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The Future of Education

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A D D R E S S

The Future of Education
Senior Convocation
May 11, 1965

*Address to Faculty
Faculty Day 1965*

Dr. Donald A. Cowan
President
University of Dallas

Two nights ago I stood for a moment on the redwood deck of the Dominican Priory and, looking about me, realized, with some surprise, that tranquility dwelt upon this campus -- something I had almost forgotten in the past three years. Perhaps you have forgotten it, too, under the pressures of study and the accelerating demands the work here has placed on you. But it is a tranquility you will become increasingly aware of after you have left this place. There will be memories come into your mind--that you were among the first to set foot upon the concrete walk that runs along the ridge--that indeed you saw the ridge tamed and the wildlife withdraw and surrender the campus--most of the time--to a kind of civilization. You will have images of the valley stretching away from the library windows, and they will be tranquil images. And you will realize that the mesquite, which yesterday was thrashing wildly about in the hurricane rain, are truly the peaceful groves of academe.

Four years ago you entered this straggly grove. In the four years you have been here, the world has changed considerably. Automation is here; a new kind of education has taken over, a new Church, a new society. Great men have died--men whose names will reverberate through the ages--Winston Churchill, John the Twenty-third, William Faulkner, T. S. Eliot. And here on the streets of Dallas a young hero fell in a mighty drama whose pageantry and scope and form few people in the world were quite as well prepared to understand as you, who now sit tranquilly before me. You understood

because you have been vested with the great traditions--with the major literary, philosophical, political, scientific, artistic, and theological traditions--and you have been made different by the vestments you wear. Already you are public men; you are cast in the mold of heroes and, willy nilly, you will serve that end. Who are you? Achilles? Odysseus? Orestes or the furies? Job or his comforters? Beowulf? Roland? Alyosia, Sonia, Ishmael, Lion or a little fyce dog--oh, you are a rare audience for whom I could call forth a thousand names in confidence that each would touch some communal reference among you. You are all of these and more, for these heroes tread the circles of your mind like Virgil to point out the way you must go. And there, too, scattered along the three levels of your minds, sit this faculty, ready to help because you are forever their pupils. And when you return to the sweet life, remember us. You bear a part of us into eternity.

You carry a portion of our hopes and our dreams. Whatever task God gives you in the building of a Christian society, may you do it well. And--if I may play the part of Virgil for the moment--remember, that when it seems like Hell, keep going. The way leads up.

I shall forego the somewhat more grandiose aspects implied by the title The Future of Education and speak more directly about the future of the University of Dallas. Perhaps on some other occasion I shall indulge my propensity for the pocalyptic vision, but then to not quite so trapped an audience.

Seminary: Let me mention first the opening this fall of the

college department of the diocesan seminary on the campus, with Father Maher as Rector. This event has great portents for the University, and I am sure that we owe Fr. Meyers and Fr. Wilson as well as Fr. Maher a debt of gratitude for using their influence with the Bishop for opening the seminary this year. We hope to have new residence halls for the seminary completed by next fall; in the meantime the seminarians will be housed in Jerome Hall, the only one of the dormitories which has sufficient space to take care of their necessary activities. The location of the seminary on the University campus, with the seminarians taking our regular courses, should strengthen the ties between the University and the diocesan clergy and gain us some active support in the recruitment of students from this diocese, in which we have lagged rather seriously in the past. Its presence on campus is also some financial assistance to us.

But more than this, we now have an opportunity to discharge an important professional obligation to the Church: the education of the clergy. We are grateful to Bishop Gorman for this opportunity.

The New Science Lecture Hall: This building will be completed in a few weeks. The seating will arrive from England about the first of October, but in the meantime we shall be able to make use of the building with makeshift seating arrangements. There is an attractive faculty lounge in the new building, which should prove to be a center for the interchange of ideas among faculty members. The additional classrooms will give us adequate space for some time

to come. There are no new offices in this building; and we recognize that faculty office space is most inadequate this year, but when the graduate building is completed, a year from now, the shortage should be eliminated.

The Faculty Committees: The University has reached the stage where it must project a comprehensive long-range plan for its expansion. When fully developed, this plan will be the most important document in the direction of University growth--both financially and academically. It will guide the Board of Trustees in its policy decisions; Administration and Faculty must work closely together in its development. The five committees appointed by Father Fandal for our long-range study will necessarily undergo some period of confusion, not entirely undesirable. There has been no attempt to over-organize this work, by appointing chairmen and preparing exhaustive agenda. One of the first tasks of each committee, I suspect, will be to prepare a list of information needed for planning purposes. Naturally many of us have thought a good deal about the ten-year plan for various parts of our program, but I can assure you that if we had the perfect solution to a problem already worked out, we should not bother you with it. If this University is to step into its era of greatness, it will need shaping by many minds working together in some harmony. Unlike the self-study of four years ago, then, this work is not performed for an outside agency or by any set of external standards; it should not engender the sort of ill feelings and suspicions that these rather regimented studies have tended to evoke on all campuses,

including our own; instead it should awaken among us greater optimism and appreciation, since it is the working of the creative imagination and the illumination of insight that will be required for our project. Let me urge each of you to bring to your topic enthusiasm and imagination. If the subject proves arid to you, we shall let you off and find other ways for you to participate in the long-range planning; but we do need the genius which resides in this faculty to guide the University of Dallas in the next decade.

The Committee on Financing must make a serious study of academic costs as they will expand during the next decade, primarily in the increase of faculty salaries. It is essential that, along with other universities, we move the pay of professors up from its disgracefully low position on the national scale of income. It is to be hoped that the Financial Committee will establish guidelines for faculty salaries during the next ten years, showing the spectrum of salaries in colleges generally and pointing to student load and other income-producing features which are correlated with salary. It is to be hoped further that this committee will take a realistic look at tuition rates from the standpoint of academic costs; it should likewise suggest a long-range budget. The present budget, incidentally, is a very tight one for the coming year. It must have been obvious to many of you that there was something of a shakedown going on in the Spring when we engaged a new auditing firm to revise our accounting and control system. This step was necessary for the University in passing from its more loosely organized formative years into the rigor that will be necessary for it to become

a major institution. Although this inquisition exhausted many of us, it nevertheless resulted in a much sounder financial operation for the University. We now have a budget balanced under the assumption of reasonable contributions to the University, and we can live with it in a sense of security. Mr. Lange, our new comptroller, will explain some of its details to you in the afternoon session.

Thus, though the immediate operations of the University must be conducted with frugality, the net worth of the institution has risen very sharply during the past three years to about \$11 million; and I can say to you with more confidence than at any time in the past that this University will not founder on financial shoals.

The Committee on University Facilities: This committee will have the responsibility of making plans for the appearance of the campus. Despite its present bareness, I think we all realize that this can become one of the most beautiful campuses in the country. But it presents some real difficulties which must be faced during the next ten years. In the immediate future, the placement of the graduate building, the gymnasium, and the laboratories must be studied. Some real imagination is needed in the projection of our needs--in particular a realistic appraisal of the future of libraries, together with a specification of our own requirements.

The Student Life Committee: This committee will need to make a study of how increasing tuition and other academic costs will affect enrollment. I think you have heard that the prospect this year is for a somewhat larger student body than last year. We have again a very good freshman class, about the same in academic average as last

year's, leaving us still, I should predict, second in the state in college board scores for entering freshmen. Recruitment for next year is already underway; the first time we have begun this work on time, and we can reasonably expect to accept some 300 boys and 200 girls, which, with the religious and seminarians, will be our freshman quota for some time to come.

The other committees: have their particular importance; I shall want to work closely with the Graduate Committee in the months ahead, considering all the possible programs for graduate work, in particular the ones which will be inaugurated next year.

In view of the expense and trouble, the dedication and the agony, required to operate a privately endowed, religiously oriented institution of higher learning, what we must ask ourselves from time to time is the crucial question: is it worth it? Does a university such as ours have a necessary role to perform, for nothing short of its being necessary could justify the expense and trouble. In order to give any sort of brief answer to this question, let me for a moment survey the educational situation today.

During my unprecedentedly long tenure of office, the past three years have produced a revolution on the educational scene the like of which the world has never before witnessed. America, it seems, has suddenly recognized its educational mission: to lead the world in culture as in power. The Educational Facilities Act has stimulated classroom building and the new act now about to be enacted will greatly broaden its scope. Governor Connally made higher education

the chief plank in his campaign for re-election. Parents are ready to make sacrifices for the education of their children--to recognize the tax-deductible status for a much longer period--and American students, I think we will admit--are much more ready to learn than they have been in the past.

The problem is: what are they to learn? (Few people seem greatly concerned on this minor point.) Certainly more vocational training will not be adequate--not even in junior colleges. Modern life provides vocational training in abundance: industry, business (think of the elaborate program of IBM or General Electric), the armed services, government agencies, the Peace Corps--all provide a way for a young person to be paid while learning an occupation. Something like an apprenticeship system is being established. Virtually no youngster expects any longer to enter upon his life work with the B.A. as his final educational adventure. He will be educated, willy-nilly, as he earns his living--and in the way society wants him to be educated.

What does it leave for the university to do? What does it leave for the undergraduate program: The function has changed in our time. Let me say that unconsciously educational theoreticians have come to look on undergraduate life as an experience rather than as a training. Actually, we look on it so here; surely and unhappily it must be so regarded at Berkeley and, I think, at most colleges. There is almost a unanimity of outlook on this point, but on the kind of experience--ah, that is another matter. On the kind of experience we differ so markedly here at this University (and should differ, I

believe, likewise at other privately-supported, church-related institutions)--we differ so markedly as to see on many campuses the exact antithesis of what we represent. Briefly, we conceive of the college years as a formed experience, not a chaotic one; structured out of useful content but arranged symbolically in order for the whole to mean much more than its parts--to pre-figure, indeed, the totality of experience which the student will have in the rest of life. Opposed to that is the unformed experience, the attempt to structure motives for action out of the data of immediate experience. The unformed experience is not a new thing in the world; it is familiar even on campuses in other parts of the world. But it is new in America. It has come about largely through a weakness inherent in secular education. In an unstable situation such as has been created by the very sudden growth of state education, small destructive elements can have immense effects, and egalitarianism which wears the cloak of democracy can prevent the reformulation of purpose.

I do not mean to make the State Universities into the bete noir of education; the very magnitude of their problems have led to worthwhile experiments and improvements, but at the same time there has grown up within them a tendency to treat the students as the masses -- to mechanize and depersonalize them. The concept of master and disciple which has been central to Western education throughout the centuries from Greek times on is not practical on the large campuses, and more than that, is viewed with suspicion even when it does occur. The student is on his own or a member of a student guild -- not an apprentice to a discipline. He will have experience,

raw experience, but unguided by his learning, since the depersonalized classroom does not carry over into life. Western civilization cannot be nurtured by such a disjointed and meaningless procedure. Some kind of unity, some sense of wholeness is needed if the student is to realize his true identity as a person. At the University of Dallas we say that what is needed is the formed experience.

We believe that the formed experience should occur in every course -- indeed we think the mark of a liberal arts course is that it changes a person, not merely informs him, that it elevates him, increases his magnanimity, imbues him with virtues. Be at ease about this effect; it is safe to say that it occurs where ever a professor teaches with his whole being, when he identifies himself with his subject, when he enjoys it and sees it always in a new light as he would view a beloved person. The experience is not sought directly but only through a subject, through what Father Lynch has called submission to the finite. And then the form shines through. I take it the kind of professors we have are ones who thus handle their subjects.

We believe, too, that the courses must fit together to make of the full four years one total experience. Our core curriculum is aimed at this effect and needs to be woven constantly into a tighter matrix; each of our 14 major disciplines must be aimed at a total experience, and in this effort we have some inadequacies still. But we have the concept of the formed experience, certainly more than most places have, perhaps more than any. There is something quite special about this university. We have a job to do, a mission to

accomplish; what we do here can change the world.

And that, I take it, is the function of the privately supported liberal arts college. And (to use my title) it is the Future of Education.