

Remarks of
Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, CSC
at the Center for Pastoral and Social Ministry Dinner
University of Notre Dame
September 27, 1978

I'd like tonight to reminisce a bit with you about where we are and where, maybe, we are going. I'd like to do it on the broadest possible scale because we are inclined today to get locked into little corners.

The Catholic university is in a fairly precarious position, in my judgment, in the world today, and to really sense that, you have to go back to the beginning of the university itself. The Italians and the French argue about what was first - Paris or Bologna - but I vote for Paris, which was established by students in 1205. ^{Bologna, students} They hired the professors and they fired them, and their university eventually became the great university it is today.

But when you go from there to the growth of Catholic universities - and of course in those days, they were all Catholic - you have such a long list, including Oxford and Cambridge; Louvain in Belgium; Bologna in Italy, and others in Spain and Portugal. But it is interesting to note that the first university world was a Catholic one. The first universities catered to the professions. They had law, they had theology, and they had medicine. And in time, they had the liberal arts, and of course, philosophy. And then a lot of things happened - over a long period of time. The world which the Church had created in the high Middle Ages began to crumble, and with it crumbled the Catholic universities. If you jump from the high Middle Ages, when all higher learning was Catholic, to today, you find that the Catholic university has almost died out in the world, except in this country.

If you give you a quick run around the world, the only Catholic university of any note left in Europe is Louvain. I was there to open the school year last week. That university was begun in 1425, and it died out as a Catholic university around the time of the French Revolution. Then it was revived around 1820, and it has been a great Catholic university, probably the greatest in the world, since then. But five years ago, because of a foolish argument about language, it split up. And now you have the new Louvain, which has grown out of a bunch of wheatfields at a cost of \$500,000,000. It was completely built by the state and is destined to be taken over by the state. The old Louvain - it is called the widow Louvain - is Flemish.

Now you look around the rest of Europe, where the Catholic university began, and you find that you have one Catholic university, Sacro Cuore, in Italy. I would have to say honestly not really a great university, but all they've got. You have the Catholic faculty of philosophy and theology at Fribourg, but they won't even allow you to call it a Catholic university. You have five so-called Instituts Catholiques in France - but not really full-fledged universities in our sense of the word, except possibly Lyon. Paris has been reduced to the ecclesiastical faculty. Germany has no Catholic university. There is only one Catholic university behind the Iron Curtain, and that's at Lublin, the Catholic university of the Polish Church, but it only has the ecclesiastical faculty, theology, philosophy, and canon law. They have revived a couple of Catholic universities in Spain at Salamanca and Navarre, and there's a new Catholic university in Lisbon, quite weak and very fledgling. And that's it for Europe, where the Catholic university began back in 1205.

There was one Catholic university, built by Louvain by the way, in Zaire, called Louvanium. It has been nationalized, the theology faculty thrown out, and I would guess that that university today is ended - finished as a Catholic university, and probably finished as a university, unless

something happens to put a new spirit within it. The faculty take the books out; ^{then} they go to Europe and sell them to get travel expenses.

You go from there across Southeast Asia. There are no Catholic universities in India. There is one little fledgling university in Jakarta, built a few years ago. It really doesn't amount to very much more than a high school at the moment. There are in the Philippines about three or four universities: Santo Tomas in quite old, a Dominican university; Ateneo de Manila, a Jesuit university; St. Louis up in Baquio, and a few others down in the southern island.

In Japan, you've got one, called Sophia. In Thailand, you have one. There is one called Sogang in Korea; I visited there last summer. And that's it.

There are none in Australia, none in New Zealand, none in the Islands.

That brings us all the way around the world to Latin America. There were great universities, founded before Harvard, in Guatamala City, the old Antigua; in Peru, ^{Santo Domingo} St. Marcus; Santo Domingo. All those universities today are gone as Catholic universities. They have not only been nationalized, but they have somewhat fallen apart in many ways. About the last two or three decades, there has been a resurgence of Catholic universities throughout Latin America. Almost every country has one or two. Barzil has thirteen. But I would have to tell you that these universities are perhaps characterized by having the weakest theology and philosophy departments of all. And I don't know how you create a Catholic university without good philosophy and theology departments. They are all anemic as far as financial help goes. I visited most of them, and one is hard put to differentiate them from any other university in the land. You find a priest here and there, and sometimes a little chapel. I spent the better part of a week at Rio Grande do Sul, the Catholic university in Brazil where we met this year with the International Federation of Catholic Universities. On this great big expansive campus, there was a room about one-fourth the size of

Hesburgh - 4

this room, and that was their chapel for a university of 18,000 students.

Now you come to this part of the world. Let's take Canada first. Canada had two great Catholic universities, Laval in Quebec, and the University of Montreal. In the last ten years, both of them have become secular state universities. They have a Catholic philosophy and theology faculty, but there are all kinds of problems going on. I'll spare you the details, but you would have to say they are no longer Catholic universities in any sense of the word. They are state universities today.

Then we come to this country, where there are more institutions of higher learning that are called Catholic than any country on earth, or all the rest of them put together, for that matter. And I would say to you that the great beauty of this country is that, while we don't have state-supported higher learning that is Catholic, we have the freedom to create anything we want to create, providing we can support it.

Now, I don't honestly believe that there are going to be a lot of great Catholic universities in America. I wish there were, but I think if we had five or six or ten, I would cheer them. We probably have five that could develop into great Catholic universities, all things being equal. But it will cost an enormous amount of money, and I can only say to you that every day we open the doors here it costs well over a quarter of a million dollars. At those prices we can go broke very quickly. Just having a computer, something that did not exist twenty-five years ago, costs \$80,000 a month, and you couldn't possibly run a modern university without it. The budget of the library is about \$1,600,000 a year, and that's about a half million less than it should be.

I could go on and on, but I think it's obvious to you that we are living in a day when we are faced with an enormous opportunity - an opportunity to create something that has not existed really since the days of the University of Paris and those universities that followed its birth. I think today in this place,

and all of you are part of this place, we have a chance to create a great Catholic university. And what is that? How would you differentiate this university called Catholic from the 3,300 universities that exist in this land today?

I think one thing, more than anything else, will characterize this kind of university, as compared to Harvard or Yale or Stanford or Chicago, or Penn State. It is something we take almost for granted. We do what all universities do. We search for truth, and we try to transmit the heritage of truth as we know it in our culture and other cultures. We do all manner of research on modern day problems. We do some amount of service to the society, which is a new part of universities. But I think we begin all this with the belief that God has entered history, which most universities would not admit if backed against the wall with a shotgun. We admit that God has not only entered history, but also has spoken to us. And that His Son, born of Mary, has entered history, and He, too, has given us the good news. And that somehow life cannot go on as if that didn't happen, historically, and that it has made an enormous difference in how we do anything human from then on, including how a university conducts its business.

It seems to me that, while we do what all universities do, in teaching and learning and researching and serving, we do this in an atmosphere of faith, and we do it with a recognition of God's providence and His grace. This is something over and above the natural phenomena that surround us. And it would seem to me that to be here tonight and to say as each of you may say, "I am part of this," means you are part of something that is growing and evolving, that can be enormously important to a world which is full of moral ambiguity, full of great universities where the majority of the faculty would laugh at what we think most sacred, bound up as they are in scientism and relativism and subjectivism and agnosticism and atheism. And yet when they look at us as a university that does its work in an atmosphere of faith and a search for value and a belief in

grace, they think that we can't possibly be a university because we're committed to these things. We are committed to our faith, we are committed to our belief, and those beliefs enter into everything we do, including our research and our teaching and our learning. I would say to them, as I say to you tonight, that I respect them for the commitments they have, and they all have them. They may be commitments to agnosticism. They may be commitments to atheism. They may be commitments to Marxism. I don't care what. There are a whole range of them, fairly held and sincerely offered, and I accept that. I only say that if they can be universities with those kinds of freely accepted commitments, then they should accept this university with our commitments of faith and belief in God's grace and His redemption.

But that leads us to something else. As you know, universities in this country, beginning with the early ones that were called colleges, like Harvard College and Dartmouth College, were founded on the kind of Oxford-Cambridge model of a college. It was Newman's model as well - the British college where people came and learned, and the faculty taught. Subsequently, the influence of the great German research universities created a new role, if you will, for universities, one seen in the foundation of Johns Hopkins as a research university. Beyond teaching came the idea of research, the idea of somehow expanding the frontiers of knowledge within the university itself, enriching those things that are taught.

It wasn't really under the end of World War II, when somehow America became the savior of a battered world, that the universities began to take up a third role called service. With service came a wide variety of promises on how we were going to redeem the world. I think we promised too much. I think we - faculty, administrators and others - dissipated our energies redeeming these promises, and I think much of the student revolution was due to the fact that we were so

concerned with solving the problems of the world that we didn't notice the problems right under our noses.

Today you will find that most universities, most great universities, have pulled back on over-extensions of service. The university no longer claims to be able to solve every problem of the world, as well as those in outer space. The universities today have, by and large, stopped having hundreds of their faculty absent. (There was a time when four universities here in the midwest - Michigan State, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin - had 380 of their faculty overseas at one time. That isn't happening any more.) Today I think service that goes out of the university is a kind of integral service that is something very special. These are the kinds of services that this university gives in the local community. They are valid and very important. We cannot live here as though in a vacuum. We must relate to the local social needs.

But it struck me, while going over much of this historical data and thinking about the creation of a modern Catholic university, that somehow we're different than a Harvard or a Yale or a Princeton or a Stanford or Chicago. Somehow we do some of the things they do - we have a center for law and the handicapped; we have opportunities for small businesses; we do some overseas work on occasion. But it struck me that if we are going to be a great Catholic university, in the full sense of that word, the most essential service that we should give would be service to the Church.

A university is a place in which many things can happen because of the strengths that exist there - be they theological or philosophical or simply the strength of Catholic community life. We can create things that can't be fashioned in other places.

Over the years we have been a kind of Catholic center for many things. I can remember my first act in 1952 as President of the University was to welcome the Christian Family Movement, having its first annual meeting on this campus.

It became more and more obvious, as different groups were attracted here because of other people who had concurrent interests or could give them intellectual backing for what they were doing, that perhaps this was a role that would shape this Catholic university a little bit differently. It would give us a dimension of service in keeping with the kind of services that many universities engaged in following the war, some of them excessively. But it would be the kind of service that could, in a discriminating way and with kinds of interaction and cross-fertilization and mutual support, make the sum of the individual parts greater than the addition of each of those parts to a whole. That, somehow, by being in this place, surrounded by other types of people doing other things, but concurrent things and important things, everyone would be buttressed, and the total movement and action would be spurred.

I woke up one morning to discover that we already had three or four such movements on the campus. They were under individual direction; they were obviously doing good work. I had no assurance that they would go on doing good work forever. I had no criteria of knowing how they should grow or how they should be supported, or how they should end if they ceased to have a vital mission. And it seemed to me that this vast area of enormous possibilities had to be organized to grow. It had to grow organically and on the basis of good judgment that is both pastoral and theologically sound. So I looked around, as I always do when I am in a jam like this, to find someone who could do it, knowing that I couldn't. And the first person who came to mind was right under my nose, namely Jack Egan.

Jack had spent the better part of his priestly life, which I guess is about the same length as mine, in this kind of work. He was a person who had the deepest kind of sympathy for the needs of the Church in our day. I thought he would have a much more solid judgment, being a diocesan priest who had been a pastor and had done extensive work on social issues in Chicago. He would have a

much better insight and feel as to what was valid or invalid in this area than I would, or most of my associates. And so the solution was very simple. Get Jack Egan to pull together all this social and pastoral apostolate and ministry, somehow give it focus and support, somehow guide it in its growth, and somehow be able to say, yes, this should be added, and yes, this should leave. It's an awesome responsibility, but someone has to have it. And I told Jack quite frankly that as far as I was concerned, and as far as the other officers of the University were concerned, he would be a kind of czar in this field, and we would take his word for something that we didn't know that much about. If he said some operation should join this cluster of wonderful ministries, that ought to happen, if he could find room and support for them. If he thought that one such movement was out of place here and should leave, well, we would take his word for that, too.

It's not easy, and this is always the problem of creation in a sense, or in this case amalgamation -- it's not easy to take a bunch of independent movements and pull them together. Any movement likes to be independent. I understand that. To take a number of operations, each with its own strong leadership, and to pull them together under one office is not easy, but I think, looking around the room tonight, that Jack has pulled that off. Not without some difficulty, and not without some pain and strain, for sure, and I am grateful to him for what I know must have been some agonizing hours at times. And I am grateful to all of you, who ought to feel better as a family than you would off in your own little corner.

I have a great hope that, when one writes the history of the University in this period, there will be fine pages in there about our academic growth, the quality of professors who joined us, about research units here and there, and all of the various humanities, sciences, and professions in which we are engaged. But I would think at the same time there would be a few paragraphs, maybe even a few chapters, about how, for possibly the first time in the history of Catholic

universities, one university began to see itself in a very special way, in service of the Church that gave it birth, and in which we find our subsistence and our grace. We are in service to a Church beset with many problems that it cannot solve itself, because it doesn't have the intellectual resources, or the libraries, or the caliber of people who can give full time to solving these problems.

But these movement, if you will, or these strands that coalesce in the life of a great university, are not just one-way. It isn't that we are helping you, or it isn't that you are helping us. I think we are mutually supportive; we are symbiotic. A university can become a kind of ivory tower, and we have to see how important it is to do our thinking, not in a vacuum or on a mountain top, but in an atmosphere of reality. I have felt that many of the organizations, whether it be CCUM or the retreat movement or pastoral ministry, in many ways refresh or renew us. That they bring into the ivory tower a little of the reality we all need. A kitchen is not really a kitchen unless it is a little cluttered up, and it is important for us, who live here in a rather orderly place, to know that, to cope with it, and to somehow make it a dimension of our thinking.

So what I say to all of you is that you are part of a great adventure. You are part of an adventure that began a long time ago, actually in 1205, if you want to agree with the French and not the Italians. You are part of an adventure that is ongoing at this moment, at this hour. You are part of a Catholic university that strives for greatness. I wish that you would somehow feel that you are part of this great, ongoing endeavor. That somehow you are adding to the reality of the contemporary Catholic university, that somehow, in the highest order of academic endeavor which is the university's, you also sense a concern for the moral overlay of human life which makes for human happiness.

This will be a much greater Catholic university if you do your job well, and I am sure you will.