

THE UNIVERSITY AND SOCIETY*

The society in which we live gives birth to our universities, and our universities cannot survive or prosper unless they serve the societies that nurture them.

The university is among the most traditional of all the institutions of our society and, at the same time, it is the institution most responsible for the fact that our society is the most rapidly changing in the history of man. Perhaps the most central challenge facing universities in a changing world is: Can they adapt themselves rapidly enough to survive amid all the changes they have stimulated?

It seems curious to suggest that an institution is contributing by its activity to its own downfall, or that, in other words, the university has caused so much change, so quickly, that it may not be able to change quickly enough to survive the conditions it has created.

What are the challenges of change for the university today? One might suggest several:

- 1) Its new and enlarged role in society: Individuals and institutions today are undergoing identity crises, and the university is no exception.
- 2) Its program to fulfill its role: curriculum, research, service, and the proportion among these.
- 3) Its governance: how it has been governed in the past and how its governance is likely to evolve in the future.

These seem to be the principal challenges of change facing the universities in the face of contemporary realities. One should likewise pose the problem in a much more descriptive and less analytic and categorical manner.

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This would give us a list of questions and propositions such as the following:

1. Rapidity of change makes much, if not all, of the past seem irrelevant. This may be called illusory, but it is widely reflected in the ahistorical attitudes of today's students, caught up as they are with today's realities, problems, and demands. How can one hope to salvage what is good in the university's past? Must we jettison everything today in the name of contemporaneity and relevance?

2. Granting that the university should concern itself with contemporary problems and solutions, how can it do so while still remaining apolitical, autonomous, free, and detached enough from the world to exercise objective critique and evaluation? This is no easy task as we are learning to our sorrow.

3. How can the university (in America) double in size since 1950 and still pretend to be somewhat of an elite institution, totally dedicated to excellence and high standards of performance? Or, more fundamentally, should it try to be dedicated to quality and equality at the same time? Will society allow it to stress quality at the expense of equality? We now are discussing these issues in the famous Bakke case in the United States. No easy answer here, but the question remains a fundamental challenge to the university.

4. Is there any other way for the university to defend itself against all the seeds of dissolution that burgeon within it today, except by somehow recreating a vital university community, united by some common goals and values? This community should be willing to articulate, profess, and defend its values, including the very freedom and autonomy best defended by being rightly and intelligently exercised by the community. What other way is there

to confront the freewheeling of faculties, the occasional violence of students, the capriciousness of administrators? What reality, other than a true university community of dedication, concern, and effort, can fend off the efforts from all sides to intrude into the affairs of the university, to abridge its autonomy, to dry up or condition its support? I can imagine no other solution.

5. Lastly, there is the challenge, greater than ever in times of rapid change, to protect the university from arteriosclerosis of the educational process. With all knowledge doubling every 15 years, with little healthy balance between specialization and wholeness of knowledge, with technology threatening to engulf humanity, with confusion of values manifested daily in twisted priorities, this is clearly a time for profound and meaningful consideration of how a university can harness change to improve education.

Of course, if our point about community meant anything, the whole university and all of its constituent parts should be party to this fundamental study of the educational process on the university level. Otherwise, there will be no total commitment or conviction--only more fragmentation of purpose and dissolution of university integrity by faculties more committed to disciplines than to the institution, by student activists who think they can save by destroying, and by administrative mandarins who lose all in bureaucratic obscurantism.

Let us discuss these five issues in more detail.

I

The first point fundamentally has to do with change and its residue

of confusion and consternation. No one could deny that the world has changed more since World War II than in any other quarter century in man's history. We have entered the Atomic Age, the Space Age, the Thermonuclear Age, the Age of Human Development, the end of colonization and the beginning of new nationalisms, the advent of the population explosion, and the new Communications Age of satellite transmission.

Then there has been an increase of speed from 500 miles an hour to 25,000 m.p.h., a fiftyfold increase that has shrunk the world. This increased capability, when applied to computers seeking, correlating, or compiling knowledge, is even more dramatic.

Most of what has been mentioned heretofore has been in the category of physical change and progress. But what of the spiritual and ideological? Here again, change staggers the imagination. After more than a thousand years of enmity between Catholics and Orthodox and 400 years of estrangement between Catholics and Protestants, today the movement is ecumenical, leading to the unity of Christianity. After centuries of human exploitation in slavery (actual, political, or economic) today all the talk is of human development, which Pope Paul VI says is the new name for peace.

Even new advances towards peace can arise from the realization that today's armaments, mainly in the United States and the USSR, provide for 250,000 tons of T.N.T. in nuclear form for every human being on earth. How much greater can the threat of global destruction become? By some reverse psychology, this may become the strongest argument for peace in our times.

This is the world of change in which the university today must find itself, its mission, and its ultimate meaning. In the face of so much galloping change, it is not really remarkable that students tend to think that what did not happen before nine o'clock this morning is not really very important

or significant. But as Santayana has noted, those who ignore history commit themselves to repeat all of its errors.

Somehow, when all is changing, there must be some constants, some anchors, some unflinching faith in God, or man, or truth, or the good, or all of these in some workable combination. The university is the place where this combination has unflinchingly been found in the past, and there exists no intellectual substitute for the future. Here our tradition leads to hope, not despair.

The only answer I can give to this dilemma is the answer of a humanist to technological change. Man, no matter how much his environment changes, is still man, and his problems are still profoundly human. This means that the university, while coming to grips with change and the very real improvements to mankind that change makes possible, will not forget that its educational mission is always and everywhere a profoundly human one, concerned with the spiritual and moral constants that make man's history something quite different from animal history. What are these constants that profoundly concern the university? They are human realities like love and hatred, peace and violence, order and disorder, law and lawlessness, justice and injustice, beauty and ugliness, virtue and sin, and all the rest of the dichotomies that have characterized the human scene since Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel.

Whatever the claim of modern students to the importance of relevance, the university must insist that the ultimate relevance is man, human life, the vision and perspectives, the successes and failures of human history, so well illumined in our literature, art, and cultural heritage. In educating students to live today and tomorrow, universities cannot forget to educate them

for the long future that is theirs on this planet or elsewhere, for human is what human does, here or elsewhere in the universe.

II

The university has always been society's most persistent and tenacious critic. Today, university professors and students, and some administrators, are profoundly concerned about the quality of life, or the lack of it, in America and in the world at large. One thing is required for the honest critic--he must somehow be detached from the world he criticizes, he must be independent, autonomous, and free. One might, at this juncture, legitimately ask: How free are the universities today? They depend largely on the state for their support. Can they then freely criticize the state and its policies? In the United States, 50 per cent of the cost of higher education comes from private sources. Can the university be free to criticize this sector as well?

I personally believe that the university can be an effective critic of both the public and private sectors if it has integrity, if it maintains within its university community a very real commitment to openness, to rationality, to civility, to all the virtues that make the university, in the words of the Poet Laureate Masfield of England, "a splendid place."

Once the university ceases to be an open place of civility and rationality, its capacity to be the conscience of the public and private is severely restricted, if not destroyed. All of this is a question of noblesse oblige. If the university is true to itself and its traditions, it can do superbly what it alone can do in the most objective and apolitical manner. Once the confidence of the public is lost, it can do nothing. In fact, without

public understanding and support, it will be starved to death financially, and will become unacceptable in word and deed to the great publics that it needs for survival as a very special kind of institution. Public support is, then, essential to the university.

III

Most institutions would accept rapid growth as a sign of vitality and general acceptance, but it is a fact of institutional life that very rapid and uncontrolled growth is a danger to institutional health. Biologically, it is a popular description of cancer.

If there is one characteristic that might be taken as standard for all universities up until World War II, it is quality or excellence of performance. Universities tended to become elitist institutions, catering to a small, highly selective and highly talented and intelligent proportion of the total population. This was true worldwide, especially in Europe, Latin America, and Asia, and true, after World War II, in the new universities in Africa.

In America, and to a lesser extent in Europe, a populist ideal became evident after World War II, when increasingly larger proportions of all classes of the population flocked to the universities with the firm conviction that this was the one infallible path to greater personal success and greater promise in life. In Europe, this has become the underlying cause for the current unrest of student populations, for the growth in numbers of students was not matched by an overall growth in educational facilities, modernization of university administration or curricular reform.

In America, the picture is more ambiguous. Here, there was an enormous expansion of educational facilities, mainly in the area of state-supported

higher education, but much in the private sector as well. The total capacity for higher education doubled, in less than 20 years, all the higher educational facilities provided since the beginning of the Republic.

As one private example I know best, my university (Notre Dame) built over \$60 million in new facilities during those years, against a total of \$10 million in the century previous, while the operating budget increased more than tenfold. Even granting considerable inflation in the value of the dollar, this was, in the private sector, an enormous growth in a very short period.

It might be added that in most cases, American higher education, state-supported and independent, has a comparable qualitative growth during the same period, due mainly to better secondary education following Sputnik, many internal curricular and administrative reforms, and a general upgrading of library, laboratory, and faculty.

On the negative side, there was a general impersonalization of the total educational process due to the growth from three to six and a half million students, and a general tendency, on the part of faculties, to stress research over teaching in terms of personal and professional advancement. Counterbalancing this, to some extent, was the idea that students themselves should take a greater personal interest in and responsibility for their own education. Even so, these factors of impersonalization do account for much of the student discontent over university education today, and this relates increasingly to what is taught, as well as how and by whom.

Looking ahead, the problems and the strains inherent in this rapid and often inorganic growth are greater still. The initially apparent problems are social rather than educational.

The report of the Kerr Commission on The Future of Higher Education, published about 10 years ago, outlined the problem clearly. While the report was entitled "Quality and Equality," I think I should have to admit, as a member of the Commission, that the thrust is on equality more than on quality of education, which was treated more explicitly in a later report. Part of the problem was sheer numbers, but it ran deeper. On the numbers side, only 2 per cent of young Americans entered higher education a century ago, as against over 40 per cent in 1969--from 50,000 to 6,500,000 students. Normal growth along present curves of development indicated an increase to 8,000,000 students by 1976. But the Kerr report tried to envision 9,000,000 by 1976 by making it possible for an additional million students to come from the lower socioeconomic class during this short interval of six years. Total costs would rise from \$17.2 to \$41 billion during this period.

The reason for the projected growth was seen from the distribution of students by socioeconomic class at that time:

1st Quartile--	48 per cent
2nd "	--28 per cent
3rd "	--17 per cent
4th "	-- 7 per cent

Put in other terms by the Kerr Commission, in the highest socioeconomic class, 19 out of 20 students entered higher education, while only 10 out of 20 comparable students from the lowest socioeconomic quartile did.

Americans were quick to see the inequity of this situation, and in correcting it by larger federal funding, there were new problems created by repeating in the span of less than a decade a growth equal to most of the

long history of higher education in America. Add to this the problem of poor educational preparation for the great majority of those in the lower socio-economic groups--because of poor neighborhood schools in poor neighborhoods with a shrinking tax base of support--and the problems are compounded. Finally, add to all of this the ultimate challenge of the knowledge taught by universities doubling every 15 years, mainly due to their research.

It has been said that never has there been so much expected and demanded of universities, despite a current lowering of their prestige in the public eye because of student unrest, occasional riots, and a consequent drying up, or conditioning by restrictive legislation, or inadequate funding of their private and public sources of support.

In fact, the number of students in higher education this year is not the 9,000,000 projected for 1976, but 11,500,000. Have we maintained our quality of education while accomplishing this fantastic quantitative growth? I wish I could say yes, but, in fact, I think the answer is no. I do not know whether greater access to higher education here in Canada has brought similar problems, but I need not tell you that quality must always be the constant companion of equality or equality is meaningless. There is no easy answer to this problem.

IV

The fourth challenge is the most felicitous since it leads to what may be the best solution to all the others. If there is to be any hope for the modern university, it is in the recreation of a sense of community within it, comprising a strong and organic unity of all its component parts, particularly faculty, administration, and students and, hopefully, trustees and alumni as well, who are external to the university, but internal to its ultimate success.

The university today needs great inner strength, a strength that has been

sapped by internal disunity--faculties that have forgotten that the most important function of a professor is to teach, to profess; students who have on occasion pressed dissent to a point of violence and boorishness that militate against those great central values of the university, reason and civility; administrators who have forgotten that their greatest function is to unite all the component parts of the university in an effort to define its basic goals and values, and to maintain them against all internal and external forces that would pervert or denature them.

The creation of such a community is no easy task. It will require a more realistic involvement of all the component parts of the university in the total task of the university to a new extent and, at times, in a totally new dimension. This has been happening to an ever greater degree in American universities where many councils, committees, and senates are now organized on a tripartite basis of faculty, students, and administration.

I should warn against a sense of panacea here, or a confusion of capabilities or functions: for students are not faculty, and faculty are not administration, and administration is neither faculty nor students, although administrators are in the service of both. What is needed is respect for each essential function, and a recognition of the necessity of various roles requiring various talents and capabilities.

Latin American universities have equated all roles with much less than success. France over-centralized university control and administration since Napoleon's time, and now seems to be swinging in the opposite direction. The Anglo-Saxon world of universities has tried to realize university governance on a system of layers of influence: trustees, faculty, administration, with perhaps all too little student involvement. This last deficiency is now being corrected, but it is difficult to change without overreacting. Hopefully, the world experience will lead to world balance in university governance--

although the present experience in change is ambiguous and ambivalent at best.

My only plea at the moment is for the community, for total involvement of the total community to the full extent that each component part has something valid to offer, backed by real knowledge, real competence, and real commitment to the total reality of the university.

I have spoken of the internal strains from faculty, students and administration, each of whom needs to reassess its best role and best contribution to the health and vitality of the total educational enterprise. I believe that trustees and alumni also have something of value to contribute, for the university is in the public domain whatever its sponsorship, public or private, and the trustees and alumni best represent the public of each university.

Community is, however, the central reality to be achieved. Only the total community can assure the unique reality and contribution of the university. Only community can vindicate the claim to freedom and autonomy, which provide the essential climate of the university, by a responsible community exercise of them. If the community is irresponsible or deficient, or worse, uninterested and uncommitted, the whole enterprise becomes suspect, and any element of the community can jeopardize the whole endeavor by its failure to respond to the challenge at hand. Either the university rules itself or others will rule it to its ultimate demise as an open society characterized by rationality and civility, freedom and autonomy, and the charge to criticize church and state.

We can conclude by insisting that in a time of total change, no institution, particularly no university, can survive without change. Wisdom is, of course, required for fruitful change which means that change for the sake

of change is not what we are suggesting. Where is wisdom? Again, we must have recourse to community, for total wisdom must somehow reside there.

There are some general guidelines, most of which have already been mentioned. The university should not be overwhelmed by technocracy; humanism is the university's best heritage. Values loom high in any assessment of university wisdom, and values are best manifested by the priorities that characterize the university enterprise. I would hope that universities might look to the ultimate reality that humanize all human concerns, and these are basically philosophical and theological concerns.

Perhaps this is too much to require of universities which are today, in large measure, secular institutions. But, I must insist that salvation for universities, in a time of great change, cannot be otherwise envisioned, for in no other way are there available those effective and immutable anchors that make for stability and progress in the face of change. If all is changing, the game is lost. What is needed is the vision of a great institution, ever new, ever old, grounded in tradition and open to the future.