

**LMU|LA**

Loyola Marymount  
University  
Los Angeles

**Robert B. Lawton, S.J.**  
**President's Convocation Address**

**September 14, 1999**

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No one, especially a new president, should easily erase tradition. Father O'Malley habitually began his convocation address with a quotation from Scripture, and I'll continue the custom. To underscore continuity, I'll take as my first text the one he chose as his last. From St. Mark's gospel:

The Kingdom of God is like this.  
Someone scatters seed on the ground;  
And goes to bed at night  
And gets up in the morning,  
And meanwhile the seed sprouts and grows --  
How, I do not know  
The ground produces a crop by itself,  
First the blade,  
Then the ear,  
Then full grain... (Mark 4:26-28)

I feel deeply fortunate to be at Loyola Marymount University. It's not primarily the beautiful weather, the spectacular views from the hillside, or the stunningly diverse and complicated city that is now my home. I come to an institution with the blade, the ear, almost the full grain appearing; I get to reap where others have sown; where many of you have sown.

Some in this room are, like me, new to LMU, but many of you are the ones who have scattered the seed and cared for it (despite the parable, growth is not inevitable!), and I want to express to you my praise, awe, and gratitude for the work of your hands. And envy. I wish that I could share the sense of accomplishment and pride you must feel. I can only hope to, someday.

I answered Horace Greeley's call to "Go west" late, not as a "young man," but as an upper middle-aged one, at a time in life when coastal change is not in every way easy. In an earlier draft, I listed by name all who have helped me feel so welcome. As the pages went on, though, my speech was sounding like that of someone winning an Oscar, the thank yous multiplying the minutes into a seeming eternity. So please accept an abbreviated "thank you" from the bottom of my heart. I do want to thank by name, however, because their kindnesses have been so numerous, Rich, Judy, and Fran in the President's office, and Joe Jabbra, in the office next door.

My remarks this afternoon will fall into two larger sections followed by three endnotes.

I'll begin by talking about comings and goings. Then I'll turn to plans for the year, and beyond. Then the notes: some unrelated reflections on faculty excellence; Catholicity; the relationship between present and future. And please don't worry. I know that you need lunch. The talk is briefer than the outline threatens!

Comings, goings, events of note. The biggest coming, of course, is the incoming class: 1,023 first-year students, 316 transfers, and 25 readmits. It is the largest class ever, and the most selective: over 6300 students applied for these first-year spaces, and over 1100 for the transfer ones. It is a class, as you have come to expect, richly diverse in talents, interests, and cultural backgrounds. And we've been able to house more of them: the Student Housing staff placed 79 transfer students in the Furama Hotel and 59 first-year women in the Leavey Center; so we opened with fewer than 40 first-year students assigned as overbookings.

The class is also historic: it will be the largest incoming class for the next few years. Attracting so many qualified students is a tribute to the toil of the Admissions staff and to the increasing stature of the University. Institutionally, absorbing several years of such relatively large classes testifies to the hard work and dedication of many of you. We've reached the limit for a while, though, in terms of numbers. We will concentrate on enrolling an ever more selective class and educating them even better. The emphasis will be on excellence.

Another coming, not as large as that of the new students but at least as important, is that of the new faculty and staff. You are most welcome. And having already met some of you, I know that this institution and its refreshing traditions will long continue in good hands.

Another "coming" still has been money, and not just tuition. Last year the University raised \$19 million. For that and for all that it enables academically, we are deeply grateful to our benefactors and to the office of University Relations. I am particularly grateful that I can continue another Father O'Malley tradition. Father liked to announce at least one new endowed chair a year. Three weeks ago, Father Merrifield called me with the news that Daniel Lynch '63 has endowed the Clarence Wallen, S.J. Chair in Mathematics. Father Wallen, a kind and gentle Jesuit, taught mathematics here for many years. The University's fundraising efforts last year saw an 11 percent increase in alumni donors and a 22 percent increase in the number of people giving at the \$1,000 level.

Speaking of fundraising brings to mind a "going." Father John Rogers, as most of you know, resigned about a month ago as Vice President for University Relations. Under John's leadership, the University gloriously completed a Capital Campaign, surpassing an ambitious goal. Both our todays and our tomorrows are in John's debt. Ms. Marea Kelly has graciously agreed to serve as Acting Vice President until we find a permanent replacement. We are indeed fortunate to have a person of Marea's skill and experience to lead our fundraising efforts in the coming months.

Another "going" is that of Dean Gerry McLaughlin of the Loyola Law School. When he steps down in June, Gerry will have wisely and warmly guided the Law School for a decade. A search committee has been formed and we will be blessed to find his equal.

I'd like to turn now from people to plans and process; from the particular to the general; in a sense from the present to the future. This section might be titled "Raytheon and Beyond." From the Hebrew scriptures, the Book of Kings: *Then Solomon said:*

My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father David, "You did well to consider building a house for my name; nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son... shall build the house for my name." (1 Kings 8:17-19.)

Father O'Malley would no doubt have loved to see the Raytheon negotiations completed during his watch and deservedly so. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the complexity of this transaction and not, in the end, surprised that this house was left to his successor — not to build, fortunately, but to buy. I appreciate the work and skill of all those who have wrestled with the demons of detail that such a large deal stirs up. Fortunately, most of the devils have finally taken flight, and we hope to conclude the negotiations soon. Important issues will remain, however, for the coming months, particularly surrounding the building's zoning and the University's enrollment cap.

Last year, a subcommittee of the Planning Council developed recommendations for the building's use, and these have been approved by the Planning Council and me. We must now turn quite concrete, decide who goes where. I asked Dr. Jabbra to chair a representative committee for that purpose, and that committee held its first meeting yesterday.

We will move aggressively to occupy Raytheon next summer, in time to convert Sullivan and Huesman into residence halls for the coming class. But let me be frank. Although from this mid-September's vantage the schedule seems leisurely, it is actually quite tight. We will do the best we can and keep you informed along the way.

Raytheon is not only substance — and quite a substance — but also a symbol. It represents the University's next step, not only literally because of its presence right outside the Lincoln gate but, and more importantly, figuratively. And what exactly is the University's next step? Where are we headed?

The University promises to become the great Catholic University of the West. Not next year, nor even in a decade or two. Probably somewhere near the mid-point of the coming century. Not a Catholic Stanford, nor a west coast Georgetown. Great in its own particular way, carrying on the treasures of its Jesuit and Marymount traditions, reflecting the energy and richness of this extraordinary region of the world. Great not mainly as a matter of prestige but because of how it educates the young, because of how it contributes to the intellectual and cultural life of the planet, because of how it helps the Church and the world negotiate their views.

This destiny makes demands, claims the context for our immediate planning. A great university requires a distinguished undergraduate program and focused areas of graduate and professional excellence.

The elements of a distinguished undergraduate program: a selective student body, largely housed on campus, taught by an excellent faculty, committed to teaching, active in research, and supported in both; the academic and non-academic aspects of a student's life in many ways integrated; superior athletic teams enlivening the mix.

This description sounds simple, perhaps even platitudinous. But it has implications: the continued recruitment of superb faculty and staff, a new library, more residence halls, new laboratories, renovation and possible construction of athletic facilities, consideration of innovative academic programming for the Sullivan-Huesman-Doheny quad. And, of course and always, appropriate allocations for technology.

What about select areas of graduate and professional excellence? The University has promising accomplishments here – where should we concentrate? It has been said that time and place are two of the surest indicators of God's will. Modern Los Angeles tells us our priorities.

This city creates the images that shape the world; it's the Florence of our times. And so our programs in film and television must form one area of professional distinction. No other Catholic university in the world has our potential here.

This city also cries out for the intellectual exploration of ethical questions. The University has been establishing endowed chairs in areas of ethical concern, and we must take full advantage of the talent these Chairs have attracted.

A prime area where ethics turns practical is the law. The law and lawyers help us to negotiate the complicated concerns of our lives with justice, equity and fairness. We must continue to focus resources on our ever-stronger Law School.

A significant contribution that a Catholic university can make is rigorous theological reflection. What does the richly diverse culture of this part of the country at a millennium's dawn tell us and the world about God and about what God might be saying to us? LMU's theology program is impressive and we must continue to enhance it.

Finally, one of the surest ways both to touch an individual's life and to affect a whole region is through teaching. When the young are as numerous as Southern California's, it makes most sense to teach the teachers. So the future will find us directing more resources to the School of Education.

To summarize. Where are we headed? An increasingly distinguished undergraduate program with a faculty committed to teaching and also contributing to the discourses of their disciplines. Select areas of graduate and professional excellence: film and television; ethics and law; theology; education. And, because of the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of knowledge, many of our other programs, from business to biology, will help shape this excellence.

These priorities, of course, yearn to be made more particular. It is apparent where the paths should be; but we still have to clear the brush, lay the stones, sometimes climb a hill. What exactly do we do and when?

In the coming weeks, I'll be charging the Planning Council to undertake a strategic planning process to be completed by the end of the academic year. The process will define the next steps and sequence then. It will take the priority areas I've outlined and make them concrete – and give them a price. I'll also ask the Council to tell me about priorities I may have missed and to point out problems that I might have overlooked. To get the process started, I'll name the first priority: a new library. After that, I want the Council's practical wisdom. After Board approval, this plan will map our next ten years, focus what will have to be aggressive fund raising efforts. At LMU, plans are taken seriously, not placed on a shelf, and I want to thank the Planning Council in advance for what will be critical and demanding work.

Now the final, brief notes: faculty excellence; Catholicity, the relationship between present and future. Building, plans, and process do not a great institution make. People do. At the heart of a university is the relationship of faculty and students, and the relationship of faculty to their disciplines and to the world of thought those disciplines serve. However our planning proceeds, we will constantly support our faculty in their teaching and research. We'll try to endow the Center for Teaching Excellence; and I've instructed Dr. Jabbara to continue funding the Center until we do. We will strive also to increase our support for faculty research. As faculties become stronger, they routinely seek outside evaluations of scholarship at times of tenure and promotion. All distinguished universities do this, and I'm happy that this faculty is moving towards this practice. Our aim always: an excellent faculty committed to teaching, active in research, and supported in both.

I spoke earlier about the University's mission to become the great Catholic university of the West. Many of you, needless to say, are not Catholic. You may wonder, perhaps worry: how does the University look upon the non-Catholic here? Am I here by intention, acquiescence or default? Do Catholics have an inside track to money and influence? Will my religious beliefs or lack thereof affect tenure or promotion?

A person's religion plays no part in hiring, tenure, promotion, the awarding of grants or the securing of funds. In fact, most of us don't even know each other's religious beliefs. But I'd like to take a deeper sounding for a moment. Openness to religious diversity is not simply a requirement of the law or a means of securing distinction by attracting the best and brightest people. Those of us who are Catholic benefit enormously from the presence of people whose ways of viewing God and the world are far different from our own. You question our clichés, shake our categories, stretch our imaginations, and, yes, touch our hearts. God is far too big, God's world far too intricately textured, to be exhausted by the insights of any one tradition, religious or intellectual, or even by the sum of all traditions. And many of you are humanly graced to help people in exemplary ways. We hope that you feel at home here.

A concluding word about present and future. I speak often of LMU's destiny. I do not do so to denigrate the present. We are fortunate, indeed, to be caught up in an institution that touches

lives for the good, that enables people to live more deeply and to dream large, to develop their talents and put them at the world's service. If we look into our own experiences, isn't that what we hope for in our lives, that we can help at least a few people to grow and be more fully themselves. We are blessed; most people's only work satisfaction is that it puts bread on the table.

And we are not only blessed, we are blessed beyond measure. To very few is given an opportunity to shape the future. Through the traditions that we treasure and start, through the plans we form and the decisions we make, we can create an institution that will enrich this great region of the world for centuries to come. Most of you in this room have been about this for years. I am honored to join you.

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