

(Address delivered by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at Commencement Exercises, Villanova University, Villanova, Pennsylvania, Monday, June 2, 1958)

## THE DIVINE ROMANCE OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

If there is any single topic that has captured the attention of our times, it is education. Everybody today has an opinion on what is happening or should be happening to education in America. Even the cold war has taken an educational turn, so that the remarkable assault of space by Sputniks and Explorers has led to an unprecedented interpretation of these accomplishments in terms of the Soviet and American educational systems. In the underdeveloped countries of Asia and Africa, education is being viewed as the key to the Pandora box of rising expectations. And it was students who threw the stones at armored tanks in Hungary and East Germany, and at our Vice President in South America.

In our own country, the debate has taken several courses. There have been lively discussions on the content of American education: how poorly science and mathematics are taught, if at all; whether or not religion and moral truths have any place in the curriculum; the seeming conflict between technical or vocational education that prepares the student to do some specific thing, and humanistic or liberal or general education that purports to educate man as man. Then there have

been the embarrassing questions: why so many teachers have been taught how to teach without learning what they are going to teach; why we spend more on comic books than on textbooks; why our teachers are paid and esteemed so much less than our entertainers; why so many of our most talented high school students receive no college education at all. Through all of this discussion there has been a rising emphasis on quality of performance. It has been rightly said that what happens to education happens to America.

It was inevitable that Catholic education should have become involved in this discussion. Nowhere in the world does there exist a Catholic educational system as extensive as in America. Never before in the history of the world has the Church in a single country undertaken to educate formally as many students as are educated today under Catholic auspices in the United States. And never before have so many Catholic priests, religious sisters, brothers, lay faculty, and administrators, parents and benefactors become so deeply involved in a Catholic educational endeavor in any one country. There are, for example, more Catholic institutions of higher learning in this country than in all the other countries of the world put together.

Nothing this large can exist without being highly visible to the world about it. Nothing this significant can continue without friend and enemy alike

searching for the depth of its significance. And certainly, nothing this widespread can increase and multiply as it should without a continual consciousness of its special contribution, its inspirational motivation, and the inner dynamic spirit that must guide all organic growth, in unity, symmetry, and coherence.

I have often thought that our own understanding and discussion of our Catholic educational system has been too statistical, pedestrian, and uninspiring. We think too often in terms of brick and mortar, speak too exclusively of financial considerations, measure too much in numbers and percentages, and thus miss the inner reality that should make of our endeavor one of the most divinely romantic activities of which men and women are capable, either as teachers or as students.

I have the impression that if we could drink more deeply and meditatively of the great and divine inspiration that is ours, we might devote ourselves more wholeheartedly to the perfection of our educational endeavors, as indeed we should. I would like, therefore, today to cast the discussion on the highest possible plane, and to compare our educational efforts with God's own divine communications of creation, incarnation, sanctification, and glory. These are deepest fonts of inspiration available to man in the face of God. If we can find in them some analogies that liken our educative efforts to these great divine realities, then indeed we shall not lack inspiration to make our total efforts not only widely spread, but

deeply penetrating.

The first divine communication is creation. There is no need that it ever should have taken place, for God had no need for the world or for man. If it had not taken place, there would have been no man to educate, or no vast creation about which he could be educated. By creation, God brought into being both the subject and the subject matter of education, and bequeathed us in this wonderful expanse of beauty, order and symmetry, so many clues to find our way to Him. We can say from theology that all of this came to be out of nothingness by a divinely creative act. We can say from science that our own earth began to be about four or five billion years ago and that the universe is so far flung, that it has taken light traveling 186,000 miles a second all of these billions of years to come to us from the galaxies at its outer reaches. Education can claim all of this as its subject matter, from the tiniest particle at the heart of the atom to the uttermost star.

Catholic education can embrace the unseen universe as well, the universe beyond science and the scientific method, the universe of the deeper realities of the human spirit, the world of divine reality in theology, the world of human ideas in philosophy, the touching world of human insight in literature and poetry, the world of human aspiration, success and failure in history and the social sciences.

All of this has come to us through creation. All of this is ours to know, to understand as best we can, to appreciate, and to love through education. Catholic means universal, and Catholic education should open the mind widely to all possible knowledge, available to man through whatever means of knowing. This divine communication of creation should teach us that education is least Catholic when it is tightly restricted to this or that specialty of knowledge or to this or that specific way of knowing. Education is most Catholic when in curiosity and wonderment it embraces all that is, the totality of creation, both spirit and matter.

The divine communication of creation has also given us the subject of all education: man. There are also animals who can be trained, but only man can be educated, for in all of visible creation, only man was made in the image and likeness of God, a person, an individual with a mind that can range the universe, and a will that can freely guide his own destiny. Any philosophy of Catholic education must begin with man as God has made him, not just a mass of humanity, not just a number on a registration card, but an individual person like to God in his capacity to know and to love and to live his own life. The really great teachers have been those who have had the capacity to sort out their students as individual persons, with individual talents and capacities, with individual aspirations and destinies. These great teachers have ever stood in awe at the task of opening young minds to

the great realities that have inspired man, have always respected the freedom of the individual to develop uniquely and personally as he learns to make an intelligent use of his freedom. Mass education by mass methods is not Catholic because God created a man, and continues to create each individual soul, not a mass of men and souls. Persons are more unique than their fingerprints. Catholic teaching must somehow reckon with this uniqueness, for while we live and learn together, we learn each in his own way and we serve God uniquely by the development of our own unique capacities and talents. Catholic education must have this quality if no other, that we respect God's creation of man as he is, that we do not attempt to distort, by mass method, what God has created by a specific divine action. When education reduces students to ciphers, it is no longer catholic.

The second great divine communication that has great relevance for Catholic education is the Incarnation. Here we are at the heart of Christianity when we ponder that in the fullness of time, the Son of God who proceeds eternally from the Father, is born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, becomes man without ceasing to be God, or as St. John so clearly states it: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." Before Bethlehem, men could wonder at the vast creation of God, and in knowing its beauty and order, come to recognize at least the faint shadow of God who created it. After Bethlehem, man can come to know God

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directly in Christ Jesus, Our Lord. What was before faint shadow, now becomes visible reality, the Way, the Truth, and the Life incarnate.

What does Catholic education learn from this second divine communication of the Incarnation? Obviously, we have in the human mind and will of Christ an eternal pattern for all mankind. The mind of Christ and the will of Christ are models for teacher and student alike, a pattern for growth in wisdom and age and grace, a prototype towards which all Catholic education must strive.

Less obviously, we have in this divine communication of the Incarnation an important lesson for all who aspire to teach. What we say is shadow, what we are and what we do is substance. The teacher must somehow make incarnate in his life all that he professes to teach: his respect for the mind and for truth, his own far-ranging intellectual curiosity, his sense of values, his sober judgment, his critical personal assessment of what is superficial, shoddy, and mediocre in life, his integrity of character, his deep respect and even love for those human persons whom he professes to teach. Other realities unworthy of the teaching profession are incarnate in the unfair tyrant who bullies a class, the unprepared professor who bores his students, the arrogant pedant, the dull and uninspiring purveyor of lifeless and unrelated information.

The student, too, has much to learn from this divine communication of the

Incarnation, for just as every teacher must remain a student, so, too, each student must in time become a teacher. Those of you who graduate today will, for good or for evil, be teaching your own children, your business or professional associates, all of those with whom you come in contact. You will not teach that which is most worthwhile teaching, unless somehow the truths that you have learned become the flesh and bone of your lives, incarnate in your daily living. This means that you, too, must exemplify the mind and the heart of Christ, that those about you "may have life and have it more abundantly." Catholic education has failed in your case if this work of incarnation has not taken place in your life, if you do not manifest to men everywhere the deep convictions about God, man, and the world that alone can give a Catholic meaning and purpose to your life.

The third great work of divine communication is sanctification. This work affected each one of us when we were baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, when we became a Temple of the Holy Spirit by reason of our rebirth to the divine life of sanctifying grace. We commemorate this communication of divine life each day in the Mass when we pray, as the priest mingles wine and water in the chalice: "O God who so wondrously created man, and more wondrously re-created him, grant that through this mingling of water and wine, we may become partakers of His



divinity, who deigned to partake of our humanity." This divine life is given that it might grow in us, that each human act of ours may have eternal value, that the presence of God may be within us through life as we seek His company forever in eternity.

How possibly can this divine communication of sanctification be relevant to the work of Catholic education? Again by analogy, I believe that each true Catholic teacher loves to teach because he sees something of himself, and of the truth he professes, come to life within his students. The teacher is engaged in a work of high dignity, because he is working with the elements of the soul that are eternal. His is no passing work. Great teachers live on in each one of us who has learned from them, for they have shaped in us that which is eternal.

How vastly different is this concept of the teacher from that of the colorless robot who merely passes out information to be memorized and recalled at examination time and then forgotten forever. Such a teacher lives a life narrowly circumscribed by the bells that open and close his class. But the Catholic teacher who understands the sanctifying power of truth will find in his profession an outlet for the continuously inspiring act of mediation between wisdom and ignorance. He is not dealing merely with facts and figures, but with minds that can be awakened to the awesome vision of truth. It will be his passion

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to inspire a curiosity for full knowledge, the search for wisdom in the ways of God and man, a deep commitment to personal and social justice, a profound compassion for human anguish in all its forms, a cherishing of goodness and beauty, and an instinctive disgust for that which is evil and ugly. It matters not what the precise subject matter is, for the human mind, once opened and working, will seek the heights if a true teacher is there to guide the way. And somehow, vital ideas have a way of infiltrating into all the corners of our life, to be our light in darkness, our hope in adversity, our strong staff when our steps falter.

The fourth great act of divine communication is glory. When at the end of our life, time is swallowed up in eternity, then the good God that we have known by faith and possessed by sanctifying grace, is ours to see, to know face to face, to possess and to love unendingly. In this light of glory, our only true graduation, we will know all things in God. All of creation will be seen as in its Creator, all the persons and things that we have sought, cherished, and loved in life will be ours to know and love and to possess forever. This is the culmination of all of the communications of God to man, for it is in fact the eternal and full communication of Himself. This communication of glory is our true homecoming, prefigured now momentarily each day in Holy Communion, but then in an eternal moment of unspeakable happiness for: "eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath the

mind of man imagined the wonderful things that God has prepared for those who love Him." What can Catholic education learn from this last of the divine communications?

First of all, it should remind us that we are educating for eternity as well as for time. We have not here a lasting city, and while we do educate for competence and excellence in the things of time, we do all of this in the context of eternity. The Catholic must have a foot in both worlds, without substituting competence for piety, or piety for competence. We serve God in time, and in doing so, scale the ramparts of eternity. Christian humanism, patterned after the incarnation, is able to live fully and competently and humanly in this world, as Christ did, to do the work of each day well, while still sanctifying the things of humanity and of time in the service of Christ, Our Lord.

Secondly, this vision of the glory to come should widen the horizons of the Catholic educator, should lift up his mind and heart, should keep him from capitulating to the depression and discouragement that so beset his path as he labors against the barriers that have ever faced the educative process: the pettiness of narrow minds; the indolence of those who ultimately do not really want to learn; the intransigence of those who will settle for goodness alone, or intelligence alone, but not both together, as the goal of Catholic education.

Thirdly, this divine communication of the Beatific Vision should remind us that what we seek to accomplish through education will, in fact, be fully realized some day in our own lives and in the minds of those we teach. By its commitment to the adequacy of knowledge, the knowledge of all that is, spiritual as well as material, Catholic education is most clearly differentiated from other kinds of education that restrict knowledge to that which can be seen, felt, or personally experienced, to that which can be established and validated experimentally by the scientific method and expressed in quantitative terms. We want to educate to the full range of knowledge, theological, philosophical, historical, poetic, literary, mathematical, and scientific, because this is the range of the mind of man, and the hope of his eternal vision in God. We need not, for example, feel disappointed if space travel is not possible in our day, for it will be possible to all of us in a few short years, in eternity, when we will indeed be able in spirit to travel to the ends of the universe with the speed of thought, to see with the eye of God, so to speak, to understand the mysteries of the natural world, the seeming contradictions of justice in the world of man, to taste the fullness of truth, to glory in the vast and beautiful spectacle of all that is.

In the light of these divine communications of creation, incarnation, sanctification and glory, our own finite efforts may seem somewhat insignificant,

but then everything human is insignificant when compared to the divine. What I have been endeavoring to say, however, is this: that of many possible human activities, outside of the priesthood, here in education is a human activity in which there is analogically a close kinship with divine activity. In this kinship, Catholic education has its greatest dignity and glory, the key to its unity and ultimate success.

Now what has all of this to do with the graduates of Villanova University in the year of 1958? First of all, if this ideal of Catholic education did not exist, you would not be graduating from a Catholic university today. The fact that you are graduating, however, is no guarantee that each of you will personify the ideal. To personify Catholic education, you must first of all understand it. I do not doubt that each of you has thought serious thoughts during your years here at Villanova. I would ask you to think through these few additional thoughts before leaving.

Are you prepared, according to the ideal, to be as fully as possible the man that God created you to be: a person who thinks for himself, a man who has a consistent and conscious philosophy of life, a firm set of values that give meaning and depth and purpose to your life? Have you used your freedom to choose for yourself the kind of life you want to live, the causes for which you are willing

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to dedicate and sacrifice yourself? Have you carefully considered the kind of girl you want to marry, the kind of children you want to educate, and have you disciplined yourself to be the kind of person who will attract this girl, and inspire these children? Is your faith a living reality for you? Do you hope for the important things in life and in eternity? And is your charity broad enough to embrace all men? Are you secure in your belief of the things most worth living for, and even worth dying for? These are the really important questions. Many young Americans finish college without really asking themselves these questions, much less answering them. All of them derive from what God created you and the world to be.

Can you say that your education has really affected your life? Can someone look at you in the years to come and say that you are different, in a good sense, because of the four years you spent here? Has Christ in His Incarnation brought you a way and a truth and a life that will become incarnate in your own life. Do you have as a living ideal the wonderful words of St. Paul: "I live, no not I, but Christ liveth in me." No one can be consciously Christian and Catholic unless this begins to happen, and unless this is a growing reality in your life, your Catholic education will have left you untouched and you will find yourself doing things that reflect anything but Christ.

Sanctification is a big word, but the reality is greater yet. If Catholic education leaves us with one great conviction it should be this: that only by constantly living in the state of grace can we make all of our living moments valuable for all eternity, that only by living each day with God in our souls, and His grace in our lives, can we face the challenge of making our Catholic education and all it stands for a living reality to all around us.

Lastly, what do you really intend to live for? Madison Avenue would satisfy you with a ranch house in suburbia, a junior executive's position in town, a future that is bright with Winters in Florida and Summers at the beach. Martinis and tranquillizers will make you forget your worries, and the world will go on successfully as long as you have money in the bank. None of these things is evil in itself, but if the totality of material advantages spell success and security for you, then you have forgotten that heaven is not on earth, that one third of the world goes to bed hungry every night, that great and satanical powers are prowling about with untamed H-bombs in their pockets, and our own country is bristling with anguishing human and moral problems to be solved by young men like you, who have had the opportunity to see the ultimate vision, and to live not by bread alone.

I have never said that all the good people are produced by the Catholic educational system. I have even stated that being produced by this system is no guarantee of being good or even competent. That, gentlemen, is something that only you can guarantee. The vision indeed is ours. Devoted people, including the Augustinian Fathers, your lay teachers, and your parents have sacrificed greatly to sustain an educational system that would mirror, however faintly, these great divine communications of creation, incarnation, sanctification, and glory. But these great realities can only inspire those who will be inspired. The Church can only hope that the inspiration takes, that, after all, this prodigious effort at education will be worth the effort and the sacrifice, the blood, sweat and tears, if you will.

All of us here today will grant that we could be better, that our efforts could have been more devoted, more inspiring, more intelligent, holier, too. But, in any case, whatever we have been able to give, you have received, and now you leave here with our prayers and hopes and best wishes. Somehow we trust anew each year, that in many different ways you will each bring something of truth to a world that often knows not even the God who created it, became man, sanctifies us, and shares with us His eternal happiness. Somehow we believe that each of you will



bring a little light to the darkness, a little devotion to the good causes that need it, a little understanding to those in trouble, a little charity to those in need, a little logic to the world of riddles beyond, a little courage to the faltering. We do not expect a great crusade, a world revolution, but just a steady growth in wisdom, and age and grace, so that the good Lord who has communicated so many good things to us will look kindly on our efforts to communicate some of them to you, and that you, in turn, will go forth and be Christlike.