

## EDUCATION IN THE YEAR 2000

If prophesy one must, and it is a chancy business at best given the paucity of authentic prophets, the millennial year just ahead of us will probably find everyone prophesying. We have only had one other millennial year, 1000, in this Christian era. At that time, there were dire predictions of the end of the world, wild chilastic dreams, doomsday coming, and all the rest. We will probably hear it again. One would hope that we have matured during the present millennium. Certainly, the world is vastly different than it was in the year 1000. No one would have been discussing the future of higher education then, because they were still 200 years away from the founding of the first university in Paris. Intellectually, the ages then were dark at best, the language mainly a bastard Latin, the manuscripts few in that pre-Gutenberg age. By our standards, almost everyone, except a few clerics, was illiterate, life was culturally brutal, learning almost non-existent, except for the preservation in the monasteries of a few intellectual gems of a long distant golden age. I speak of the Western World, the only world celebrating this particular millennium, although for our humility, it should be mentioned that there were a few bright lights glowing in Asia and, strangely enough, in Meso-America. Despite the new and different kind of gloom that characterizes our age, unlike those prophets of 1000 years ago, crouched over a flickering candle in the mountain vastness of Subiaco

or Monte Cassino, I, a kind of monk like them, at least sharing their common vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, write these lines on a yellow pad instead of parchment, with a ball point instead of a feather pen, not in a monastery, but higher than they in their mountains, traveling at 600 miles an hour in the bright clear air at 37,000 feet above the Atlantic, midway between Europe and America.

Despite the incredible change of pace in the conditions surrounding us, now as compared to then, life and learning fundamentally pose some of the same problems. They are mainly orientational problems of value, meaning, direction, attitude, ultimately salvation now and eternally for the many who still believe in eternity, however incoherently, no less longingly.

The year 2000, a quarter of a century away, is only one-fortieth of the distance that man has come in time since the year 1000. While there will be some changes in the human condition, I would not see anything cataclysmic, barring nuclear or biological warfare. We will probably muck up the world somewhat more, but less rapidly than at present. There will be a few more billion people aboard our spacecraft, but again they will be mostly on the other side of the globe and in the Southern hemisphere. Again, the rate of growth will have begun to level off, if we will have had enough sense to have helped them develop more humanly than at present. There will be scientific breakthroughs, though nothing as spectacular as nuclear energy, rocketry, computers, and all that they made possible in the last

quarter century. Our future scientific gains will be more generally in the field of biology than in chemistry and physics, although the great gains in these latter will have facilitated the biological spectaculars yet to come. I doubt that we will have heard from other intelligent beings in the universe by the year 2000, although I have no doubt that they are there.

Against this background, it may sound banal to predict a few modest changes in the world of higher education, specifically in the United States which happens to be the world leader in this field.

First, I suspect that we will struggle to strike a better balance between equality and quality than exists at present. Both as a member of the Commission on Civil Rights and the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education, I pressed long and fervently for better access to higher education on the part of those minorities so long denied equality of opportunity. While the task is still unfinished, we have succeeded beyond our initial hopes, and the machinery is in place for further success. As so often happens in human affairs, the good was in some ways the enemy of the better. Equality often came at the cost of quality, funds for the latter being transferred to the former. Quality of education was also wounded in more subtle ways. Greater masses of minorities were given what often was called higher education, but really was not. This is understandable, since a decade cannot make up for the deficiencies of centuries. However, I would predict that wiser

counsel and greater balance will prevail by the year 2000. Equality is essential to our political system and moral convictions as a nation. Yet, without the highest quality of learning as a constant standard, supported concurrently and generously with equality, the higher learning will sink ever lower, to the dismal level of the least common denominator. As the leader in higher education in all the world, we cannot debase its value, even while we widen access to higher education. I look for a growing balance in that equation, hopefully reaching equilibrium by the year 2000, if not before. Prophecy here brings a dire warning -- if we do not cherish quality of education and the highest educational standards, we will have given equal access to that which is really not worth having, because without high quality, education is a counterfeit and a fraud. As Groucho Marks once quipped, "Any club that will admit me isn't worth joining."

Secondly, I believe that higher learning in the year 2000 will be more closely and finely focused on how to learn continually. If anything impresses one comparing the world of the year 1000 to that of 2000, it is the enormous growth in what now must be learned, the explosion of knowledge, especially scientific and technological, the rate of growth with which we must cope in the learning process. I suspect the learning of the future will strike the note of intellectual curiosity, anticipation of what is yet to come, rather than simple control of present knowledge, security in the current state of the art. In the future, even starting today, students must learn to live

with rapid, abrupt, and even frightening change. Learning will be correlative with life, an exciting intellectual adventure for which students will have to be explicitly prepared.

Thirdly, I voice a hope as much as a prophecy. In a world of sudden and cataclysmic change, simple sanity requires some constants. Navigation requires some reasonably fixed points of reference. Without navigation, life today becomes irrational wandering, a journey with no homecoming, a voyage without a port of call, a story without meaning or ending.

Higher education in our day is weakest in this respect. Values, whether intellectual or moral, are largely characterized by their absence. Often enough, we cannot even agree on what these values should be as constants, much less how they might possibly be part of higher education. One would hope that between now and the year 2000 we might, as a means of intellectual and moral survival, begin to renew in higher education the kind of dialogue that sought a higher learning in Plato's Republic; in Aristotle's Ethics; in the Old and New Testaments; in the history of saints and sinners, heroes and cowards; in the literature that so beautifully has personalized values or the lack of them in recent centuries. We should not be afraid to seek wisdom and virtue in other cultures than our own, for greatness and goodness are humanly great and good wherever they are found. They are the constants that bring quality to the whole endeavor of higher education, to the life and achievement

of human kind in every age. Somehow in the welter and abruptness of change, we have lost our grip on these constants. We would all admit in the quiet of our consciences that justice is better than injustice, love better than hate, integrity better than dishonesty, compassion better than insensitivity, beauty better than ugliness, hope better than despair, faith better than infidelity, order better than chaos, peace better than war, life better than death, knowledge better than ignorance, and so on and on and on.

All these are constants that were important to the monk on the mountain and the peasant in the field in the year 1000. Whatever the enormity of our growth in knowledge and technique since then, they are still important for me and you today. We will be neither educated, nor wise, nor even able to cope with change, to navigate through life without these constants, these values. As change heightens, as indeed it will, I would hope that higher education will include for everyone a long and longing look at these values, <sup>u</sup>As a measure of what we are or are not becoming as a people, a nation, a world.

Lastly, I prophesy that higher education in the year 2000 will challenge its students to create a rather new kind of world, characterized by quite different social, economic, and political arrangements. The emphasis will be on the interdependence rather than the independence of nation states. Students will be challenged to be world citizens as they seek solutions to problems of human rights, ecumenism, food, fuel, shelter, health care, urbanization, pollution, crime, terrorism,

development, education. None of these problems has a purely national solution. They are all illustrative of the interdependence of all human kind today. No longer can geographic prejudice decree that being born in the Northern hemisphere promises an infinitely more human and humane existence than being born in the Southern part of spaceship earth. No longer can the affluent and powerful view the world as if everything important runs on a line between New York, London, Paris, Moscow, and Tokyo. Better than two-thirds of humanity lives well South of that line and it is their earth, too. Students in the year 2000 will increasingly be made conscious of the possibility of creating a better world than the one they are inheriting, one with liberty and justice for all, not just Americans, with liberty, equality, and fraternity for all, not just Frenchmen.

Since we do not live well or even perform well in the face of abrupt discontinuities, one might hope that the value of a world view, characterized by the interdependence of all human kind, might begin to enter into the substance of higher education even now, so that the year 2000 will be a crescendo of interdependence, not a belated beginning. This would then become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The real value of looking ahead, even prophesying, is that it clarifies our present perspectives and priorities and hopes. It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. Before taking that step into the future, it is good to know where this first step leads us so that our goal becomes our prophecy as we walk with hope and vision, even today.

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.  
President, University of Notre Dame