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**President's Convocation Address – *A Tale of Two Cathedrals***

**Lincy Auditorium, Conrad Hilton Center for Business**

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Today's talk might be titled "A Tale of Two Cathedrals." The "two cathedrals" are not, let me quickly point out, the Burns Recreation Center and University Hall, even though each shapes, in a way, a sacred space! As the last century dawned, Henry Adams finished his first edition of *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*. As this new century still begins, I'd like to say a word or two about the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels and Chartres. These two great buildings tell us something about LMU; for one speaks about an important task absorbing the present, the other about a grand project requiring decades to complete.

Few people in the world's history get to see a cathedral rising before their eyes. And none of our ancestors has seen one so majestic going up so quickly. Of course, cathedrals don't just "rise" or "go up." They are imagined, crafted and constructed, works of skill and calloused hands. Many such hands. Three hundred people a day work on the new cathedral. Anyone talking with them feels their pride. This job is not simply a job, like building a corporate headquarters, department store or tract of homes. No, not just a job; more like a mission, a supremely significant task giving meaning to talents and labors of every type. The timeline for the project: roughly three years. So those creating the cathedral will not only feel the fulfillment that comes from involvement in an important work. Their hearts will soon leap as they eye the fruits of their labors, see people throng through the Church's doors, talk with one another outside its walls, pray quietly to God alone in a chapel.

Chartres was another story. Begun in 1194, the main part of the Church took thirty years to complete. Certain workers began the project, others finished it; some spanned its decades. All were caught up in the promise of what the place would become. Their dream drove their labors, gave meaning to their days. And the centuries have confirmed their accomplishment. Chartres is still a place where men and women find their souls stirred, their humanity deepened, their sense of life's beauty and mystery enhanced. Amidst the play of light and color and darkness, they sense God among us.

LMU lives in both these worlds, the ones symbolized by a new cathedral and by an old. We are caught up in a deeply significant present project, one whose works and ways we can sense and see, whose success grants the right to a certain swagger. And we are also entrusted with a promise, whose very imagining leads instinctively to gratitude and awe. The present. The promise. A word about each.

The present hardly requires words! The Burns Recreations Center; three new student residences, Sullivan, Huesman, and O'Malley; a renovated dining facility; all beautifully bridged to the extraordinary University Hall, and landscaped as well. In August, new students came to a different campus from the one May's graduates left. A million square feet built or renovated, a hundred million dollars worth of projects brought to completion. On behalf of the University, I thank the multitude of you who in ways large and small brought this about. I especially thank – and praise – Dave Trump and his facilities staff. Yours is a remarkable achievement, and we are in your debt.

Buildings, of course, do not a university make. What gives all of us joy in our “new” campus is how well it works and how alive it feels. The Recreation Center has been averaging 7,000 visits per week. The students love their new residences, at least most of the students, mostly! In new classrooms, ideas charge the air, amidst clouds of chalk dust and the most modern of multi-media. The flow of movement through the campus ties all our spaces together more naturally than most of us foresaw. And miracle of marvels, I've even heard students praising the food!

Gain, as you know, often brings loss. After all the moves, some of you miss the cherished neighbors of years. Habits long comfortable have had to change, walks long predictable have required re-calculation. And there have been glitches of various kinds. Nevertheless, we all thrill to new possibilities, feel a bit like the poet of Gilgamesh before Uruk's walls. We're proud to be at LMU.

We boast not simply of buildings. Last year, 6500 applicants competed for spaces in the first year undergraduate class. And our yield was even stronger than we had dared hope; nearly two hundred more said “yes” to our offer than we had planned. In addition, over a thousand transfer applicants wanted one of our 187 spaces.

The academic quality is high; the average SAT of the first-year class is 1139. And their number is as widely diverse as the campus they've entered. At the Law School nearly 3300 applicants competed for the day program's 346 spaces, (the evening program 96); and the median LSAT is 158.

To teach our talented students, the Westchester Campus hired fifteen tenure-track faculty, and eighteen visiting faculty, while the Law School hired two.

We've also added to the staff at both campuses. To all of you who are new to LMU, I extend a warm welcome.

Because I'll be working with them so closely, I am particularly happy to welcome Mr. Charles Rasberry as the new Vice President for University Relations and Professor David Burcham as the new Dean of the Law School. Both bring intelligence, integrity, experience, professionalism and a rare decency to demanding jobs. I'm very happy that they are here.

Last year was a phenomenal one for fundraising, the most successful in the University's history. We raised \$33 million in cash, \$57 million in cash and pledges; the number of Presidential Associates rose to 876, up 6-1/2% from the previous year's all-time high. For these resources

and all that they make possible, we are indebted to the generosity of our donors, and to a recently retired Marea Kelly and all the people in University Relations. I look forward to the day when such a phenomenal year is considered lackluster!

Last year was a wonderful one for our sports teams. A third of our teams were nationally ranked in the top 25. Indeed, the women's volleyball team finished in the top 25 for the seventh consecutive year. And the baseball team won the league (West Coast Conference) last year. We are fortunate to be attracting true student athletes; the average GPA of the incoming athletes this Fall is 3.35. I am particularly happy to welcome our new basketball coach, Steve Aggers. At times, when talking with alumni, I feel that the success of my presidency is in Steve's hands! I wish him well.

We are fortunate indeed to be caught up in a successful and important mission absorbing the present, the noble mission of educating the young and helping them grow more fully alive and of contributing to the wider culture that shapes us all. This supremely significant task gives meaning to our talents and labors of every type.

But we are not merely fortunate. We are fortunate beyond words. For we are also called to care for a promise that, like Chartres, may take thirty years to fulfill.

This institution has the potential of becoming a great Catholic university of the West, great not principally as a matter of prestige, but as a sign of how well we educate the young and how significantly we contribute to culture. Such a destiny demands more than a decade. To become great we will need to be fueled by our dreams and focused by a clear vision of the world around us and of ourselves. What do the world and the Church, this City of the Angels and the cultures it hosts most urgently need? What particular strengths do our time and place, our traditions and location confer?

To make this concrete, to define and refine the much-talked-about "next" step toward which we are already instinctively moving, a strategic planning process has been underway since January. I am deeply grateful to the University Planning Council, chaired by Dr. Jabbra, for its dedication and hard work on so important a charge. The future is in their hands. The Planning Council has completed the first phase, defining and detailing our needs. The price tag: \$365 million in one-time costs; nearly \$20 million in annual. Nearly all these needs are legitimate, but we can't meet them all. So now begins a tougher phase: prioritizing. This phase should be finished by the end of December.

As it carries out this task, I've asked the Planning Council to be guided by several principles. The first is that we must think foremost not about what is best for my department or division, discipline or program but about what best serves LMU as a whole. This is a plan for the Institution whose mission we share.

Secondly, our passion must be: what does the world around us most need that we can best contribute? This is the principle that has yielded the foci I talked frequently about last year: an ever-stronger undergraduate education and experience; ever developing expertise in film and television, ethics, the law, theology, and education. And this principle must guide us as we

prioritize within these and other areas. What does the world around us most need that we can best contribute?

This magnificent world region has a great public university in UCLA, a great private one in USC. It needs a great Catholic university. As we build LMU, it makes no sense for us to compete with UCLA and USC. Not because we can't but because if a society's needs are already addressed by certain institutions and others remain, then those unattended-to areas need addressing.

To get more concrete, UCLA and USC are both large in their undergraduate enterprise. This region deserves as well an institution that cherishes a distinguished undergraduate experience that is smaller, where there is more opportunity for faculty-student contact, where students across all their difference learn to form a community, where all can talk freely about values, ethics, God. We are that kind of a place, can become it more fully. So we won't become substantially larger, won't finance our development with significantly increasing enrollments. We will build our financial aid endowment to attract talented, diverse students, build a new library to enhance our education, build new residence halls to make our community experience richer, continue to strengthen our athletic program. We will make our undergraduate academic program evermore challenging and give our faculty increased support in their teaching and research. We will make sure that we give our students the scientific literacy they'll need to understand the world around them. The Planning Council will detail what to do when, in what kind of sequence, and show us how to weave the threads that form the pattern.

What does the world around us most need that we can best contribute? At least one Catholic university in the world should be strong in film and television, the powerful media that reflect and shape us. By location and tradition, we are that university. What should be our signature? Should we become the place where people come who are interested in writing scripts? If so, what do we do to get there? How do we leverage our faculty and programs in other areas like English, theology, history? Or should our signature be business and entertainment? If so, how do we include sophisticated ethical reflection as we develop the program?

This kind of thinking must propel us as we look as well at what we can do in ethics, law, theology, and education. What does society most need? What specific particular steps can we take in the next decade to address that need?

A few more thoughts and then I'll conclude. Focusing on priorities doesn't mean that the rest of the institution goes on hold. LMU is naturally improving across the spectrum and the improvement will continue. And there are always the ways that sheer circumstance can outwit any plan. Nevertheless, and I want to be frank, certain areas will be targeted for more funding than others. There will be priorities, and that will have implications both for budgeting and for a Capital Campaign. And so I urge you to participate actively as the University Planning Council invites your insights, reactions and criticisms to its developing plan. I'd like maximum input on the front end so that we can decide together, as an institution, what is best for LMU and how LMU can best serve the world.

At the beginning of Chapter VII of *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* Adams wrote:

Like all great churches, that are not mere store-houses of theology, Chartres expressed, besides whatever else it meant, an emotion, the deepest man ever felt, -- the struggle of his own littleness to grasp the infinite. You may if you like, figure in it a mathematical formula of infinity, -- the broken arches, our finite idea of space; the spire, pointing with its converging lines, to Unity beyond space; the sleepless, restless thrust of vaults, telling the unsatisfied, incomplete, overstrained effort of man to rival the energy, intelligence and purpose of God.”

When, in the years to come, people look at what we will have achieved here at LMU, they may or may not detect in our planning, budgeting and building, “the unsatisfied, incomplete, overstrained effort of [humans] to “rival the energy, intelligence and purpose of God.” But I trust that they will say that we strove to be God’s good servants, fortunate to be caught up in the divine work of helping the young, and one another, and our fellow women and men in this awesome region of the world, to be fully alive. It’s a noble task and enjoyable to share it. Thank you for your kind attention.