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### Quo Vadis?

When I was in grade school, growing up in a little town of 500 in Northern Illinois, my mother served as a part-time speech coach for the high school students. The lessons were always given after school in our home, so I heard many a high school girl or boy practice. There was an oration entitled, Quo Vadis?, which I have always remembered. When I asked my mother what that meant, she said it was Latin for "Whither Goest Thou." The substance of that oration entirely escapes me, but the title has remained and it happens to fit what I want to say to you today. Incidentally, when I saw some of our classicists at a party the other evening, I checked out my translation of the Latin title and was told that mother had said rather elegantly what might be freely translated as, "Where are you going?" On reflection, I concluded that her King James version of the Latin sounded better than the modern version!

Today most of you, except for those who will go on to some form of graduate or professional study, are about to shift roles. You have been for several years the recipient of a higher education. Henceforth you are, whether you like it or not, going to be a provider of it, for all universities, whether they be private or public, are subsidized by taxpayers and donors. That is sometimes hard for students to believe, because they are conscious of the money which their parents have spent on them, of the earnings of their own which they have put into it, and of the loans which they have accrued. Nevertheless, as your alumni organization will shortly call to your attention, your education has been subsidized so that you would not have to pay the full cost. Otherwise, college would be accessible only to those who could afford it and that solution does not appeal to most of us as fair.

As you now change from recipient to provider, you will find yourselves engaged in a great national debate. It revolves around whether the job market

really requires a college education, and if not whether we are then sending too many of our young people to college. It is that question which I want to discuss with you, and it is that question to which my Latin title is addressed.

The question of whether the job market requires a college education is deceptively simple. It sounds straightforward enough, but it conceals some very serious problems. Let me discuss three of them with you.

No one believes that all college education should be abolished, it is only a question of whether we are now sending more people to college than the job market requires, and whether the job market is the only test of the need for a college education. Thus three questions immediately arise:

1. How many college students do we need to satisfy the requirements of the job market?
2. Once we have decided how many we will need, how will we select those who are to go?

It is true that the sole reason for going to college is to prepare for the job market, or is that only one of the reasons why one might go?

Suppose we start with the question of how many college students are needed to satisfy the requirements of the job market. It does appeal to one's sense of logic that if only so many chemists, or engineers, or lawyers, or accountants are needed, there is a certain inefficiency in training more than the number needed. The trouble is, the problem is not that simple. All of the experience, both here and abroad, is that manpower planning is a very tricky business. When the development of technology makes space travel possible, there is a sudden need for aerospace engineers. If there is an Arab boycott on oil, it imposes an immediate premium on other sources of energy and there is a scramble for trained personnel to work on the problem. Even in a field like teacher training, where we hear a drumfire of statements that we have too many teachers, one cannot help but ask

the question of whether there are too many teachers or too little commitment to the needs of young people. In this connection, I recall very well that while in Moscow in the Summer of 1975 attending a meeting of the International Association of Universities, I heard a speaker from one of the Eastern European countries, in which there is an extensive commitment to manpower planning, say that in their estimates of the previous year they had missed the required number of teachers by fifty percent! That is a margin of error which does not particularly commend itself to one as to height of efficiency.

I do not mean to suggest that manpower planning is totally impossible. I do mean to say that it is an inexact art, that it is unlikely to be wholly accurate, and that it cannot be expected to solve all of our problems with mathematical accuracy. It is made even more complicated by the fact that all of our studies show that people change career lines several times during a lifetime of work. All law schools know, for instance, that many of their graduates will never practice law. A significant proportion of engineers go into business rather than engineering. And so it goes. If those of you who are students ask your fathers and mothers how many of them are doing what at your age they thought they would be doing, you may be astonished at the answers you will receive.

Suppose we, nevertheless, conclude that some form of manpower planning is essential in our day, and that we will limit college enrollment based upon our best estimates of the numbers of trained people the job market can absorb. We then have a problem of having to select the students who will attend. How will we do that?

One way, and a way which we use heavily in this country, is to rely upon grade averages from high school and upon test scores. There is enough experience with these criteria to know that they do predict with considerable accuracy the academic performance of the student. Academic performance is not, however, the same as success in life. The latter may be heavily determined by motivation, by

the individual's capacity to get along with others, and even by just plain good health. Under our present system of eligibility for college, any high school graduate can find a college to which entry is possible. It may not be the college of his or her first choice, but it will be an accredited institution and it will open the door to the student to demonstrate the qualifications which he or she has that will lead to subsequent success.

There are, of course, other ways of going at the college entry problem, even in those societies which sharply limit the number of openings. When President Enarson and I were in The People's Republic of China in November of 1974 with a group of college presidents, we visited many of their universities. We were told that the total number of college students is determined by a national committee which decides how many individuals are needed in each category, and that admission is determined partly by academic records, but more by the judgment of peer work groups who decide which students will best represent the people. Good health is also a factor in the judgment. Given their system, it is clear that a student who hopes to be chosen will have demonstrated commitment to and approval of the political system which pervades all of the life of the Chinese. Moreover, an applicant who is accepted will study whatever subject he or she is assigned to, and will later accept employment in whatever part of the country and for whatever employer the government selects. Perhaps that is necessary in a country of 850,000,000 which is poor by our standards, and which has such urgent other priorities. It would, however, be abhorrent to our personal freedoms to ask that college admission standards relate to our political beliefs, or to impose mandatory manpower controls thereafter on what one did and where one lived.

The point is that once a nation decides to limit the number of opportunities for higher education its troubles are not over. It is very hard to accurately forecast manpower needs and to identify the numbers needed in particular job categories. It is equally hard to devise a fair and acceptable system for deciding

which of the many applicants will be allotted the limited opportunities, yet people realize that a heavy proportion of the leadership positions in the society will go to the college graduates. A frequent charge in both the Chinese and Russian societies is that a disproportionate number of the children of the power elite find their way into the universities, and hence into the best positions.

If there are practical difficulties in the way of limiting the opportunities for a college education, there is also a philosophical problem which may, in the long run, be of even greater importance to us. Do we really want to say that the principal reason for going to college is to obtain job training?

It would be foolish to deny that there has always been a strong link between higher education and a particular kind of work. The early private colleges in the East were largely thought of as training grounds for those who were going into the ministry, medicine, and school teaching. Later on, President Lincoln signed the landmark Morrill Act which encouraged the establishment of land-grant institutions and state universities with a primary purpose of developing agriculture and the industrial arts. Even our present-day institutions include colleges of law, engineering, pharmacy, public health, dentistry, medicine, nursing, music, business, and social work, education, architecture, art and so forth, all of which train one for fairly specific job markets. There remains that great heart of our undergraduate program, the liberal arts college, which teaches not only its own students but offers service courses to almost every other college. We do not pretend that in our liberal arts colleges we are training individuals for specific jobs, rather we argue simply that we are turning out students with a broad perspective, and analytical mind, and, hopefully, a civilized approach to life itself. We know far better than others that we do not always succeed in our objectives, but we are more disturbed by the notion that our objectives are wrong than by criticism that we could do a better job.

If it is true that training for the job market is not the only reason for going to college, or in many cases not even the most important one, what are the other reasons?

First of all, there is the fact that actual hours of work, as compared with leisure, are going down. This has been true throughout American history and it still continues. The result is that all of us are going to have more time during the course of our lives to indulge our own interests as compared with those of our employers. Sometimes, of course, those interests coincide. That is why universities so often get more hours out of their faculty members than any reasonable work schedule would assume. We happen to be paying professors for doing what they already like to do, therefore, they keep right on doing it long after we could reasonably expect them to work. For a great many of us, however, college supplies a diversionary interest which is lifelong, personal, and enormously satisfying. I think of the business executive who had a side hobby of orchids and who became an authority on that subject; of a young lawyer who, while practicing, indulged his interest in history by writing a book about the Civil War; of a medical doctor whose off-hours' love was music; of the numerous statesmen who have found relaxation in art; of the philanthropist who made his money in industry and then spent large portions of it trying to improve the performing arts in a university. There is, in other words, a "quality of life" aspect of all of our lives which may or may not be associated with our particular field of work. It is often spurred on by an interest acquired in college which was, by deliberate design or the exigencies of life, bypassed in favor of something else but which retained a satisfying self-interest. Are we to say that because that interest was not directly job related it was not worthwhile? Or can we say that such an interest would have been acquired anyway when the truth is that it often comes about quite accidentally because a student is exposed to a field which was previously unknown to him or her?

In the second place, we should ponder how much of a correlation there is between our ability to maintain the world's foremost democracy and the fact that we have made a college education possible for so many of our people. The hard fact is that the number of countries in which one finds a viable democracy is steadily shrinking. The problems of our day are said to be too complex to resolve in a democratic manner. Almost every major decision we are called upon to make involves difficult trade-offs. We are facing a desperate shortage of energy for which many people believe atomic power is the only answer, yet we are fearful of the damage which it may do to our environment and to our physical well-being. We are intrigued with the possibilities for good which inhere in genetic manipulation through recombinant DNA, yet we wonder whether we are creating a monster which will then be beyond our control. We want more jobs for our people, but we do not want to damage the environment or further pollute our air and water. We see ourselves spending an enormous share of our national income on armament, and we long to divert this money into other desperately needed priorities, yet we are afraid of what this might mean in preserving our freedom. We know that the Malthusian predictions about the growth of our population as compared with the availability of food resources are beginning to come true, yet we do not know how to square control of the population with some of our moral and ethical convictions. We want full employment so that a forgotten segment of our population will not suffer the social and economic handicap which unemployment imposes upon them, but we do not want runaway inflation and our economists can only speculate about the solution to that problem. We want to share our capacity to produce food beyond our own needs, but the mechanics of international trade and the endless need in the poorer countries of the world baffle us.

These problems are not unique to those of us who live in the United States, they plague most of the world. But there is a difference. We are still trying to deal with them in a democratic fashion, whereas much of the rest of the world

has given up that ideal as impossible. It is said that such things can be handled only by "experts", that they are too complicated for most of us to grasp. If history confirms that judgment, we will have lost many of our most cherished freedoms. If, on the other hand, we preserve the opportunity of our people to pursue an education beyond the high school whether or not it trains them for a specific job, would it not then seem more likely that our system of government will long endure?

I have now come full cycle, and I am back to where I began. Quo Vadis? Where are you going on the issue of higher education? In your role as taxpayers and donors of the future you will be involved in the debate over whether our society will continue to make higher education readily available, or whether it will become much more restricted.

If the past is, as the poets tell us, the prologue of the future, we know a great deal about the tie that binds you and the university.

- . Many of you will indeed take jobs for which you have trained while you were here. Others will find no direct relationship between the jobs which they take and the course work which they did here. In either case, you will not work as many hours a day, a week, or a year as your parents, or as their parents did before them. You are, therefore, going to have more time to exploit your own interests.
- . Most of you will change career lines several times in the course of your lives, and by the time your own children are in college your perspective will be different than it is now.
- . Almost all of you will travel, not only in this country, but elsewhere in the world, and as you travel your journeys will be more interesting because sometime while you were here your curiosity was aroused by another society, another culture, another and very different way of doing things.



- . Because your working life will not entirely absorb your time, you will develop avocations, many of which will have their roots in an interest which you picked up while at the university. For some of you that avocation may ultimately blossom into a new career, while for others it will simply remain a great source of satisfaction in your lives.
- . Finally, we know from studies of your predecessors that you will more actively participate in the life of the community, the state and the nation than the average citizen and that our democracy will be strengthened thereby.

I am not an unbiased observer of the university scene. My life has been richer because I had the opportunity to go to college even though my family's financial resources were very limited. I believe the society benefits, as does the individual, from our very accessible system of higher education. Perhaps you will come to a similar conclusion as you think about it over the coming years.

In any event, I wish you great good luck as you face the future.