

(Remarks made by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, on accepting the C. Albert Koob Merit Award of the National Catholic Educational Association, San Francisco, California, April 12, 1977)

I would like to say a few words about Catholic education. After completing twelve years of Catholic parochial education in 1934, all of my life has been spent in Catholic higher education, which I believe is getting better every year. Only to the extent that it is becoming secular in some places, and abandoning its Catholic tradition, is it getting worse. If Catholic higher education ceases to be Catholic, it really has no special reason to continue and, in my judgment, will not survive the many crises that face it. If it has no identity or value of its own, why should it survive? When I say that Catholic higher education is getting better, I mean that in many places it is becoming more conscious of its unique tradition, more concerned with values, more cognizant that wisdom is something more than knowledge, complete truth greater than partial truth. Even the secular mind is beginning to sense this with ever-growing concern. Read the latest report from the Dean of Harvard College.

I should perhaps say the same of Catholic elementary and secondary education. But something else must be said from an observer who is in no sense an expert. It appears more and more evident that after some years of drought, the appreciation of the unique value of Catholic elementary and secondary education is on the rise again.

Curiously, it is not just Catholic parents, but parents of all faiths and, especially, minority parents who yearn to have their children in a Catholic school. I heard this from a Jewish parent who sat next to me on the airplane en route here. I recently heard it from a black Protestant parent in Washington, D.C. who was driving his cab twelve hours a day, six days a week, to keep all of his children in a parochial school. The eldest girl, just graduated, had received a full scholarship to Stanford University for pre-medical studies.

No one questions the enormous task accomplished in earlier times by parochial schools, giving both social mobility and enlightened faith to millions of children of illiterate immigrants. The problems facing us change, but the basic educational needs must be met if young people are to be prepared to face all the spiritual and moral and physical challenges that life brings. Catholic education must be as good, even better, than other kinds of public education, but to be true to itself, it must be something more. ^{If Catholic education is not now really something more,} I cannot understand why so many parents are sacrificing so much to enroll their children. I cannot believe that where there are so many supporters, there is not as well all the needed resources to keep Catholic schools alive and well.

Let me put my confidence on the line by telling you a secret. The day after tomorrow, I am officially announcing at

Notre Dame the start of a campaign for much more support than a Catholic university has even sought in the eight centuries since Catholic universities began. And I will tell you something else, as we begin this campaign, we are almost half way home. And I will make a confident prediction, we will be given more than we are looking for. Why? Because we are not just striving to be a great university -- many are doing that -- but a great Catholic university as well. That takes even greater striving because it is something more. May we all give something more.