

PATTERNS FOR EDUCATIONAL GROWTH

Six Inaugural Discourses
at the University of Notre Dame

by

Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

President

1952 - 1958

Affectionately dedicated
to the Faculty
at the
University of Notre Dame
1952 - 1958

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

1952	Wisdom and Education
1953	A Theology of History and Education
1954	The Mission of a Catholic University
1955	Education in a World of Social Challenge
1956	The Divine Element in Education
1957	Education in a World of Science

I N T R O D U C T I O N

It has often seemed to me during these past six years that a university President is always, and perhaps ex officio, in danger of becoming illiterate. His opportunity to read and to write are in inverse ratio to his necessity of speaking frequently, often without advance warning, on a vast variety of subjects. Immediately upon his appointment, the public expects the university President to be an authority on all things knowable. I have orated during the past six years on athletics and astrophysics, on juvenile delinquency and gnotobiotics, on marriage and atoms for peace, on business, theology, education in South America, and jet airplanes. These are only a few of the variegated subjects upon which I have unburdened myself with words of questionable wisdom. And yet, I can only plead that the force of circumstances left me no alternative. It was a matter of speak or disgrace my position. How often I have hoped against hope that in speaking I did not disgrace myself. How frequently I remembered the words of Mark Twain: "Better to be silent and to be suspected of being ignorant, than to speak and thus to remove all doubt."

However, once a year I had the opportunity of speaking upon a subject that was germane to my essential hopes and activities as President. At the beginning of each schoolyear at Notre Dame, I had the opportunity of speaking to our assembled faculty at the inaugural Mass on some pertinent aspects of university education. There was no set pattern to these discourses.

I can only generalize that the more I understood the magnitude of the task at hand, the more difficult it became to write something that seemed even slightly adequate to that task. It is a personal impression that, although the talks became more difficult to write, they probably became better, or at least more significant, as the six years passed. I hope this is so. If not, then I did not learn very much from the experience of the six years.

Taken as a whole, these six discourses on different aspects of university education express the guiding lines of our educational endeavor at Notre Dame. They should convey some sense of that constant effort at self-examination that is the price of growing excellence in an educational institution - or any other institution for that matter. These discourses should reflect the constant striving for quality of performance, for a sense of what good has been accomplished and what heights may still be reached at Notre Dame. They speak insistently of the adequacy of knowledge that must be our aim in a Catholic university, of the wisdom that must be all-pervading, of the inner dignity and eternal worth of the educators effort, of the effects that may be hoped for in our students.

No doubt, the more sophisticated will find in these discourses a rather undisguised attempt on my part to inspire the faculty in the task that faces them anew each year. For this, I cannot apologize, because I happen to believe that a President who cannot inspire his faculty is not worth his salt. Of course, actual inspiration and the attempt to inspire

are, unfortunately, not the same thing. The years ahead will know best, from the educational results of the faculty's efforts, whether or not their performance was actually inspired during these years. And if their work was inspired, I am sure that much more than these discourses was responsible for that inspiration.

Presenting these discourses to a wider public than our faculty may well be presumptive on my part. However, we have been the recipient of so much enlightened interest and help from such a multitude of people during these past years, that we feel some responsibility to report to this wider public regarding our program for a growing measure of educational excellence that will justify their interest and demonstrate the effectiveness of the help we have received from them. The ultimate accounting of effectiveness is most often given by statistics. The figures are indeed impressive. We have, during the past six years, completed more than ten million dollars worth of academic and auxiliary buildings. Our annual budget has grown from eight to fifteen million dollars. Our graduates have won more national and international scholarships during these past six years than in our whole previous history of more than a hundred years. We have completely revised the curriculum in most of our colleges, and have added many distinguished professors to our faculty.

Underlying these and other statistics that could be presented, there is the more important plan of action, or pattern for quality that provides the inner spirit of growth at Notre Dame. It is this inner plan or vision, the dynamic relating of the University to the key educational

problems and opportunities of our day, that these discourses purport to give. In the realization of this over-all plan, it is the faculty, not the President, who is most important. Perhaps then, the best title of these discourses would be "A President Dreams Aloud to his Faculty." It is my hope, shared alike by our many friends I am sure, that our faculty at Notre Dame will make all of these dreams come true in the life and growth of the University.