FALL CONVOCATION

September 9, 1969

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One of the privileges allowed a university president in an annual fall convocation is the voicing of a vision of the future. For education, as we all know, is not directed toward the past. Nor is it in any practical sense concerned primarily with the present. Education is designed for the future: for ten years from now, twenty years, the twenty-first century, when you who are students now will have your major effect. Is it possible to design an educational plan which will be applicable a score of years away? Must educators be prophets? Must we foretell the future? In part, yes! It is our responsibility to predict what is likely to come, to compare this brute future with what ought to come, and to do what we can to shape the future by a vision of order.

But before you thus indulge my prophetic soul, let me confess that the actual design of curricula is not greatly affected by these autumnal presidential visions. At this university in particular we all talk much about the future. Those of you who are new on campus will discover that here is a faculty of some fecundity, who can say readily and even with a modicum of accuracy what the world will be like a decade hence. But for any of us to design our programs for a given time in the future would be as unwise as to design a
program specifically for the present. These various discussions of the future reveal an openness to things to come, an insurance against the limited value of contemporary relevance. Some sense of direction, some dynamism, is borrowed from the glimpse of the future that many of us here are granted. But we do not tool up, so to say, the dreams we have. We do not attempt to translate them into action. We do not engineer our visions, because future discoveries cannot be engineered.

Whenever society has a definite job to do, such as landing men on the moon, the engineering must be done out of the state of the art at the beginning of a project, at the time the decision is made to do it. Future discoveries are ruled out of planning. Perhaps it is an exaggeration to say that the ship that landed on the moon was obsolescent when it got there. Its youngest ideas were ten years old. By this statement I would not denigrate the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the 400,000 people who worked on the project. There was real development accomplished in devices and systems; real drama in dangers incurred. And important results ensued. The idea of the reliability of physical systems has been explored to its limits, and the gleanings from this development will affect our future television sets and air-conditioners—even finally, perhaps, the Irving telephone system. The feat of management in controlling this immense single-purposed peacetime
project is truly remarkable, opening new possibilities for corporate living. Think of it. Almost half a million people were tied together in their work lives by an extensive systems management. The output of one worker in one part of the country directly affected the timing and work assignment of another worker a continent away. It was as if some gigantic organism existed to which various people were, for a time, connected. Marshall McLuhan's vision of the computer serving as a communal central nervous system became a reality much sooner than even he would have predicted. It would be terrifying if it were not, somehow, curiously old-fashioned.

It was old-fashioned in the very visibility of the apparatus, in the invariable precision required for success. The freedom of the individual, on ground or in space, virtually disappeared. The machine, in effect, was in control. It was an amazing accomplishment of structural planning. But in the year of 1969, it was old-fashioned. For all the excitement of interplanetary discoveries, what the moon project seemed to be, rather than an opening of the space age, was a celebration and a summation of the sixties.

The '60's was a decade of structuralism. The French anthropologist Claude Lévi Strauss pronounced the philosophy of the period in saying that mere observations cannot reveal reality; man must seek for meaning in structures of order which lie hidden below the
surface for appearance. This principle has been long established in physics, in atomic and molecular work, and more recently in solids and fluids; it is a principle recently come to biology with its genetic codes and the double helix model; it is a principle long prevailing in poetry and now governing criticism, having one of its notable outcroppings on this campus. In Politics, Leo Strauss with his theory of secret writing; Eric Voegelin with his order in history, and certainly Willmore Kendall with his virtuous people (people bound together by a largely unconscious structure of virtue) give example to this principle.

I suspect, being something of a structuralist myself, that if I put my mind to it I could discern beneath the recent disorder and disruptions on many university campuses this principle of structuralism at work, in some large prevailing pattern. But if I confine my speculations to territory close at hand, I must say that on this campus the idea of structure is a much more conscious principle than elsewhere, perhaps because most members of this university community do not think of man as driven by forces that he does not comprehend, but sees him as making choices.

In maintaining the structure of education at this University, students play the role of binder, or communicator. This medium is not a very precise means of communication. Professors are frequently misquoted. Nor is it always a safe task. On most campuses
professors do not take kindly to a student's reference to another faculty member—not in class, at least, and not generally outside. Perhaps this sort of thing does require tact; but if a university education is to be one thing—a unity—the only place that unity can exist is in the minds of students. For faculty members, with their various and individual geniuses, pursue different directions. True enough, we try to set up this unity in more formal ways. On the large scale of curricular planning, the courses are designed to complement each other, but the actual correlation can be done only through the medium of students. What is learned in one class is carried to another, and the total curriculum is bound together by this exchange.

One further function of the student as communicator is the bringing of the absolutely contemporary into the campus intellectual consciousness. The latest poet, the new folk songs, the newest theory of learning, the boldest innovation in art—these are matters for students to be proficient in—not necessarily for professors. Upper classmen and graduate students in particular have the responsibility of catching from the journals and from various media the tempo of the times. In this manner every student should participate in the formation of the educational process. In contrast, the kind of play-school involved in the "Free University" or in student representation on curricular committees is a bit of juvenilia
that has no place on an intellectually alive campus; but all
sorts of discussions, formal and informal, certainly do. A large
part of your learning comes to you through the medium of discussion
outside class. I should be surprised if the works of Herbert Marcuse,
for example, showed up in any class we teach, but I should by sorry
if most of you did not know who he is and something about what he
believes. I think you should be familiar with underground films
and rock groups—-but I do not think that these subjects need to
be taught in classes. Students provide the cohesion—-and the
relevance—-for the structure of education.

But the deterministic structuralism of the sixties is over.
If the footprint on the moon marks the end of an era, if
structuralism has had its triumph in our conquest of the
physical universe, to what does the consciousness of the world
now turn? Do we, as Foucault would have it, shut one door
and open another? Not at all. The accomplishments of the
sixties will remain with us. The patterns of reality which
have been traced out will be added to the catalogue of re
sources we draw upon, and the cast of mind which seeks these
patterns will remain as part of the permanent equipage of the
sensibility. But there was a characteristic of the sixties—
one not shared in any large measure by this campus—-which
seems to be in the process of change: it is secularism. The
decade of the sixties was perhaps the most secular ten years his-
tory has known in the last several centuries. The systems it engendered were closed systems, complete in themselves. A belief in the self-sufficiency of man was dominant—of man and his systems, I should say. How dominant will this belief be in the decade ahead? A friend of mine remarked that the era we are now entering is a metaphysical age. Everywhere there are "signals of transcendence," he maintains, and we hear this phrase and this concept increasingly from several quarters.

A shift of the general consciousness toward being rather than knowing has consequences in every aspect of society. For example, a general lessening of excitement about education is already apparent. The gain that have come to society through its emphasis on education since the launching of the Russian sputnik in 1956 have been immense and will not be lost. Higher education has become established as a way of life and as the chief instrument of social adjustment. Barriers of race and wealth have been removed in principle and their dismantling in fact will go on largely through education. But the realization is upon us that the intellect alone cannot be the measure of man's worth. Men as men have value because of what they are, because of what we call their virtues.

The job of education has shifted, then, from a primary emphasis on technical ability to an uncovering of men's fundamental qualities of being. Not that the importance of mathematics and physics— the "hard" sciences—will be lessened; indeed, the rigours inherent in these disciplines will be heightened, not diminished.
structure of learning. But it is the developing of inner qualities rather than the adding of external ones that becomes the central function of education.

What are these qualities? Greatness of soul, magnanimity of spirit, flexibility of mind, creativity, the power to synthesize and judge—these are some of the virtues which can be nurtured by education. These are virtues that make life more satisfying personally, but in the era ahead these are also the qualities which will give men economic and social value. Because of the economic value of personal qualities, all education, public and private, will bend toward their development.

A danger exists in an education directed toward personality, of course, a danger of angelism, of assuming that man is naturally good. The secular world can fall easily into this trap. A metaphysical approach to education, however, can comprehend men as fallen into a very real and imperfect world of contingency, but still connected, through acts of the imagination, through insight—and through grace—with the supernatural life of goodness. That kind of education we call an education in the liberal arts.

The liberal arts are those historical, philosophic, literary, and scientific disciplines that grant insight into the nature of reality through an imaginative recreation of the significant experiences men have had. When we study the Greeks we are not
indulging an antiquarian curiosity but are discovering ourselves. When we study Dante and Shakespeare, Melville and Dostoevsky we seek to acquire not simply the "literary tradition" but insight. A course in mechanics opens a mode of thought, an expanded volume of consciousness to the awareness of being. Passive scholarship has no part in this scheme. Every course offered in a liberal arts curriculum is intended to enlarge the imagination; and the curriculum as a whole is intended to make the imagination coherent and productive. The curriculum on this campus is a notable example of this kind of education and has been recognizably successful. Its success has not come from a snobbery of requiring philosophy or offering Greek but from a thorough penetration of the imagination into almost every crevice of instruction. There is an established pattern to the course of studies, a structure, but in actuality the curriculum changes from year to year. No trivium no quadrivium exists here impervious to change. It is the whole concept of liberal education that is persistent. Within it, courses may be added or dropped, material shifted from one place to another. But it cannot be diluted for mere practicality or deluded by cries of relevance. A liberal education is in itself practical. It is itself relevant. It is the vessel of the virtues of the human spirit. Call them the verities. Be a structuralist and call them
the "invisible presences," the persistent order that lies below the shifting appearances. They are the metaphysical qualities of being.

Is it possible to give to the students who walk the campuses in the fading months of the sixties an education that will fit them for the twenty-first century? It is, indeed, because the qualities of the soul are more persistent than footprints on the moon. An education that develops these qualities, that releases the imagination, that frees a man to realize his being in a field of grace, that is the proper education for the twenty-first century. For all its imperfections, that is the kind of education offered at the University of Dallas in the fall of 1969 at the beginning of its fourteenth year on this campus.

As president of the University of Dallas I declare the academic year of 1969-70 officially open.