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"THE IDEA OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY"

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THE IDEA OF A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

There was a time in this country when virtually all higher education was sponsored by some religious organization. Even so recent as 1940 two-thirds of all college students were in church-related colleges. The number of students in such colleges has increased in the intervening years, but the percentage has dropped. Now only one-third of all students are in church-related colleges. What has happened in the quarter of a century controlled by our age group--those of us gathered in this room--has been a tremendous upsurge of state-sponsored education. It has been a magnificent achievement. Everyone can take satisfaction in having participated in a very far-sighted communal action, in having placed on themselves added taxes and having assigned an increasing portion of the gross national product to the betterment of a world that is yet to come. It is an act of faith in the processes of education that none of us who are engaged directly in the work can fail to appreciate. This nation has indeed declared that higher education is the responsibility of all men, acting through political institutions.

In the face of this recognition, why, then, the University of Dallas? Why a private school? Why a Catholic one? It would seem logical to turn over the whole apparatus to an agency willing to absorb it and to devote the energies of the Church to other matters--other matters such as the salvation of souls, or--as many would have it--to social welfare. Before we ask private citizens--Catholic and non-Catholic--to support this enterprise, therefore, we need to answer some

pertinent questions.

What is the pertinence of the Church to education? It was at one time, admittedly, the protection of the faith that was involved. Since higher education was in the hands of religious authority--mostly Protestant--the education for Catholics had best be Catholic. In this day of more or less neutral state education, however, the protective argument loses its force. And yet, in a far more fundamental way and a more general-non-sectarian way, it is a matter of protection of the faith. Education is much more associated with religion than with politics. Indeed, education is not possible except through the re-formation of the person, through his transformation from a being that was incomplete and limited to one that has begun the life-long process of unfolding the potential of a being made in the image of God. That is the nature of education, whatever campus it is on. This is not to say that secular education is wrong, that it should not exist. It must exist; it is the only practical way a pluralistic society can further its aims. But if it is to be viable, this education must have before it the kind of model provided by a school with the dimensions of religious freedom available at your diocesan university. I have said religious freedom. It has been one of my startling discoveries to find more religious freedom in a Catholic University such as ours than in other sorts of colleges, including state institutions.

What does this freedom mean? Is it the right to teach theology openly as a legitimate study? It is that, true, but if it were not more than that, then some appendage to a secular curriculum might suf-

face. Newman Clubs might do the job, adding religion at the fringes of campuses. But there is more to it than that. In actuality every subject has a religious dimension which, if omitted, leaves a discipline not fully explored. That fact is obvious in history, philosophy, and literature, but it exists in other disciplines as well. The mere fact that I teach physics, for example--and in a Catholic university--says something about the Church and about physics.

What I am pointing out here is that society needs the church-related college. Society would strangle in its own taboos if the norm for education did not exist outside political entanglements. For a university to serve as a norm, of course, the education it proffers must be superior. Perhaps it is fortunate that the University of Dallas is church-sponsored but not church-supported; there is no chance for complacency, no sitting back on the oars, because support must be won year by year from the most responsible citizenry of the region. Each year the quality and nature of the education offered must be examined by men like you who bear some responsibility for the place.

Let me indicate to you briefly something of the standing of your university. There are no official ratings, of course, other than accreditation, which represents minimal standing. Virtually every college that means to have any sort of permanent duration is accredited. But a kind of general estimate of the quality of a school becomes current in academic circles and a few unofficial agencies actually attempt a rating on statistical bases. There are about 2,500 insti-

tutes of higher learning in the country--about 1,200 four-year colleges. The University of Dallas is somewhere in the upper ten percent. One publication had us fifth among Catholic schools in the country, twelfth among all schools in the South. That would rate the University of Dallas ahead of most schools you would know. The reputation of a school is based on faculty--the degrees they have won, their rate of pay, their publications--and on students--how good they are when they enter, how well they score on graduation, what honors and fellowships they win, how they do in graduate school: it is also based on libraries and here we are rated down; we have a very well selected and well handled library, but the number of volumes is still limited for our quality of school; we need a major gift to bring our holdings up to par. Actually we have the use of other libraries in the region, but we take advantage of the other schools in not quite carrying our share in libraries. But aside from that, the University of Dallas comes out exceedingly well. And despite our low mark on library rating, our general average is higher than other schools in the region.

Take the matter of students. Ours is not an exclusive school. Students of all levels apply, are admitted, and get through to a degree. We take some pains to advise students carefully and do turn them down if we believe they cannot make it through our program. But we have no set cut-off--no artificial standards which eliminate promising if late-blooming students. We accept many students that other universities would reject. Nonetheless we do have an excellent student

body. Students tend to select themselves. They know that a choice for the University of Dallas is a choice for a dedicated life--a declaration that each person intends to be a person of some consequence in society. Students of such ambitions tend to be more talented than their less ambitious compeers, and therefore the student body consistently rates high in scholastic aptitude. Among this student body are over two hundred seminarians, sisters, and priests.

A report received last week from American College Testing Service shows our freshman class of last year rating at 93%--7% from the top---among schools in the country. These students gain a good education and win many national honors. For several years now University of Dallas graduates have won Fulbright and Woodrow Wilson scholarships--the two top awards in the country. This year's class had three Woodrow Wilson winners---something of a break through from the one or two which had been the U.D. pattern of the past. Actually, only Rice, Texas, and the University of Dallas in the state have been in the class of consistent winners at all. The reviewing boards have come to expect good candidates from the University of Dallas.

The quality of instruction which attracted these students and prepared them for honors is the work of a faculty and of a curriculum. The accidents of history--or was it the movement of the Holy Spirit--gathered on our unlikely, mesquite covered hill an erudite, scholarly faculty, one of the more cosmopolitan and multi-lingual in the country, and fashioned out of a mixture of cultures a curriculum that was very much American.

The college experience is a complex and highly individual thing

but the large outlines can be quickly limned in. The first two years are spent essentially in a recapitulation of what Western man has learned, not only in his head but in his heart and in the marrow of his bones. The great discovery made by a student at the University of Dallas is that he is part of a tradition, alive and meaningful and one that can be captured only by the desperately original action of his independent mind. He cannot be taught the virtues; he must experience them in his imagination, and then such words as honor, courage, magnanimity, justice, and mercy are no longer sentimental and embarrassing terms but concepts shaping the view of reality. Let me emphasize that the experience is not one of the past; it is now-- contemporaneous. Ancient logic moves quickly to the computer and every freshman tries his hand at a program on our IBM 1130. It is an exciting two years, an important two years. If a student could spend only two years at the University of Dallas it should be these first two. There is no finer two year program in the country.

The second two years are spent primarily in the acquisition of a discipline. A discipline is a mode of thought, a way of ordering reality. Mathematics, physics, history, literature, philosophy--these are all disciplines, and each has its characteristic mode of thought. Each has, too, its techniques which must be learned and its fund of knowledge which must be mastered, but it is the mode of thought which most characterizes a discipline and which, once adopted, allows the student to acquire his techniques and knowledge with a dexterity born of understanding.

The years after the baccalaureate, either at work or in

graduate school, are the professional years. The graduate business program, for example, designed to pick up students with engineering, scientific, or humanities degrees, is a highly professional, very intense training in modern management. It is remarkably successful and popular in the Fort Worth-Dallas area. There will be about 300 mature students in the graduate program this fall. A portion of it will be taught over the TAGER TV network this fall to students in many locations, including, in all probability, General Dynamics--Fort Worth and Texas Instruments--Sherman.

I give you this quick outline of studies to indicate the kind of thinking and the philosophy of education that directs the course of studies at your diocesan university. We do a rough sort of systems-management approach to curricula in order to maximize benefit from every hour of study, just as we do for every dollar spent on operations or on facilities.

The financial condition of your university is quite sound; its net worth is about fourteen and a half million. Endowment is not yet large enough to cover the gap between tuition charge and cost, and that is why we must have our annual campaign. This campaign must raise \$300,000--\$20,00 of it from Fort Worth. As I have said, I think it is good for us that we must have this campaign; it keeps us on our toes and responsible to society. And I think it is good for the public; it brings a potential donor face to face with some quite fundamental questions about state, education, and the Church.

The education of our youth is a great work. It is a work that belongs to many people. A Catholic University deserves and gets the support of many more Catholics, but there exists for each school

a set of persons who have some natural affinity and natural responsibility for it, although many of these persons are not aware of it. I should hope you would consider yourselves fortunate in having as your diocesan university a school of the quality of the University of Dallas and could awaken in others a sense of identity with this important enterprise.

It is the work of the Church, not at its hierarchical level, not in its liturgical function, but at the level of you and me, in the function of bringing to the children of God a realization of their being made in His image.