[SEPTEMBER 10, 1968]

Dear Fellow Rectors and Faculty Delegates:

I was faced with some real difficulty in preparing this presidential address for our Eighth General Conference opening today (9/10/68) at this amazingly splendid Catholic University of Lovanium in Kinshasa, Congo, our first Federation Conference on this Continent of Africa. One difficulty was that the University of Notre Dame celebrated its 125th anniversary this past year, and my presidential address on that occasion said substantially what I should have liked to have said here today, given the theme of our Conference: The Mission of the Catholic University in the Modern World. A second difficulty is that the three years that have passed since our last General Conference in Tokyo have witnessed many significant developments in the university world at large, and some especially striking changes in the world of the Catholic University.

In a world of rapid change, it is always difficult to compute absolute gain or loss. One can be alternately optimistic and pessimistic about the present status of the Catholic university. Some think that the Catholic university is dying out on a worldwide basis, either through the onslaught of secularism, imminent bankruptcy, take-over by students, or the sheer impossibility of a Catholic university ever being what it purports to be: a true full-fledged university that is also Catholic; a university that is at once committed and free.

Others think that Catholic universities are entering a second Spring of rebirth comparable in importance to that first Spring in the Middle Ages when universities came into being under the sponsorship of the Church. The reasons for optimism are also varied: the new interest of the Church in

the temporal problems of the modern world, problems that can only find an intellectual solution in the climate of variegated disciplines that characterize the modern Catholic university that is also free and autonomous. New institutional structures, with much greater involvement of the laity in university governance, also give reason for renewed hope. The new strength of our International Federation of Catholic Universities is another legitimate cause for hope. One does not federate the dying.

As your President, I must confess to you that I see many valid reasons both for optimism and for pessimism as I look at Catholic universities on a worldwide scale. There is ample reason both for great hope and some fear, too. This is only to say that the total situation of the Catholic university in the world today is quite ambiguous, with an ambiguity born of many new opportunities and as many new pressures that could, if not successfully countered, easily push our institutions into irrelevancy, if not extinction. There are no easy answers available to a would-be prophet. A gaze into the crystal ball of the future shows many conflicting currents, productive and counterproductive, good and bad, hopeful and fearful. To be realistic about the future of our Catholic universities, we must take all of these currents into account, in the spirit of the Chinese ideograph that signifies both crisis and opportunity.

The history of Catholic universities somewhat parallels the history of theology, and this is also a reason for hope today as theology certainly is entering a second Spring of rebirth. Theology also had its first Spring in the Middle Ages when the great syntheses were being created, mainly in a university context. When the first great Catholic universities founded

in the Middle Ages were secularized following the Reformation and the French Revolution, theology was relegated to the seminaries, outside the universities.

It was really not until theology re-entered the university that theology began to enter its second Spring which flowered with the fruitful activity of university theologians during Vatican Council II. It would be impossible to imagine the results of this Council without the creative theology and active presence of the periti from university faculties of theology. Conversely, most of the difficulty in elaborating new and creative theological texts in the Council came precisely from those theologians who were wedded to an outdated, repetitive, and uncreative theology that, unfortunately, had largely characterized seminary teaching for some centuries.

This parallel birth and rebirth of theology and the Catholic university should tell us something about the future growth or demise of Catholic universities. However, we cannot make a simple comparison of the situation in the Middle Ages and today. History has not stood still in the meanwhile; indeed, the world has undergone cataclysmic change that has affected both the university and theology in the modern context.

In the Middle Ages, theology was the acknowledged Queen of the Sciences within the university which comprised mainly only two other professional faculties of law and medicine. As we have noted above, with the secularization of the universities, theology was largely dropped from the university scene. But much more happened. The totality of knowledge which by then had taken centuries to develop, now is doubling in content

every fifteen years, particularly in the natural, physical, and social sciences.

Most intellectuals today do not even recognize theology as a true science. If theology is to re-enter the university, even the great Catholic university in strength, it will only be accepted as a true university discipline if it proves itself to be relevant to the total scene of knowledge, and operating under the same kinds of university conditions of freedom and autonomy as the other disciplines do in the university. Theology simply cannot be ordered in, unless the university is by name Catholic and, in fact, not much of a university, which is to say that the other secular disciplines there are either non-existent or very weak.

Once reinstated in a strong and vital university, theology will not enjoy its ancient position of mistress or queen of all else taught there. Indeed, if theology does not dialogue with all the other knowledges, and bring some special new dimension of meaning and direction to all of the other disciplines, it will simply <u>be located</u> in the university. It will not <u>exist</u> and <u>thrive</u> there, and it will contribute nothing to the Catholicity of the university, which, without vital theology, will in fact not be Catholic, whatever its name or sponsorship.

I submit to you, in all frankness, that this has been the sad state of theology in many of our Catholic universities today which, therefore, are not very distinctive as Catholic, and which, consequently, have made all too little intellectual contribution, to the Church or the world, in that precise task which faces the university as Catholic.

I shall say more about that precise task later, but for the moment let me say a word about the Catholic university as university. We take pride in the fact that the Church sponsored the first universities in the Middle Ages, but have noted that most of these great Mediaeval universities, Louvain excepted, are no longer Catholic. The re-creation of Catholic universities in North America - thanks to a climate of political freedom for higher education - began more than a century ago. In Europe and in Latin America, which shared much of Europe's experience in the early founding and subsequent losing of Catholic universities, the re-creation of Catholic universities came either late in the last century or, for the majority, during this century. All of the Catholic universities in the third world of former colonies are also of relatively recent vintage, with the exception of Santo Tomas in the Philippines. What can one say of this effort to re-create the Mediaeval tradition of Catholic universities in modern times?

First of all, we must admit that while the Church sponsored the first great Mediaeval universities, it soon enough lost them to the state and the secular world, which for the last several centuries have been the forces that have determined the rules governing the university world. The Church does not have to re-enter this world, but if it wishes to do so, it must follow these established university rules of freedom and autonomy, and dedication to all the varieties of knowledge and all the varied ways of knowing which constitute in the modern mind the very conditions of life for the university. The Catholic university can contribute to the variety of the worldwide university spectrum another way of knowing, theology,

which has been, as noted above, largely lost to this world that, by the word universitas, is by its nature committed to universal knowledge which it will not really have without theology.

We must be perfectly clear, however, in realizing that theology cannot expect special treatment and exceptional existence in this university world which it did not create during these past centuries. Theology, too, must enjoy the full privileges of this world, if it is to be an accepted part of the total university life and experience and not a world apart. The Catholic university has too often been looked upon by many Catholics as Catholic first and university second. University is the substantive noun in this combination, and the world judges clearly enough whether or not an institution, whatever else it claims to be, is in fact a university in the commonly accepted meaning of this word. One can similarly speak of a Catholic person, but he must be a person before he can become a Catholic. Catholic here is an adjective. So, too, in the case of the Catholic university. By reversing the order, putting Catholic before university, we have often created a Catholic something that lacked the essentials of what the secular university world considers necessary for a university: a combination of many strong, free, and autonomous faculties. If, in addition, there was the added defect of no strong, vital, and creative theological faculty within it, the so-called Catholic university was neither a university nor Catholic.

This is not to say that the Catholic institutions of higher learning have had a monopoly on weakness. But it is no compliment to God's honor and glory to say that Catholic universities are no better or no worse

than the secular institutions around them. It does derogate from God's glory to find some Catholic universities judged commonly as much worse than the best of their kind in the secular world around them. And, it is a real disgrace to God and the Church when the most obvious weakness in many Catholic universities is their faculty of theology, which should be their greatest strength, particularly in the complicated and problematic world of post-Vatican Council II, so needful of theological insights from the university.

All this, perhaps too strongly said and too negatively sounding, brings us to the great challenge that faces the Catholic university in the world today, its special and proper mission.

We might begin by seeing ourselves as others see us. Here, I would like to quote, at some length, passages from a recent book: The Academic Revolution, by Jencks and Riesman, the most complete and critical study of all American higher education to appear thus far. The book has a special chapter on Catholic higher education in the United States which concludes with some observations on its future. I am quoting these at some length because I would prefer to consider with you criticism of my own country rather than of your countries and your efforts. You will, however, note some criticisms of universal application within the total system of Catholic higher education, as well as some exciting insights into the task ahead of us all.

> "So while we ourselves are less than enamored of the secular graduate schools, we find it hard to see how the Catholic universities will invent acceptable alternatives.

Under these circumstances, we must return to the question of whether a reputable college or university can really be Catholic in any significant sense. Catholic educators ask themselves this question, and their more critical students ask it of them. We have never heard a really satisfactory answer given to it, and we have none to offer from our own experience. There is a recurrent hope that the richness of Catholic traditions, apart from specific creedal elements, may work against the fragmentation of learning that characterizes the secular university and against the divorce of introverted research from missionary teaching. There is also the hope that the Catholic tradition will help insure that questions of ultimate concern have priority, even if no professionally acceptable methodology has yet been devised for answering them .....

"In the short run some Catholic colleges (and universities) will be able to justify their existence by participating in the renovation of their Church, building morale by attacking the traditionalism that still characterizes so much parish Catholicism (and a good deal of Vatican Catholicism as well). (Author's parenthesis). But creative as these colleges roles may be in the Church, and valuable as they may be in mediating between the claims of the Church and of the academic profession on the young, it is not easy

to imagine how this will bring them a continuing supply of talented students. To do that, they would have somehow to demonstrate that Catholicism helps fertilize the larger society, and especially that it enriches American intellectual life, as well as the other way round. Failing that, perhaps the most that a Catholic college or university can hope to do is to provide a good secular education while also helping its students explore in an informed and disciplined way the question of what it means to be a Catholic .....

"Quite aside from their Catholicism or lack of it, then, currently second-rate institutions are likely to be second-rate a generation hence. One or two Catholic institutions might break into the charmed circle (of the few best) if the Church were able to come up with a master plan concentrating resources on them, but this is unlikely. The pressures to spread resources is as great in the Church as elsewhere .....

"The only development we can imagine upsetting this prognosis would be a radical reorganization of Catholic higher education in America. Today this seems unlikely, but it is certainly not inconceivable. There is enormous ferment in the Church today and higher education is not only one of the prime instigators, but one of the main objects of discussion .....

"Sweeping reforms that concentrated on a relatively small number of institutions might well enable leading Catholic colleges and universities to improve their competitive position vis-a-vis non-Catholic institutions. The more important question is not whether a few Catholic universities prove capable of competing with Harvard and Berkeley on the latter's terms, but whether Catholicism can provide an ideology or personnel for developing alternatives to the Harvard-Berkeley model of excellence. Our guess is that the ablest Catholic educators will feel obliged to put most of their energies into proving that Catholics can beat non-Catholics at the latter's game. But having proved this, a few may be able to do something more. There is as yet no American Catholic university that manages to fuse academic professionalism with concerns for questions of ultimate social and moral importance ..... If Catholicism is to make a distinctive contribution to the over-all academic system, it will have to achieve such a synthesis on the graduate level." (The Academic Revolution, C. Jencks and D. Riesman, Doubleday, New York, 1968, pp. 401-405)

You may not agree with all the judgments of these secular scholars, but I believe that they are closer to the mark than most of us would like to believe, particularly,

1. Because of the enormous personnel and financial requirements in establishing and maintaining first-rate

universities, the Church would do best to sponsor a few of these, hopefully on a regional basis, rather than many second and third-rate institutions.

2. Our special task is to create on the graduate level a synthesis between academic professionalism with all the conditions of freedom and autonomy that this requires and a serious intellectual concern for questions of ultimate social and moral importance.

This is indeed our central role in the modern world, to be among the best of universities, in the full meaning of the word, and to be Catholic in the full contemporary sweep of the Church's concern for worldwide human development in its ultimate personal, social, cultural, spiritual, and even material dimensions.

I have elaborated on this latter theme in the anniversary address mentioned above. One need only to scan the long list of human problematics in Vatican Council II's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World to perceive the magnitude of our task.

The opening words of this Constitution provide a setting for this task: "The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts ..... This community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history(1) ..... Though mankind today is struck with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious

questions about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of his individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity(3).....

"This Council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with the entire human family with which it is bound up, as well as its respect and love for that family, than by engaging with it in conversation about these various problems(3).....

"To carry out such a task the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times, and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must, therefore, understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics(4)....

The Church as Church is not organized in a way that permits the deep and persistent and scientific study of realistic solutions to this vast panoply of human problems, such as war and peace; human rights in the social, cultural, economic, and political orders; world poverty and hunger and population; illiteracy and race and neo-nationalism; ecumenism both between and among Christian communities and non-believers; the personal and moral implications of the technological, atomic, space, agricultural, communications, and knowledge revolutions. The Church has declared itself concerned about all of these problems - but only in first-rate Catholic universities can the Church confront these problems with the necessary intellectual resources to seek solutions that are at once

meaningful and humane and in keeping with Christian traditions of optimism and concern for the temporal and eternal dignity and destiny of the human person. The university is not the Church, not even the Magisterium, the Church teaching. Father Ladislas Orsy, S.J. of Fordham has expressed the difference very well:

> "There should be no clash between the need of being faithful to God's revelation and the need to explore it more deeply, as there should be no conflict between the genuine Christian tradition and the Christian response to contemporary problems. Both attitudes and thrusts are necessary in the Church, and they are destined to operate harmoniously, completing each other. However, a clash may arise on a human level: the charism of the episcopate is primarily that of fidelity to the Word of God; the charism of the theologian is that of searching for new questions and new answers. (L. Orsy, S.J., "Academic Freedom in Theological Research and the Teaching Authority of the Church", (private paper), p. 6.)

In another place he says: "It concerns the harmony between the charisms of the bishop and of the theologian; between the gift of stability and the gift of progress. The answer is that the two should work together and grow together in unity". (L. Orsy, S.J., ibid, p. 7)

The university, therefore, is the very quintessence of the pilgrim Church in the intellectual order, seeking answers to ultimate questions in concert with all men of intelligence and good will, drawing

on all knowledges and every way of knowing and, especially, bringing every philosophical and theological insight to bear upon the monumental task at hand, whatever the source of these insights.

This is no task for amateurs or dilettantes, nor for second-rate scholars or institutions less than first class. It is not a task that can be done without that intellectual climate of freedom that is the essential atmosphere of a university's research program, especially in theology. It is not something that can be accomplished in the face of arbitrary controls from outside the university's professional community of researchers and scholars. Again, Father Orsy puts it well:

> "The aim of the theologian (and I would add, especially, the graduate university theologian) is not to restate the facts of the revelation in traditional terms; his aim is to explore it deeper and find new insights into it. This is possible only if he feels free in his venture to push ahead in search of truth even if it means the possibility of a mistake. In other terms, there should be a freedom to make mistakes and errors in the pursuit of truth. A theologian by necessity will work through hypotheses in the analysis of revealed truth and in building a synthesis among the data of revelation. A working hypothesis is not the same as truth. It is an attempt to reach the truth, and many or most of the working hypotheses eventually, when verification is possible, will have to be discarded. With such hypotheses, the

theologian works and the ratio of mistakes in his work is not likely to be less than in any other science. In fact, it is likely to be higher. After all, he is exploring divine mysteries! Yet, while such a procedure is taken for granted in any and every branch of human science, in theology it is held suspect. Unrealistically, superhuman success is expected from the theologian; he is expected to find the truth immediately, which he cannot do.

"In the person of the theologian, the people of God are searching for a deeper understanding of the truth. This is good for the whole Church, in particular for the episcopal college. Therefore, the bishops should give as much confidence and freedom to the theologian as is possible. Since the university is the primary place where this quest of the Church for truth and understanding can be fulfilled, academic freedom at the universities should be jealously guarded by the bishops. A university does not compete with the episcopal office, it completes it." (L. Orsy, S.J., ibid., pp. 10-11).

Under the best of conditions, the task of the modern Catholic university and, especially, of the theologians in it, is well nigh impossible; under less than the best conditions, it would be better not to begin, for we serve both God and the Church badly by mediocrity in any order, but doubly so in the order of God's great gift to man called intelligence, intelligence that works best in function of God's other great gift of freedom.

All of us have begun the task or we would not be here, representing so many institutions that aspire to be of service to mankind in his present need. I trust that this Eighth General Conference of the International Federation of Catholic Universities will inspire all of us and, through us, all of our institutions to renew our efforts in a manner commensurate with the noble and demanding task facing our Catholic universities in the world today.