

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the General Faculty Meeting, October 4, 1982)

PREPARING FOR THE MILLENNIUM

If one might judge from the advent of the first millennium in the year of Our Lord, 1000, this unusual benchmark of history is by its very nature the occasion of prophecies of gloom and doom. In its most drastic form, one hears increasingly, as we approach the second millennium, the year 2000, predictions of the coming end of the world. One can admit to a certain historical symmetry in this, but given the daily challenges that face us increasingly in the university world, I believe that we might more profitably admit to the uncertainty of the ultimate cataclysm, since the good Lord has told us that: "We know not the day or the hour." It seems best to leave it that way while doing all we can to eliminate the present nuclear threat, and then attend more seriously to our own affairs which are difficult enough, but at least knowable and manageable, too, one hopes.

In 1967, together with twenty some other educators and national leaders from the public sector, I became a member of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Six years and six million dollars later, in 1973, we published our final report. That same year we also published another report: The Purposes and the Performance of Higher Education in the United States: Approaching the Year 2000.

One would have thought after about a hundred studies and reports -- a veritable bookshelf of white-jacketed books -- that there was little left to study or report upon. However, our genial Chairman, Clark Kerr of Berkeley, could still discern a few problems, so a successor body was commissioned under his Chairmanship, The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. Seven years later, in 1980, their final report was issued on the next twenty years for higher education. It was entitled, Three Thousand Futures.

For those of us engaged lifelong in higher education, it does focus our attention on the coming millennium by giving, in the first chapters, thirteen fairly obvious reasons for gloom and doom to come. These are immediately countered with fifteen reasons for hope. At least hope wins out numerically over gloom and doom, but only narrowly. One has the impression that the report strained a little to tip the balance.

The rest of the report, plus a very thick appendix, attempts to prepare all of us for what we might expect realistically in the field of higher education before the millennium arrives. We are told that there is no compelling reason for either panic or euphoria, that what is most certain is that the next twenty years -- eighteen now -- are full of uncertainty, that higher education's recent problem of managing growth, has suddenly become a much more troublesome and difficult problem of managing retrenchment, and, finally, that the last three decades of full steam ahead through clear seas to wide open horizons now are to be followed by two decades of avoiding shipwreck and planning survival.

The report is clear on several salient points:

1) There is not one future, but three thousand futures for higher education, that being roughly the number of individual institutions and the title of the report. Each institution must study itself and prepare for its own future. No one will do that for us. We at Notre Dame are engaged in PACE, but that is only a beginning, a call to action.

2) Among the uncertainties, there are certain facts, for example, the students who will people our institutions in the year 2000 are already born and compared to the present age cohort, there are 23.3% less of them. Since students are the life blood of our institutions -- the public ones because they are generally funded per capita, and we in the private sector since we operate mainly on tuition income -- it does not require a prophet to discern the anguishes that this situation will engender. When the food is scarce, the many hungry natives really do get restless -- nothing like hunger to focus attention and overstimulate competition -- even among colleagues.

3) Another fact: more than half of the current faculties in higher education were appointed in the '60's and '70's. Since about three quarters of them are on tenure, nationwide, they will presumably be holding down the only available faculty positions until the millennium. Again, no need to speculate about what this implies for women and minorities (most of the current faculties across the land are white men). We can also easily imagine what

it means for junior faculty competing for tenure, what it could mean for young intellectuals, especially in the humanities, who are seeking Ph.D.'s for teaching posts that do not exist.

Finally, and here I simply paraphrase the report, imagine what it will mean to have an aging and aged faculty (not to mention administrators!) who are not being stretched by younger colleague competition, who are more distant in some cases from younger students, who, finally, have few if any other positions available in academe for which they might otherwise compete and into which they might grow.

4) Then there are the uncertainties: such as, which institutions get the fewer available students, which colleges or departments within institutions? What happens to the normal academic dreams of new programs and new facilities in the face of diminishing financial support from the federal and state government, already a fact, or from donors who now have their own new financial problems? What happens to the young scientist who can no longer be placed in a university laboratory where alone he can associate freely with his mentors and in the past be financed by government grants, to do that basic research which has made America unique? An aside: how economically productive and competitive will America be in the world of the future without this basic research which universities have largely provided in the past? Young scientists may be employed elsewhere, mainly in industry to do applied research,

but they will not grow and become the next generation of teacher-researchers on the endless frontier of science and technology. One can, of course, make the same case for young engineers in the university. In the frontier days of extreme hardship it was called: "eating your seed corn."

5) If future financing during a potential downturn in higher education is still in the realm of uncertainty, there is no uncertainty about what happens in higher education when financing shrinks and inflation grows. A whole series of things happen: positions are vacated without replacement and salaries presently paid get frozen or reduced; maintenance is deferred, which means you pay ten times more later to replace the whole roof for not having fixed the leak; laboratory equipment becomes not one, but two or three generations obsolete; library resources are cut, books are not bought, and periodical subscriptions are cancelled; computing facilities shrink or become outdated or both; programs without sufficient students or strength are cancelled and with them, attending faculty, even though tenured; new promising programs are simply shelved for a better day, new opportunities lost for decades; faculty development, books and travel, sabbaticals and important conferences, secretarial help and fringe benefits, all look relatively unimportant in the face of survival. Many go overboard, some at first, some later.

I could go on with this list, but it is depressing and I think enough is enough to get the general idea of what could

happen in the two decades to come. For all of you who read the educational journals, all of this will come as no surprise because there is not one thing I have mentioned that is not happening now, somewhere in higher education. In more than 100 institutions, it happened all at once in the past decade. They simply went out of existence. They are no more.

The Carnegie report also predicts that an unknown number of presently existing institutions of higher education (some mention the figure 200) are unlikely to be around to usher in the new millennium. In a somewhat cruel and yet realistic fashion, the report implies that these unlucky ones deserve their fate, mainly because they will react in a short term manner to long term (at least two decades long) problems, they will not analyze their particular situation and take corrective action, they will attract few students, they are already educationally weak and behind the times, their faculties are the reason for the weakness of the curriculum, and the lowering of standards because they, too, are already weak and try to attract weak students. Anyway, the report says, in general, that the weak institutions will get weaker and die, and that they will not be missed, and that higher education may well be better off without them. That is a sad requiem, not entirely true I'm sure, but probably mainly so.

I am moved to say at this point, so much for the bad news as we march towards the millennium.

The good news can be put in promising capsule form and it is both a wish, a possibility, and here at Notre Dame, I hope, a

prayer as well. It goes: the strong institutions might just get stronger, not by growing externally, but by pursuing frugality, integrity, and quality internally. It will require a good deal of analysis by all parts of the University to be sure of the facts and to predict, as far as possible, the general uncertainties as they will or will not apply. This will call for leadership and understanding on all levels of the strong university, cooperation of all in applying stringent solutions instead of competing for scarce turf. The common good of the institution must once more be the guiding star. There must be hope, morale, pride, imagination, wisdom, and so many other great qualities at work together in both faculty and administration. Fundamentally, all must believe that in a time of potential disaster, their institution can and will not only survive -- as Faulkner put it in accepting the Nobel Prize -- but prevail. The university will get stronger even if not larger, it will augment quality in ways not thinkable in easier halcyon days. It will do all this, or it will not survive, at least not as a strong university with a future.

I would like now to share the ways in which I think Notre Dame, our University, has some unique strengths in the face of the Carnegie Commission analysis.

The report spends a major part of its analysis on students. It even gives the birth rates which will hearten at least those who foster ZPG -- Zero Population Growth -- in five year intervals:

1955-59 - 3.7%

1960-64 - 3.5%

1965-69 - 2.6%

1970-74 - 2.1%

1975-79 - 1.8%

They analyze this shrinking student population and judge that only 40% of them can be called hard core or reasonably certain students -- those who are at least second generation college students. The others, mainly first generation, tend to be older, part time, in-and-out of college, favoring two year colleges or vocational schools. If this 60% of the soft fringe continues, there will be wide fluctuation in total numbers.

Notre Dame must concentrate on the more certain 40%. We are fortunate also that so many of these are sons and daughters of our alumni and alumnae. We now accept about 25% of them. That figure may perforce grow in the future as the number of our alumni and alumnae are growing and many look first at Notre Dame for their sons and daughters.

Another hard core for us, thanks to a decision made differently than other institutions during the student revolution, is the availability here of ROTC in all services. This year, these well screened and competitive students are fully subsidized to the amount of ^{wel} ^{and half} over three million dollars.

Another decision that practically doubled our pool of applicants was coeducation. I would hate to think where we

would be today without these women. There may well be more, but, so far, we have correlated the growth with St. Mary's, as I think is historically correct and proper.

We have more beginning black and other minority students this year than ever before. These are largely covered by an endowment of over six million dollars which should double in the years ahead. Our record with Hispanic students is better than most. This, too, at least in the numbers presently applying, is an important new and growing potential for Notre Dame. We could and should double our number of foreign students. As a group, they have grown nationally from 50,000 in 1960 to about 300,000 today. However, we need to learn how to better utilize the rich diversity of culture and languages that they bring to this campus. We will also be more attractive to all students if we improve substantially, in programs, places, and preparation, our own overseas programs.

I do not foresee our engaging in what seems an escape hatch for many institutions to uphold student levels today by lowering standards, adding all sorts of vocational attractions, using faulty advertising, luring the older student, reaching out to those in jail, or the services, or anywhere -- warm bodies, but generally not students in any real sense.

Let there be no mistake, however. We attract and will attract -- among only 16.9% of colleges and universities today -- a good and growing number of applicants because we are unique

and different than most of those who are failing. Fifty per cent of all students are in institutions of our size or larger as against 25% in 1955. Only 1.5% are in schools of less than 500 students.

But there is much more than size involved. The report says that few institutions today have their own strong personalities. The report adds: "The alumni are the great force for preservation of elements of historical diversity where they exist, and their financial support is almost directly related to the traditional distinctiveness of the institution." (p. 23)

I will return to this distinctiveness later, since it is crucial, but I must recall that our alumni are always among the top few alumni groups in the country who generously support their universities. I do not believe that would be happening if we had become homogenized, as were so many others who have lost alumni support.

How long will this student drought continue? The report charts it from a high point for students in the years 1979-83 to a nadir in 1997, then rising again to the '83 level in the year 2010. By then, we will have fought our battle, won or lost.

The report observes that more than half of the students who begin college never finish. Retention efforts are then advised as a tactic for survival. Fortunately, here too, Notre Dame is quite unique, losing generally less than 1% of our students in the freshman year -- the first difficult hurdle

for them. I am sure we could do much better, through faculty counseling mainly, in the years after they leave the care of Emil Hofman. And we must, for each of these later departures is generally a personal tragedy for the student and a failure on our part.

What of graduate students? Curiously, here the Council sees a slight increase between now and the year 2000. There are special reasons and these are not entirely reassuring -- at least not to Notre Dame. The present graduate school gloom, they say, is because we are losing, or will lose, 50% of the academic Ph.D. students who are presently preparing only for a teaching career -- mainly in the humanities and some sciences, such as physics and botany. However, this 50% represents only 1/12th of the whole graduate enrollment nationwide. Other graduate and professional programs seem to be holding stable, especially theology and business.

I believe that the lesson for us is to decide which graduate programs we can do better than most, and which are related to our special strength as a Catholic university. One thinks of philosophy and theology, special segments of the humanities, science where we have both special facilities and a long tradition of strength, business as a growing field searching for ethical enlightenment, law where one can be among the best in our special tradition, engineering -- a booming field -- where there are very special areas of burgeoning *disciplines*.

such as robotics which involve artificial intelligence, as well as computing science and almost all of the engineering departments.

I have no great reservations about the quality of our undergraduate education, if we are intelligent and daring enough to give it greater humanistic depth and breadth than it presently has. As for graduate education, we have a distance yet to go, much study yet to do, if proper and promising priorities are to be identified and imaginatively pursued as we can, especially within our special tradition and building on historical strengths, not proliferating all over the map as we have so often done in the past. That day is over.

What we need at this historical moment is a tighter ship, and only the faculty can rig it. But it will require vision and perceptiveness, strength and decision that have not always been present on more expansive and more affluent days. I trust that PACE will point all of us in this direction.

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If I were allowed one ardent desire at the moment, it would be for enthusiastic and serious curriculum study and reform right across the whole academic spectrum of the University. We cannot go into heavy waters with wildly flapping sails, no firm hand at the tiller, and no real sense of direction. I would like us to forget for a moment all the ancient academic fortresses here that are defended so persistently on the walls, even when fairly empty of treasure within. If the

Let me here give you the planning thoughts of two universities with larger endowments than our own, Duke and Princeton. Chancellor Ken Pye of Duke offers the following argument in his paper, "Planning for the Eighties":

"A great private university must be composed of educational components which are better than or different from those in public universities, if in the long run, it will be able to charge higher tuition and continue to achieve a high level of support from corporations, foundations, and individual donors. The financial forecast makes it clear that Duke can be qualitatively superior only if it restricts the scope of its educational programs and concentrates the resources available on fewer activities.

"Duke's position is not unique. Princeton University's Priorities Committee recently concluded that ".... in the face of financial adversity, it is better to do fewer things and do them well, than it is to spread the effect of a cutback evenly across all segments of the University."

"We must therefore," Pye continues, "engage in planning for retrenchment, not growth. We must be prepared to re-examine many assumptions which have been tacitly accepted in the past, and explore new ways to function more effectively, increase revenue, and decrease costs. No major change in the fundamental nature of the University is contemplated.

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The disciplines which constitute the core of a modern University will continue to be taught, either in existing departments and programs or in consolidation of these activities. A broad curriculum in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences must be available to undergraduates. A strong graduate program must exist in the same subjects and in interdisciplinary areas. A small number of high-quality professional schools must continue to flourish. The tenured status of present faculty must be respected. But we cannot continue to do all we are now doing, or do all that we continue in the same ways."

hour calls for new resolve, more imagination, a re-routing of our best traditions, a bright new focus to all our efforts, an attending to our special character with greater resolve, then we must be ready to re-examine where faculty and student time is spent and how effectively and how efficiently or not, and to what over-all well articulated purpose. At present, we really do not have such an over-all vision, except for bits and pieces. I would settle today for the firm resolve to start anew, along the lines I have suggested and which I am resolved to pursue with your assistance.

I have now come to the point where there is much more yet to say than there is time in which to say it. But then, you have all had that experience in your classes. Let me touch a few concluding highlights of the report, especially as they pertain to our University and our future efforts.

There is a section on financing in which endowments are shown to have decreased in their share of carrying the budget, during ten year intervals, from 17% in 1930, to 14% in 1940, only 5% twenty years later in 1960, 3% in 1970, and about 1% today. Here again, the Notre Dame experience is just the opposite. We have been trading up while the others have been trading down. Our almost invisible endowment was operating at the current national 1980 level in 1930, helping the budget by about 1%, if that. Today, our endowment is over two hundred million dollars and climbing. ~~The~~ The eighteenth largest endowment among private universities. Its contribution to the budget is around 10%. Naturally, we must continue to reverse

the trend, especially since our endowment is specifically aimed at supporting not the general budget, but specific efforts to achieve greater academic excellence, such as endowed distinguished professorships, scholarships, fellowships, library, Shuster Fund, and all the rest.

The report outlines, towards the end, ten hard choices that individual universities and colleges must make for themselves, at whatever cost, during the next two decades, but the sooner, the better. I have spoken directly and indirectly of most of these, but will briefly review them, as they summarize the whole report.

1. Quality. This is central to the whole endeavor and should be the focal point to be emphasized and not compromised in any and all academic adjustments during the present time of crisis.

2. Balance. This means in a word that each university must decide what are its special priorities among all the possible academic programs available. PACE and curriculum reform are especially relevant here.

3. Integrity. If we are to deserve widespread support from our constituency, we must be, as best we are able, without fudging, that which we profess to be, a great Catholic university. Integrity also speaks to the inner life of the institution -- what we really stand for, and what against, not only institutionally, but in our personal lives as faculty, administrators, and students.

4. Adaptation. This means that we do not sell our birthright while planning to survive, grow, and become better, even in difficult times.

5. Dynamism. This means that we have to be lively and inventive enough to do with confidence and vigor what must be done -- to grow inwardly while not growing outwardly, to be able to substitute this for that, if this is better.

6. Effective use of resources. This speaks primarily to the money available, but also to the people. Faculty productivity in the United States has been unchanged in the past fifty years. There may be innovative ways of doing more with less, such as using the new technologies and arranging our working patterns somewhat differently. At least, it is worth a look, although one's initial reaction is usually to maintain rigidly the status quo. It has been reasonably reported, for example, that the quality of teaching is more related to the approach of the teacher than to the size of the class. Obviously, some classes must be small and others can be larger. The savings involved in knowing the difference, and doing something about it without affecting quality, are tremendous. Also involved here is the needless proliferation of courses, especially those that attract very few students and contribute little to an integrated education. Clark Kerr once said that every university has at least twice the number of courses as teachers, representing for each, one they wanted to teach and one they had to teach. That may sound cynical, but it is not far from the mark.

7. Financing. The report warns us not to expect more, even probably less, federal financing, although we might guide the effectiveness of the support available -- for example, financial assistance preferably for able, but indigent students or for basic rather than applied research. If we are doing something unique, necessary, difficult yet promising, we will be supported no matter what the cost. If we don't really believe in our heritage or our vision of a great Catholic university, then we will not deserve to be supported, nor shall we.

8. Leadership. Since I am here speaking of myself (the report does ask for more presidential power, or at least, for fewer roadblocks and veto bodies), as well as speaking for Provosts, Deans, Directors, and department Chairmen, may I just for once quote the report:

"A period such as that ahead does not readily attract the ablest leadership -- the tasks are grinding ones, the victories too often take the form of greater losses avoided, the constituencies are more likely to be united around doing nothing than doing something.

"The problem of administration (they here quote Ken Boulding) becomes more difficult and the quality of leadership is likely to decline, and the new skills required call for an 'all too rare mixture of compassion and realism'"

I can assure you from past experience that this mixture of compassion and realism is rare, because humanly difficult to pull off and then try to explain to oneself and others.

9. How best to preserve the private sector of higher education which in 25 years has gone from 50-50 public-private share of students to 80-20 today. All agree that we in the private sector are what makes American higher education unique in all the world, but how small a percentage can we become without losing that uniqueness or effectiveness.

10. Basic research. I have spoken to this subject earlier.

These ten are all listed as hard choices. The report adds that no choice is the worst choice.

Beyond these ten hard choices, even more important than most of them, is the inner quality of life on the campus. Who can calculate the value of a caring community, a vibrant spirit of teaching and learning, a coming of age in an atmosphere that bespeaks goodness, truth, and beauty and entices young people to embrace them. Who can put a price on the value of younger and older people sharing dreams, working together for the less fortunate, planning a better world and preparing to help it be born, espousing great causes with courage and integrity, praying together during those great liturgical moments that say to all of us how important it is to be a family, brothers and sisters, sharing a faith, and a hope, and sustained by a love that transcends time, age, circumstance, anguish, even defeat.

One cannot really define the élan that makes our institution more noble, more promising, more effective than another. But one senses it when it is in the atmosphere, the tone and the spirit of a place, this place.

The University of Notre Dame du Lac was born in adversity, inspired by faith, nurtured by love, sustained for over 140 years by a bright and living hope that we could do what few, if any, others have ever done: create a great Catholic university.

Whatever the challenges of the next eighteen years leading to a new millennium, I do not fear them and neither should you. It might sound corny or mawkish to say that the past is prelude -- but I believe it is and I know that with God's grace and Our Lady's care, all of us together are going to realize the dream of a poor French priest who called this place a university when it was a log cabin in the cold wilderness, drafty as well, but warmed by a love and a faith and a vision that would not be denied, not then, not now, not ever, one hopes.