

July 3, 2014

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Michael W. Higgins, *Sacred Heart University*

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From left are University of Waterloo Chancellor Prem Watsa, Michael W. Higgins and UW Registrar Ray Darling - photo courtesy of the University of Waterloo

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Professor Michael W. Higgins, vice president for Mission and Catholic Identity at Sacred Heart University, received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, at commencement exercises on June 11. He also delivered the keynote address that day.

In presenting Higgins for the honorary degree, David Seljak, associate professor of Religious Studies, talked about his 14 books and many academic articles as well as his popular commentary on CBC and CTV television. “Beyond his work on specifically Catholic topics, Professor Higgins has written about the continuing relevance of spirituality in our so-called secular age, producing, for example, two first-rate books on the monk and mystic Thomas Merton,” Seljak said.

Higgins was also feted the night before at a special reception. The tribute was given by Professor Gabriel Niccoli, chair of the University of Waterloo’s Department of Italian and French Studies. He described Higgins as “a man certainly for all seasons, given the multiplicity of talents and significant roles in his long and multifarious academic life, from top administrator, to author and editor, to radio and television journalist and commentator, to opinion maker, to theologian, to Vaticanist. And the list goes on and on. He has been called the voice of CBC and, more often, the perfect face for radio,” Niccoli joked.

After sharing stories of a memorable trip the two took to Italy where they were honored for their efforts to build academic and scientific bridges between Canada and Italy and to promote exchange programs between universities in the two countries, Niccoli concluded by saying, “As an old friend and colleague, and fellow Grimaldese, I am deeply honored to have been called on to say these few words as a premise to the great recognition you are about to receive. Your stellar career, your innumerable achievements, your magnanimity, your gravitas and humanitas make of

you a veritable Renaissance man for our times. I know I speak for all in the audience, Michael, when I say to you: Congratulations.”

In his commencement address, Higgins provided a bit of history on the Vikings before advising the students to emulate their pioneer spirit. “The questing spirit, the inquiring mind, the restless heart—these are the key ingredients of a genuine arts education. Savor them, treasure them, evolve them,” he said. He also suggested that they occasionally set aside the multiple technological platforms available and enjoy the arts the old-fashioned way. “...Read a book, listen to a recording, watch a film, and revel in its complexity and mystery, free yourselves to think deeply,” he said.