

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Dinner Session of the Annual Meeting of the Council of Protestant Colleges and Universities, Statler Hilton Hotel, Los Angeles, California, January 16, 1967)

### THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

Everyone is likely to agree that the 817 Church-related colleges and universities in the United States face a future challenge. The only disagreement would be in the use of the word "future". Of course, equally great challenges face all the other private and public colleges and universities in this country. But our challenge is rather special, since it is encompassed in the broader challenge facing the Churches themselves in modern America, with or without the colleges and universities they sponsor. We who live and work in Christian colleges and universities not only face a challenge, we are already under fire, as are our Churches. One might best describe the challenge in its most dire terms as a challenge for survival. Those who predict our early demise do it about as discourteously as possible by saying that our institutions should never have been founded in the first place. Obviously then, for them, there is no point in continuing the farce. Even when it is granted that some of our institutions are among the top ten per cent in the nation academically, and are indeed admitted to be "America's unique contribution

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to higher education" (p. 218, Cox, Secular City), we are said to struggle daily "with what to do about a 'Church tradition' that usually seems less and less relevant to what they have to do to exist". (ibid. p. 219)

The critic I have been specifically quoting is Harvey Cox, although I could have just as well quoted an unhappy Catholic, Dr. Rosemary Lauer, who says that the Church should get out of education. If you prefer someone from neither camp, we can fall back on George Bernard Shaw who said that a Catholic university is a contradiction in terms.

Cox is perhaps the most widely read of all the current critics, so let us first listen to his indictment in his own words:

"We have already noted that the university has always been a problem for the Church. But the current cleavage between the two is wider and more impassable than ever, precisely because we now stand at the end of the epoch of the Church's dominance in Western culture (ibid. p. 219) .....

"The anachronistic posture of the Church is nowhere more obvious than in the context of the university community. The Church has made three attempts to come to terms with the university problem in America, all of which have been marked by a

certain recidivism. The first was the establishment of its own colleges and universities. This, of course, is mediaevalism. The whole idea of a Christian college or university after the breaking apart of the Mediaeval synthesis has little meaning. The term Christian is not one that can be used to refer to universities any more than to observatories or laboratories. No one of the so-called Christian colleges that dot our Midwest is able to give a very plausible theological basis for retaining the equivocal phrase Christian college in the catalogue. Granted that there may be excellent traditional, public-relations, or sentimental reasons for calling a college Christian, there are no theological reasons. The fact that it was founded by ministers, that it has a certain number of Christians on the faculty or in the student body, that chapel is required (or not required), or that it gets part of its bills paid by a denomination - none of these factors provides any grounds for labeling an institution with a word that the Bible applies only to followers of Christ, and then, very sparingly. The

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idea of developing 'Christian universities' in America was bankrupt even before it began." (ibid. p. 221)

I spare you the full flavor of his rhetoric on the other two means by which the Churches came to terms with the university problem in America. The second means was "residential congregations to render a special ministry to people involved in university life" (p. 221); the third was "to transplant onto the university campus a denominational Church disguised as a 'house' with ping-pong tables and a less ministerial minister". (ibid. p. 222) He adds later that "we are still in the third phase of this cumulative catastrophe". Apparently, we happy dinosaurs of the first unhappy phase are already written off and forgotten. Should we now curl up and die?

I do not want to vent my spleen criticizing Cox, word for word, as E. S. Mascall recently did in his book, "The Secularization of Christianity", aimed mainly at Drs. Robinson, Van Buren, and company. Mascall's attempt is understandable enough, but probably overkill. What I would like to do is probably nastier, and it may not come off, but at least it's worth trying, in self-defense, if nothing else.

Later on in this chapter on the Church and the university, Cox describes three functions that the Church should be undertaking, that require

"stepping out of the organizational shells in which they are imprisoned on the hinterlands of the campus (and even more so I would gather, stepping out of so-called Christian colleges and universities, the worst anachronism of all) and (stepping) into the university community itself." (ibid. p. 226). The three functions Cox elaborates are: 1) restrained reconciliation; 2) candid criticism; 3) creative disaffiliation. I would like to suggest that there is great and even greater validity in pursuing these three Churchly functions within the Christian college and university, indeed, that these three functions need doing there first and foremost, if the total college and university community in America is to be spared much of what Cox forecasts. I would gladly admit that our Christian colleges and universities need desperately to find themselves, their identity, their special function and high purpose in the totality of American higher education. Maybe Cox has inadvertantly helped us in this most important endeavor.

Obviously, I do not intend to apply these three functions in the same context that he does, in the secular university community, since my point is quite apart from his, namely, having accepted the importance of these three functions, they do have a true home and even greater validity within the context of the Christian college and university, especially as

these institutions validate their own proper existence and influence the total collegiate and university community in modern-day America. In other words, I grant his substance, but apply his functions quite differently, still I trust with no less, but even greater ultimate and total effect.

1. Reconciliation. Cox's biblical text for this function is good, although there are many other texts which would illuminate and complement it: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. And we are ministers of reconciliation." Cox adds: "The Church has no purpose other than to make known to the world what God has done and is doing in history to break down the hostilities between men and to reconcile men to each other." (p. 227) Again good, but not far enough. We reconcile men to each other in Christ and in His love. The History of Salvation is what the Church is about, and this has reference not only between men, but, even more importantly, between men and God. Reconciliation is not the only term for this priestly responsibility. It is even more essentially a work of mediation, for the priest is essentially a mediator, a pontifex, a bridge builder. The mediation of God's message to every age must somehow go on, and it is precisely to do this work of mediation that Christian colleges and universities were founded and exist today. They not only transmit to every age the totality of human knowledge in the humanities,

in the social and physical sciences, in the professions, but they do this in the context of the Christian saving message. They also do it in the context of the Christian community, in which Christian love is the moving force of reconciliation, and they bolster their efforts by research and vital teaching so that mediation may be continually more effective as knowledge widens. They mediate also by community prayer wherein we admit how little we have really understood the Christian message, yet how very much we do wish to obtain the grace of greater understanding and ultimate wisdom, and, finally, they mediate in Christian service where all our misunderstandings are caught up and redeemed by the Christian giving of ourselves and all we have to others in Christ.

Let it be admitted that we do all of this all too poorly, too unimaginatively, and too ungenerously, but at least our attempts are honest, and perhaps that alone justifies the calling of our colleges and universities Christian. If I might be mediaeval for a moment, the notion of analogy was then and is now a valid description of the use of words. I do not take the notion of Christian college or university as equivocal, in Cox's terms, but analogical, in the simple sense that what the Bible implies of a person by calling him Christian, that too applies to our institutions, albeit imperfectly,

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as followers of Christ. It is the spirit that is important here, the intent, the dedication, the commitment. Our institutions, if we try to mediate the saving work of Christ in all we do, are no less Christian than Christian art, or Christian music, or Christian culture. To speak of Christian observatories or laboratories is Cox's point, not ours. We grant his point, but add that it only obfuscates this very real issue of Christian colleges and universities.

The mediator stands in the middle, but he stands for something, else he is a mighty poor mediator. Our Christian institutions are mediators between the believing and the unbelieving, the devout and the tepid, the dedicated and the uncommitted, the knowing (in the Christian sense) and the ignorant, between those who think the Christian context is important and those who think it negligible. At least we stand for a point of view, in history, in philosophy, in theology, in literature, in art, in music, in drama, in the use of science and technology, in the nature and destiny of man. We know that God has spoken to man and we think this important enough to be reckoned with in all else we know, or believe we know, from whatever source. And we are not about to abdicate the field, whatever Cox says about "the end of the epoch of the Church's dominance in Western culture".

We know that our culture would be poorer today without all that the Church, or better, Christ and His message of salvation and faith and hope and



charity have brought to it. We are not interested in dominance. We are ready to mediate Christ's message to all forms of human knowledge in institutions sympathetic to the message, our Christian colleges and universities, and outside them, too, within the broader collegiate and university context. Ours is not the concept of a ghetto, but a leaven and a light in the darkness. These images are also biblical. And we apologize to no audience for the weakness of our efforts in view of the greatness of that which we presume to mediate. We are unfaithful servants if we do not try, ever to mediate better, despite the difficulty of the age. Whoever is against us, we might at least assume that Christ and the history of salvation are with us. Thus we proudly, and humbly, bear the name of Christian, ourselves and our institutions.

2. Creative Criticism. Under this rubric, Cox calls for criticism of both the university and the Church. In regard to the university, he is against any world view as being divisive. Here I am reminded of the divisiveness of Christ: you are either with Me or against Me. Again I am reminded of the testimony of two professors, former Danforth Fellows, at a Catholic and a Presbyterian college:

"Although it may sound paradoxical, I, as a faculty member, feel freer in the Church-related institutions (all

Roman Catholic) with which I am familiar. It is a freedom to be myself - to explore and to communicate whatever religious dimensions I, as a religiously-oriented person, find or fail to find within my discipline. I did not feel this same freedom when I taught at non-Church-related institutions, committed, as the faculty and student bodies seemed to be, to a secular materialistic humanism. I found myself squashing areas of investigation and perceptions of religious significance in literature which would have been either totally misunderstood or ridiculed in the secular environment. In the Church-related college, religious meanings and interpretations are understood and encouraged without - and obviously this is essential - forcing them where they do not fit. So, to oversimplify it, both the religious and the secular are admitted to the Church-related institution, while only the secular is admitted in the secular institution. The result I find to be a greater sense of exploration, a freer intellectual atmosphere, and a greater opportunity to find truth. And from the vantage point of within a Church-related

college, I feel freer to criticize the failings of my Church." (Patillo-Mackenzie, Church Sponsored Higher Education, p. 168)

The second professor was in the process of moving from a Presbyterian college to a larger state university. He writes:

"Let me close by noting an additional satisfaction of teaching in the Christian college which I think may be inherent in that type of institution and hard to find in other types of colleges. It is easy to find other scholars who are interested in the question of how their disciplines and professions relate to the Christian way of life and the Christian faith. One can talk directly and overtly about these questions, rather than obliquely as I anticipate doing at a state university." (ibid. p. 169)

In citing these two professors, I am not attempting to demonstrate that all is rosy and Christlike at our institutions. Even less, am I trying to resuscitate the old antagonism between Christian and state institutions in which the latter are characterized as "Godless". When over 40% of state universities today are sponsoring some type of course in religion, it seems

to me that with the advantage of the general acceptance of the Christian philosophy of life, in the broadest, most liberal, most ecumenical and open sense of that phrase, in most of our Christian institutions, our most creative criticism of the contemporary scene in higher education would be to demonstrate the meaningfulness of whatever integration and unity <sup>of knowledge</sup> we have been able to achieve in mediation, in the hope that it will be contagious, not divisive.

As regards criticism of our Churches, again I do not know where this can be done in a more understanding and creative sense than on our campuses. Here, as nowhere else, the Church meets the contemporary world. I fully agree with the recommendations of the Patillo-Mackenzie report on Church-sponsored education when it says:

"In our judgment, the faculties of Church-related colleges are in the most favorable position to provide intellectual leadership in the study of the issues facing the Church and the hammering out of proposals for action. The Church college lives in both the 'Church world' and the 'outside world'. Its faculty, in the aggregate, has the breadth of knowledge required to see the Church in perspective.

College faculties include historians, philosophers, artists, theologians, psychologists, sociologists, literary critics, political scientists, economists - scholars whose business it is to be sensitive to ideas and to understand the meaning of the world around us. They are in touch with secular thought, but at their best they care about the Church and its future." (ibid. p. 203)

Needlessto say, the Church will not receive this kind of creative criticism from the faculty and students of its colleges and universities unless it allows them a maximum freedom to be creative and critical. The Church has nothing to fear from criticism springing from those who love the Church, who want to participate as fully as possible in the continual reformation by which the Church faces each new age and each new problem, by which the Church continually renews herself and purges herself of her many earthly imperfections which are a denial of her total dedication to Christ Our Lord and His saving message. I strongly believe that in default of strong, intelligent, dedicated, and creative criticism within the Church, and especially from within the Church's institutions of higher learning, the Church will suffer the worst kind of carping, sniping, vindictive, and, to

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say the worst, unloving criticism from those who have already written off the Church, whose unspoken motto seems to be, *Ecrasez l'infame* - wipe out the infamy. In a word, if the prophetic, creatively critical mission of the Church-related institution of higher learning is not vital and courageous, the priestly, mediatorial mission will be diminished, even more, in a true and valid sense, suspect. There then would be no easier option for the generality of mankind but to write off the Christian college and university as Cox has done.

3. Creative disaffiliation. This third function suggested by Cox is the most difficult to apply to our context, instead of his, but it is possible and fruitful, too. First, Cox describes creative disaffiliation as "the modern equivalent of asceticism, the focusing of energy on what is important at the cost of denying what is less important". (ibid. p. 230) No problem here.

Consistent with his earlier stance, Cox sees the Churches as hindered in their work by "ingrown isolation made unavoidable by the sheer size and complexity of the apparatus and by an institutional and social conservatism related to their dependence on sources of funds, a dependence which in turn precludes the possibility of any real criticism of the structural elements in our society." (ibid. p. 231)

His advice then is to disaffiliate from this bureaucratic monstrosity.

"The university Christian who succumbs to the temptation of work within the organizational Church stands in deadly danger of cutting himself off from the reconciliatory action of God in the world and blinding himself to his place in the drama through which action is taking place." (ibid. p. 235)

As to the Church itself, he asks in the concluding paragraph of this chapter, "What is the role of the Church in the university? The 'organizational Church' has no role. It should stay out." (ibid. p. 236)

As I said above, it is difficult to apply Cox's third function of "Creative Disaffiliation" to our context, since he has earlier eliminated our context. He is speaking here of the Church and the Christian in the secular university. What I say here depends largely on what I have already said, following his lead in a secular context, on the priestly and prophetic functions of the Christian college and university. One more point must be made here. However one speaks of the Church, as a visible or invisible body, or as both, the Christian college and university are not the Church. And they are very much in the world. We should indeed disaffiliate ourselves from any influence that is not ecumenical, that cuts us off from each other or from the world, or from the very real values that are to be derived from

a wider understanding of all the social revolutions in progress.

No age has seen a greater dedication to human dignity, human equality, and human development than our own. No age has had greater resources, educational, scientific, technical and human, to do something about these deepest of human aspirations. Our Christian colleges and universities might well disaffiliate ourselves from our more bland and imitative educational endeavors to throw the full weight of our Christian intelligence and educational dedication into these secular revolutions which may indeed be close to the heart of the mystery of salvation in our times. We have no need to disaffiliate from the Church or from our Christian institutions to do this - but we must respect the validity of new knowledge and new techniques and, relatively, new aspirations. We must understand them on their own terms.

All truth is a part of God's redemptive activity, but all grace is too. And grace, for us at least, comes from another source. Ultimately, both all truth and all grace are from God. More immediately, we seek, find, and respect secular truth in all our institutions of higher learning. We, in Christian institutions, also seek an ever greater understanding of the meaning and relevance of God's divine word from His revelation. We seek

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as well God's divine grace, from our deepest fellowship with each other and with Him in private and community prayer and in the sacraments. We seek this grace particularly in our Christian institutions of higher learning to inspire, to refresh, and to revivify all our efforts to find and understand all His saving truth in the modern context.

No single facet of this total reality of truth and grace need be denied, nor should any or all of it be confused or underestimated or eliminated, even in an essay, however novel and insightful, as the Secular City. There are indeed changing social structures and new functional arrangements following upon the spread of secularization in the world at large and in the world of the intellect. But the lineaments of Jesus Christ and His saving message of grace and truth are yesterday, today, and tomorrow, ever the same.

There may well be new and effective methods of witness in our age. We need not deny them, but in affirming them there is even less need to destroy what in its own unique way may ultimately be more effective, as I believe Christian higher education to be. As the old saw goes, "Don't throw out the baby with the bath."

If Harvey Cox has spurred us to take a deeper look at ourselves, as Christians, and at our institutions of higher learning, as professedly

Christian, if he has piqued us enough to make us redouble our efforts to do more pointedly, more energetically, and with greater focus, the important work we are concerned with in all of our waking hours, then I think we should be grateful to him, even if this was not one of the purposes he had in mind.

At the heart of our specific endeavor are two great educational qualities: commitment and freedom. Have no fear of commitment as long as it is intelligent and deeply believes on real evidence the truth of those great Christian values to which we are committed. Have no fear of freedom either. It is the context within which commitment grows, deepens and is enriched, as we freely seek a greater dimension of understanding, a broader unity within the total reality we know, and, hopefully, a better expression of all these values that will speak to the heart of modern humanity in words that they, too, will understand and appreciate. There are all kinds of commitment in the world of higher learning today, scientific, secular humanistic, agnostic, and all the rest. No one makes any apology for them. We must not be less free than any of them, or less committed. We must even grant them more freedom than they grant us, believing that ultimately the truth makes all of us most free.

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I began by speaking of a future challenge. I close with the concluding words of the best study of our Christian institutions, just recently published:

"Enough colleges and universities have achieved this combination of commitment and freedom to show beyond doubt that it can be done. We believe that this is the key to the future of Church-related higher education in the United States - the way in which the great tradition of liberal education infused with the Christian faith can, at this point in history, better serve God and man." (Patillo-Mackenzie, *ibid.* p. 214)

# PROGRAM

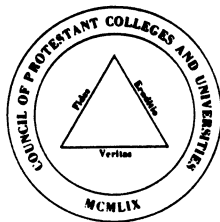
## NINTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF PROTESTANT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Statler Hilton Hotel  
Los Angeles, California

JANUARY 16, 1967

Dr. Willis M. Tate, *Presiding*

*The Theme: The Christian College Confronts Alienation*



1818 R STREET, N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20009

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# AFTERNOON SESSION

2:30 P.M.....Garden Room West

INVOCATION.....Dr. Albert C. Jacobs  
*President, Trinity College*

## PANEL ON "CAMPUS CHARACTERISTICS INVOLVED IN ALIENATION"

Chairman: President Willis M. Tate, Southern Methodist  
University

### Participants:

Dean William L. Kolb, Beloit College

President Landrum R. Bolling, Earlham College

President E. D. Farwell, Luther College

President John W. Bachman, Wartburg College

Business Session

Announcements

Brief Meeting of the Board of Directors

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# DINNER SESSION

6:30 P.M.....Golden State Room

INVOCATION.....Dr. William Graham Cole  
*President, Lake Forest College*

## Brief Statements

Chairman of the Board.....Willis M. Tate

Acting Director of the Council.....A. Burns Chalmers

Presentation of Convocation Plaque  
to Earlham College.....Willis M. Tate

Address: Father Theodore M. Hesburgh  
*President, The University of Notre Dame*

“The Challenge Ahead”

Introduction of the Chairman of the Board of Directors for 1967

Date to Remember:

April 9.....National Christian College Day

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