard and mistrust; the splitting up of friendships; envy, jealousy – these are the ways it all begins.

So J.K. Rowling ... is helping children to imagine evil and to evoke it, in modern Western culture from which it is frequently banished. Powerful children’s stories have always done this, but I think that we have sanitized many of those stories by making believe that we are protecting children as we do, and we’ve said as we’ve sanitized these stories, “We don’t want to frighten them.” But children are frightened anyway. They know the world isn’t always nice. They have tremendous fears: fears of abandonment, fears of danger, and they deal, alas – certainly once they start school this is true – with petty cruelties and cutting comments and bullying rather frequently. I don’t know a school child who escapes that altogether.

As well, children like my own grandchildren, whose first significant political memory will be the memory of men of wicked purpose seizing great symbols of the freedom of travel – commercial airliners – and flying them into buildings, thereby murdering thousands of innocent people, many of them moms and dads who only went to work that day – these children do not need to be nurtured by nostrums. They know that terrible things happen. So how do we help them to understand? How do we prepare them to think about that?

it is that you are meant to do and what it is that you want to do." – ROBIN ROBERTS

John Maxwell

Best-selling author and esteemed speaker about concepts of leadership

APRIL 25, 2006 • Teague Special Events Center

Known as America's expert on leadership, Maxwell also is the founder of INJOY Stewardship Services, an organization that partners with churches to provide vision-driven stewardship campaigns.

He also founded EQUIP, a non-profit organization that helps Christian leaders fulfill the Great Commission in every nation. He is a *New York Times* best-selling author and has written more than 30 books, including his latest, *Failing Forward*, which explores the concept of learning from mistakes. His 1999 release, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, is a *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller.

Maxwell founded INJOY in 1985 as a non-profit organization, operating out of his one-car garage in San Diego. The growing organization moved to the Atlanta area in 1997 where Maxwell and INJOY continue to develop integrity and passion in leaders through personal and professional growth resources.

... **Thirty years ago I came** to the conclusion that successful people do four things very well. ... Whenever you see a Maxwell book that comes out, it will be in one of these four areas. I constantly want to teach and to help people get good in these four areas.

... The first area is the area of relationships. People that are highly successful have a way of getting along with people. Think about that for a minute. In fact, here is what I say: "People won't go along with you unless they can get along with you." Highly successful people have good relationship skills. It is the foundation of leadership, but it is also the foundation of success. Your ability and my ability to connect with people, to understand them, to be understood by them, to communicate care and love to them, to emotionally, spiritually and intellectually relate, is going to be a great determinant of our success. So a lot of my books are relationship books.

... The second thing to be highly successful is [that] you need to learn how to equip people. You need to learn how to train people. Successful people understand that success, for it to compound, has to improve others. So they have the great ability to take the vision from "me" to "we." They understand the most significant part of teamwork. I wrote a book called *The 17 Laws of Teamwork*, and one of the laws is the law of significance that says one is too small a number to achieve greatness. You can't achieve greatness by yourself. The only way we can ever achieve greatness is to develop a team around us. The moment that we build and develop this team around us, all of a sudden things begin to compound, and successful people understand that.

So that's why I write a lot of books on teamwork. That is why I'm in the sports world and the NFL and the NCAA. Every

year I'm invited to do the NCAA Final Four. I go about every two or three years and speak to all the coaches on that Saturday morning. The reason why is because I do a lot of work on how to develop teams. Teamwork makes the dream. There is no question about it. Your ability and my ability to engage people to come alongside of us and do something together compounds whatever we are wanting to accomplish, and highly successful people compound themselves and get a huge return.

The third area is attitude. Highly successful people have an uncommon attitude, especially about adversity. Highly successful people do not have fewer problems than unsuccessful people. They just have an attitude that allows them to have a tenacity to work through the issues, the difficulties and the problems. Now attitude isn't everything. ... For example, attitude can't make up for incompetence. The only good thing about it is [that] while you're going bankrupt, you are happy. You don't need a leadership conference; you need a therapist. Attitude isn't everything, but it is the main thing. It is what I call the difference-maker: the main thing that makes a difference between people who are successful and unsuccessful.

Finally, number four is that highly successful people are good leaders. They know how to lead. Because they realize that it is one thing to have a vision and it is another thing to get [people to] buy into that vision. Leadership is nothing more than influence. It is not title or position. In fact, my newest book that just came out in January is called *The 360-Degree Leader*. I am very excited about this book. It's about how to influence people above you, beneath you and beside you. I love the book because, when I do leadership stuff, people will say they love my leadership ideas, but that they don't have a leadership position, so they think they can't lead. I wrote the book to show you that you don't need a leadership position to lead. You can lead where you are. You can influence people wherever you are. ▲



GERALD EWING