

The opening of the new schoolyear provides me with the pleasant opportunity of speaking to you about the past, present, and future of the University. More effective than mere words, it gives us all the opportunity of offering the labors of the coming year to the service of God and men, in union with the greatest service of all time, the full offering of the Son of God to His Father, Calvary renewed, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This particular Mass is always the Mass of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness and Truth, for it is under His Divine guidance and help that we work - that our days may be spent in the most efficacious kind of charity that brings men close to God in truth - the true test of all human holiness.

Last year, I spoke to you of Christian wisdom, the final purpose and goal of all University education, that wisdom which must characterize us as teachers and inspire our students as learners.

This year, at this hour, a new page unfolds in the history of Notre Dame. Standing by itself, this could be a very trite and banal statement. But I mean to make it the topic sentence of all that will be said this morning. There are many possible attitudes that we might have at this hour. Perhaps the worst attitude would be to assume that this is just another hour, ushering in just another year in a history already one hundred and eleven years old at Notre Dame. Such an attitude is characteristic of ivy-covered minds, which unlike ivy-covered buildings, are no asset to a university. Human beings cannot long live happily, or energetically, or intelligently, or especially fruitfully in an atmosphere that embalms history as mere glories of the past with no reference to the present or the future.

We have had our glorious days of the past at Notre Dame. †

The testimony of the past is enshrined all around us in our buildings, our monuments, our venerable traditions, and, especially, in the lives and accomplishments of our graduates. But again, history does not end until the life of man and his institutions end. What we need superlatively today is a consciousness that, through us and our lives here, the history of Notre Dame is still being written. We can be proud of past glories, but we cannot rest in them. Nor can we assume that the distinctions of the past will continue in the future without the same burning vision of divine faith and the same valiant measure of human effort that created distinction here in years past. †

Many contemporary European scholars have highlighted this basic truth with reference to what might be called a Christian philosophy or theology of history. Their basic thesis agrees in this, that apart from the Judeo-Christian tradition, there can be no possible theology of history. To formulate any theology of history, one must have a sense of the purposefulness of man's life today, some sense of origin, and middle ground, and ultimate fulfillment. There must be some centrality or focus to all that happens, some inner dynamism that derives unity and meaning from a long succession of individual human acts.

Such a theology of history is not easily come by. Greek thought, that wisdom of the world to which St. Paul so often refers, found many answers to perplexing human questions, but even the Greek philosophers failed to find a meaningful direction in the unfolding of human events and historical structures. Greek philosophy centers about the idea as something fixed and eternal and of inexorable necessity. Thus for them, time was an eternal circle, within which

nothing is new and all, of necessity, re-occurs. Even the soul is caught up in this necessity through the process of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls. Human happiness became a vague and illusory reality attained by an escape from the determinism and pessimism of time's eternal circle of necessarily recurring events. Happiness in a sense involved a flight from time, leaving today, to contemplate the eternal.

Neither has Eastern Hindu philosophy found the inner meaning of history. Like the Greeks, their salvation too comes by escaping the temporal reality of history, in nirvana and reincarnation.

For these ancient wisdoms, there is little hope for meaning and purpose in life today. It is no mere chance that their golden ages are always in the past.

We are reminded here of a great question posed by the recent Cardinal Archbishop of Paris: "Are we a pawn of chance, subject to an inexorable fate at the hands of a blind brutality of material forces? Or is there above everything here below another power full of intelligence and love, which sees all and judges all? Is there a Providence?"

The answer to this question is also the reason why the Judeo-Christian tradition alone gives meaning to the history of the past, the task today, and the goal of the future. By divine revelation in the Old and New Testaments, God breaks into history from beyond time. For us, time and history are linear, rather than circular. There is a beginning of time and of man, and there is an end towards which we are progressing through time and history. Our God is not the faceless god of the Greek metaphysicians, nor is the human person

merely a mask. Our God has entered history as the living God of prophecy and promise, and we, too, enter the drama of history as men having faith in the prophecy and freedom to follow the promise. Our history acquires purpose and meaning not only from the past in which it began, but in the present through which we traverse towards the fulfillment of the future. This is true of every man, of every nation of men, of every human institution, and it is true of this University, too.

The key notion in all of this is faith. It is important to realize that only those religions whose revelation is inseparable from human history are based on faith. This faith is a faith in the word of the living God who made the world and gave it a purpose. It is also a faith in an all-powerful God who takes a part in every human event, and yet respects the freedom of human persons. Only such a living faith spells the difference between the pagan and the Christian in the face of history. For the pagan, a frustrated pessimism in the face of the inevitable. For the Christian, a bright optimism in the face of God working through men in history. Providence, for the Christian, is one of the attributes of God. Providence implies a purpose and a fulfillment. Equally important, Providence involves a solicitous interest on the part of an omnipotent God in the efforts of a finite man to have faith in the promise and to seek the fulfillment courageously. Optimism then is indeed the order of the day, no matter what the turn of events, no matter how far we have come, no matter how far we have yet to go.

And if this optimism is born of faith in God, certainly that same faith engenders auxiliary wellsprings of progressive human action in the supernatural virtues of hope and charity. For if faith regards the promise of

God, hope looks confidently to the realization of the promise, and charity will go to work today to speed the realization of the promise accepted by faith and anticipated by hope.

There is no flight from time in all of this, for the promise was made in time and must be sought in time. And the story of the quest is the meaning of all human history.

In general, this is the thesis accepted by those who see in the Judeo-Christian tradition alone, a meaning and a purpose to history.

But beyond this point, there is a basic disagreement among Christians today as to what the Christian attitude should be in the face of the historical difficulties of the purely temporal order.

The resolution of this basic difference is highly significant to the point we are attempting to make today. Karl Barth of Basel perhaps expresses best one possible Christian attitude in the face of the temporal difficulties of our times. His attitude is called the eschatological view which means simply that our supernatural vocation to share the life of God here and in eternity is of such transcendent value, that we should not concern ourselves with the comparatively ephemeral problems of human progress, science, culture, literature, or art. Temporal progress is unimportant while eternity beckons. We have here a passing city which does not merit our careful attention. While the utter secularism of our days might press us in this direction, and while the historical situation does appear to be a hopeless tangle at times, this attitude is strangely reminiscent of the Greek flight from time, even though there are now apparently better reasons for fleeing, and a haven of more certain hope ahead in the Christian scheme of things.

The other attitude which I commend to you today is most compelling because of the most important fact in all human history. God became man and dwelt amongst us. History is centered in this all important fact. All before Christ prepares for and anticipates His coming. All after Christ is the fulfillment of what He came to do. And all of us have a part in the doing, and in history, even though we are free to do our part well or poorly. Christ is the central focus and meaning of history in the Christian scheme of things.

There is no human event, no human progress in knowledge, science, or art that cannot be consecrated, now that God has literally become man and dwelt amongst us. Historians can recognize the unique influence of the man of Galilee. Only Faith can see the utter uniqueness of God's great liturgy which is realized in Christ, in whom, and through whom, and with whom all creation is drawn to the service of God as a divine symphony in which all of us play a significant part.

Men endowed with this incarnational approach to the world today are certainly committed to human progress of all kinds. University men are even more particularly committed to take an active part in the program of creative ideas, the intellectual apostolate. We do not rest in human reason, or human values, or human science - but we certainly do begin our progress in time with all that is human in its excellence. Then, after the pattern of the Incarnation, we consecrate all our human excellence to the transforming influence of Christ in our times. Our prime concern must be to offer to the service of God and man a worthy gift. Certainly we should not offer as our part in this divine symphony of all creation, the sour notes of intellectual mediocrity or educational complacency.

This brings us back to our original theme - a statement that certainly is trite is made without reflection, and banal if uttered without purpose: "This year, at this hour, a new page unfolds in the history of Notre Dame." The mere statement becomes exciting if we see ourselves as actors rather than mere spectators of history. It becomes challenging when we realize that Notre Dame can grow this year if all of us, faculty, Administration, and students, grow in wisdom and in grace. The statement becomes a bit frightening if you measure your own deficiencies, as I do mine, against the promise of what Notre Dame can be, and should be, this year and in the years to come. Remember always that ours are deeper and more significant goals than mere material security and prosperity. Our aim must be a Christian humanism born of the Incarnation of the Son of God, a humanism embracing all the wide dimensions of the world and the human spirit, a humanism that is adequate to the designs of God for Notre Dame, named and consecrated as we are to the honor of her who is most perfectly, most beautifully, most gracefully, and most wisely human.

We do not reach these goals of the spirit by merely balancing the budget, or maintaining a full enrollment, or by building buildings, or winning national championships. We only reach our goal in its fullness by growing together, in faith, and in hope, and in charity, towards the full stature of Christian manhood, consecrated in the growing perfection of all our human powers of mind and will to the service of God and men, in Christ.

As this new page is unfolded, let each of us consciously reach for it and think what we shall write upon the page this year. I only ask that whatever you write be written in the spirit of faith and hope and

charity, which never fails. And for all of you at this hour I would offer the prayer that all of our priests recite before examining their consciences in Corby Hall Chapel each noon:

O Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in Thy servants, in the spirit of Thy holiness, in the fullness of Thy power, in the perfection of Thy ways, in the truth of Thy virtues, in the communication of Thy mysteries. Triumph over all enemies by Thy Spirit for the glory of the Father. O Lord open the eyes and ears of my heart that I may understand Thy oracles and perform Thy Holy Will. Amen.