

(Address given by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Atlanta, Georgia, February 23, 1981)

I am delighted to be with all of you distinguished members of the National Association of Secondary School Principals tonight and most honored and grateful to receive your Association's Distinguished Service Award. I shall cherish this link with all of you.

All of us are united in the great and good enterprise of education in America. It really matters not that some are in the public and some in the private sector. We face the same challenges, the same problems, the same opportunities. We must face them together. When Faulkner received the Nobel Prize for Literature, he said: "Mankind will not just survive, he will prevail." Despite our common problems, we will prevail together. But it will be no easy task. American education, on all levels, has never been a larger enterprise than it is today. Larger are its problems, too, greater our common challenge. I have confidence that all of us, on all levels of education, will rise to the new challenges and opportunities if only we can correctly diagnose the situation and respond with confidence.

Some years ago, Herman Wells, the then distinguished President of Indiana University, called me with a question. "Would you take it amiss, Father Ted," he asked, "if we were to create a branch university of Indiana in South Bend?" "Not at all," I responded. "We have a great number of students

in Northern Indiana who, for one reason or another, cost, religion, or programs, cannot attend Notre Dame, but they should have another option and a university of Indiana at South Bend would provide that option."

"I rather expected you to be upset at the possibility," said Herman, "but I'm glad you aren't." Today IUSB has almost as many undergraduates as we have. It is a fine school and performs a very needed opportunity. It would have been silly of me to have tried to block it. Across all these years, Indiana, Purdue, and Notre Dame have always made common cause, as the three largest universities in our State, two public and one private, to promote educational excellence wherever and whenever possible. We have all gained from the common effort and so have our students. I am sure that this same collaboration is possible between the public and private sectors of secondary education, but it may at times be more difficult. In any event, I commend the effort. I must add that I was particularly happy to receive your award as one whose whole life has been in the private sector, but always in collaboration with the public sector, too. I have always been more interested in building bridges, making common cause, rather than protecting my special turf. The common challenges that unite us are far greater than the petty differences that might put us at odds.

One of the greatest modern Catholic theologians, the late Father John Courtney Murray, used to say that the greatest of

American civic virtues was the tolerance we bear each other. In the most pluralistic nation in the modern world, this is no small virtue as we seek to grow together in peace. With my fellow public educators in Indiana, however, our relation transcended tolerance. We are the best of friends, comrades-in-arms, sharers in victory.

I would like now to try to describe to you what I think is the greatest challenge we face together as we engage in the common and exalted endeavor of education in America. About fifteen years ago, the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education produced its first, and one of its slimmest reports. The title was "Quality and Equality." Two words with one letter difference, yet they encapsulate what was then, and in my judgment, still is today the central tension, the most difficult and most important challenge facing American education on all levels.

The Carnegie Commission over the six years of its life produced a veritable bookshelf of reports, about a hundred volumes. Never before, and probably never again, will American education receive such a close and continuing scrutiny. We were about twenty-four Commissioners. We met for several days each month in different localities. We visited innumerable campuses and met with hundreds of educators.

When all was said and done, and written, there still remained that pivotal dilemma: quality and equality. I have thought and written much about it since -- so have most of my colleagues. It is

probably fair to say that education in America has, at different times and places, made progress towards greater quality, and at other times and places, progress towards greater equality, but I am not certain today that we have most often reached both goals together. Putting it differently, we have often achieved the one goal, either quality or equality, at the expense of the other.

In the long run, this will not do. Both goals are essential to America's most important enterprise: education. What happens to education, happens to America at its inner core. The achievement of either goal, quality or equality, without the other, would be a hollow victory, both unworthy of American education and untrue to the best political and educational ideals of America.

Not everyone would agree with this. There are those who condemn the never-ending search for quality as elitism, an enemy of democracy, which in some people's mind, means that all must be equal, or every person should simply be proclaimed equal, even though some perform at a higher level than others. Elitism is equated with snobbery, with older pre-democratic societies, with dividing society into nobles and peasants.

May I say a word in defense of elitism, even in a democracy. I believe in and cherish elite performance. The alternative is to reduce everything to grey mediocrity. When I fly in an airplane, I want an elite pilot up front at the controls. When I visit a dentist, I patronize one I judge elite by his performance, not one with little knowledge and two left hands exploring my root canals. When we turn

the University's endowment over to investment firms, the Trustees look long and far to find the best in the land. And I make no excuse for the constant, undying and difficult effort to make the agonizing decisions that will bring to the University the best faculty, the best students, the best administrators, the best facilities, and the best and most demanding and most liberal curriculum, too. If this is elitism, I am guilty and I am proud of it.

It is curious that many of those who argue against the elitism manifest in all of these painful academic decisions, suddenly become super-elitist in choosing their restaurants, their wines, even their quarterbacks and tackles.

This nation was not founded by a group of mediocrities. By any standard of the times, Jefferson, Washington, Hamilton, Adams, Monroe, Franklin and company were a very special elite. Because of that, they gave us a very special kind of country, with a special vision of equality. In every age, forward progress is made by an educated elite, whether in politics, religion, business, education, or even sports. The Olympics are not for the mediocre, nor is opera, ballet, or the arts, or the sciences at their best. Talent is both race and color blind. We must cherish and nurture it wherever it is found.

If that particular human endeavor that proposes to develop the whole person, in mind and heart and spirit, in vision and ideal, if this educational endeavor is not dedicated first and

foremost to quality, then it will be unworthy, even more, it will be a monumental fraud, both to those who support it and to the students who are enabled to grow, <sup>and uniquely by</sup> mainly through quality education.

Regarding the second goal, equality, there are also those who disagree. For the longest part of our national history, they held sway. There was, until recently, no equality of opportunity in American education for most minorities.

All that was changed -- at least legally -- with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. One must admit that enormous change has occurred in the seventeen years since then. Higher education has been entirely desegregated, North and South, since 1964, although because of past educational deprivation and lack of good elementary and secondary education for minorities, coupled with lack of past access to higher education, we have a continuing problem with enlarging the pool of qualified minorities for higher education, for faculty positions, and, especially, for entry to professional schools -- this is changing now, but all too slowly.

The picture in elementary and secondary education is probably more dismal. We have terminated de jure segregation once and for all, but in some ways the de facto educational segregation in the North, somewhat less I think in the South, is increasing almost beyond control and correction. I will say another word about this later.

All this says to me is that we must try harder and more imaginatively to enlarge and to balance minority presence in all

of American education today, Bakke notwithstanding. When people ask me why I press so hard on Affirmative Action when equality of opportunity is now secured, I say, opportunity against a background of dismal preparation over generations is not equal opportunity at all. If you sprain your ankle, both ankles are not equal. You favor the one until both are equally strong. Then you can talk about treating them equally.

Even so, Affirmative Action is at its worst in admitting either faculty or students who are not qualified, instituting a double standard. If extra attention is needed to make opportunity equal, then we must provide whatever is needed to balance the scales. The scales must eventually be balanced, but it would be the worst kind of injustice to use different standards, different weights in the balance. This helps neither the individual involved nor the cause we espouse.

Groucho Marks once said in jest that any club that would admit him was not worth joining. It is the worst kind of travesty today to freely admit minorities to programs that defraud the participants with a degree that is worthless, without quality. It is also the best way to prolong the problem of achieving quality and equality at the same time.

When I look at the problem of quality and equality in your schools today, I am somewhat appalled. Not, <sup>appalled</sup> about all your schools because we continue to admit 1,600 of your graduates each year at Notre Dame, which draws equally on public and private secondary

schools. The thousands of applicants are so good that the greatest problem is selecting among them. This past semester, for example, there was not a single academic failure in the first semester among the many first year men and women who entered in August. All took the final semester exams. Given our difficult and demanding common freshman <sup>year</sup> program, that must say that there are at least a thousand high schools across the country from which our students come, that are giving a very good education.

When I said I was appalled, I was thinking rather of those inner city schools that turn out <sup>each year</sup> almost a half million, mainly minority students, ~~each year~~ who really cannot read, write, or speak well, who cannot figure or cope with the largely technological society in which we live. It is said that almost 40% of them are unemployed. What is not said is that in our highly developed society, they are really unemployable -- except at menial labor forever.

Neither you nor I would like to be on the edge of adulthood, with all our lives before us, and with no possibility of meaningful work or growth, despite twelve years spent in school.

What to do? Years ago, as a member of the Civil Rights Commission, I visited one of these inner city schools. Everywhere one looked in the neighborhood, one saw failure, crime, hopelessness. The school itself reminded me only of a federal reform school -- another dismal place -- in which I had worked as a young priest

chaplain. I asked the principal about attendance and he said the truancy rate was about 40% daily. Only one word could describe the inside of that school, and the <sup>neighborhood</sup> outside as well, depressing.

We grasped at many solutions, busing being the most obvious and the most despised as well. I have finally been convinced that the only immediate answer is another vehicle: the bulldozer.

When I look at some of our great institutions of higher education, Michigan State, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois to mention some of my neighbors, I wonder why, if we have learned to accommodate 40 to 60 thousand students, in graceful surroundings that are conducive to education on the higher level, why can we not do the same for kindergarten through 12th grade?

If our neighborhoods are so bad, why not create a whole new environment for learning. Why not take two or three hundred acres of land between the great inner cities and the suburbs and create an educational park that engages many thousands of students in every facet of their lives, health, recreation, classroom learning, laboratories, drama, art, music, athletics -- all on the very best level of endeavor and achievement. Keep them busy there from morning to night, eleven months a year, with every supplementary agency engaged, public and private. Have YMCA, YWCA, YHMA, CYO, Girl and Boy Scouts on all levels, bands and teams, libraries and galleries, and museums, fishing and boating, camping and climbing,

vaccinations and nutritious meals. Make the place so safe, so exciting, so engaging, so totally educational that parents would stand in line to get their children in -- might even clamor for busing to get them there.

Teachers could teach both low and high level classes. Discipline would be the price of admission. Parents would have to be involved. The great American dilemma of desegregation would take care of itself without great friction because black, white, and Hispanic parents are united in wanting the best education for their children, best health, joy, and spiritual growth to maturity as well. If I were a ghetto parent today, I would weep for my children because of their lack of opportunity for a good education now and a better life later.

Is this a utopian dream for America, for each great city to have one or several such great educational parks drawing students from both suburbs and ghettos? A more important question is, can we afford to do less and survive as one nation committed to the blessings of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all? What happens to education, happens to America. Those are the terms of the real choice for quality and equality as our highest educational and national goals.

*Might not use of both higher and secondary education, of both the public and private sector, work together to achieve these goals in our time*