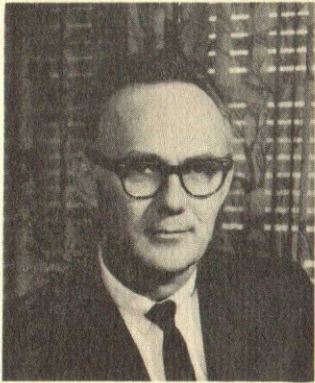




CONVOCATION ADDRESS
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Dr. Donald A. Cowan
President





The ceremony we are here celebrating marks the opening of the fifteenth year of the University of Dallas. The computer has just reported to me that there are 1359 registered students; the previous high was 1270. At a time of declining enrollment in private schools, the University of Dallas continues its careful growth from year to year. A few here gathered on the stage have seen all of these years unfold. A number more have counted a dozen autumns. To those of our company who saw the wilderness beaten back from the ridge on which the mall now runs, the present appearance, quality, solid financial condition, and reputation of this university seem something of a miracle. To you who are students here the University must seem long established; many of you chose to come to this place when it already had substantially its present appearance, although you seniors saw much of the present structure take shape. For most of you, then, any congratulations we pay ourselves on past accomplishments have no meaning; and I think you are right. It is the present that is our concern.

A university is always in the process of construction. Every year it is different because the people who make up the community are different. A fourth of the student body and, in most colleges, a fifth of the faculty, change each year; here, for numerous reasons, the faculty is considerably more stable. We are aware that the entering freshmen each fall could completely alter the temper of the school; and each year we look with delicious and fearful anticipation toward their arrival. But despite the efflux of the old and familiar and the influx of the new and strange, the nature of

this university persists. Something shapes the sensibility of the people who spend time on this campus, something which causes most of them to join—student and professor alike—in the common enterprise.

The common enterprise is the development of a community of wisdom. In this respect, this university has always been clear in its aims. The factory model of a college in which the students are the material to be processed and the faculty is the processor has never applied to this institution. The model here has been that of professor and student working together at the business of re-creating and extending learning. Both are scholars. Both—in theory, at least—are interested in learning, in exploring old ideas together and discovering new facets, new insights. The classroom is a laboratory, a stage, an arena, in which something of importance might happen. It is not supposed to be a mechanical or electronic reproduction of an old show—a summer rerun—where all knowledge and even the jokes are already in cans. It is not a scriptorium, where the master reads from his yellowed notes and all the little scribes make faithful copies. On the contrary, a classroom is a place where something happens, something exciting for the professor and student. Ah, some students and professors fail us at times and certainly sometimes the excitement is very quiet and almost concealed, but on our campus this excitement in learning is the expected rather than the incidental occurrence.

In the scheme of things here, however, the student is not the center of the enterprise. Let me illustrate the meaning of this perhaps surprising statement by referring to a story which most of you study here in your classes on one level or another: Faulkner's "The Bear." In it, you remember, a young man—Isaac McCaslin—is allowed, at a certain age, to go to the big woods as a participant in the hunt. Later in his life he is to speak of the wilderness as his college; certainly he receives an education on the hunt that is remarkably thorough: he learns virtues, he learns the lore and the myths of the old wild free time; he hears the "best of all talking" among the men; he learns to be scared, but not to be afraid. But his learning has come precisely because the hunters are engaged in a serious occupation; had they staged a game for him—had their principal aim been instruction; had they sought to give him only what he wanted, Isaac McCaslin would have had

a different and less important experience indeed. The hunt itself, then, the enterprise, as I have called it—the quest for wisdom—is the center of university life. If through some cataclysm the students disappeared from this campus, the faculty and administration would be immensely disappointed and feel deprived but would go right on at the business of learning, and not as workers in a research institute, but as persons who must express the love of their disciplines—as professors in a university. The university then, as I am explaining ours, is not like a public school—primarily a place for the instruction of students—not a utilitarian service but a center of learning.

I would not want by this to deny the importance of the students. A professor would, indeed, be deprived if there were no students to come alive at his instruction, to catch on to an idea and set it growing in new soil, in the surprising ecology of learning. The greatest reward a professor has, far outstripping the reviews and footnotes he might gather for his books and articles, is the awareness of leaning in his pupils. The ongoing of wisdom is what is important: something in which the old and young may share, the furthering of a common enterprise which will, we hope, outlast us all.

One thing that has distinguished this campus has been the presence on it of a great body of oral wisdom, of theories and structures and explication never printed in books but existing wholly by word of mouth, with scraps of it here and there in student notebooks. I know that you students who have been here for sometime are aware of this phenomenon: I know you have seen it grow in class, have perhaps added to it yourself. You have the privilege of being in class with professors who are authorities in their fields, who speak with first-hand knowledge of their disciplines and are free to add to them or modify them before your eyes. The professors, too, have the privilege of having in their classes students who do them the honor of original and independent thought, thus celebrating and illuminating the intellectual traditions they love. Professors and students together join the common enterprise.

This interplay of student and professor that I have ascribed to this campus is actually the paradigm of university action—the very "idea" of a university. That this paradigm has virtually disappeared from

campuses elsewhere is a warning to us not to take pride in the privilege granted us of harboring here, for a time, the spirit of wisdom. We have not captured it by our prowess; it is not a trophy for our mantle-piece or a bird to sing in our cage. It is a free spirit, that flies where it will. But of one thing we are certain: if the lonely pedant or the dull and dreary lecturer does not invite it, neither does the radical activist. The spirit of wisdom is to be found in community, in the working together of all elements; and perhaps the desire for community more than any other quality is what makes a university Catholic in our time.

A universality of experience is condensed, intensified, given form and a spiritual quality by the coming together of individuals into a community. I have spoken of this campus as an intellectual community because it is the search for the intellect that brings us into common purpose. But we come to know that the intellect has no boundaries, that it penetrates every action, sharpening our wit, blunting our anger, softening our grief; and we find, indeed, that **intellectus** and **caritas** become inseparable—that understanding and love are single in the ability to bind individuals into a community.

It is a different community each year and yet it is the same one. It surrounds us now. We are in it—the community for the academic year 1970-71. It is my privilege to declare the fifteenth year of the University of Dallas officially underway.