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President's Convocation Address

Lincy Auditorium, Conrad N. Hilton Center for Business

September 25, 2001

As an undergraduate I majored in Classics, pondered the glory of Greece and the grandeur of Rome. In graduate school I got religion, earned my doctorate in ancient near Eastern languages and literatures. That's code for the Bible, text and context. So as I've tried, like each of you, to figure out life, the one life I'll ever have, I've been enriched by wisdom – secular and sacred. Both those strands inform today's talk. My topic is twofold: first a word or two about strategic planning; and then, in more detail, a discussion of diversity.

Throughout my years as an administrator, Thucydides has been a wise and comforting companion. In *The Peloponnesian War*, he has shown me, through cleverly crafted scenes and speeches, how circumstances can trick the most rational of plans. Speaking to the Congress at Lacedaemon, for instance, the Athenians reflect on plans and their frailty and warn: "Consider the vast influence of accident in war, before you are engaged in it. As it continues, it generally becomes an affair of chances, chances from which neither of us is exempt, and whose event we must risk in the dark." And, of course, the irony of the Peloponnesian War is that the Athenians, who are described, despite their words, as "innovators and sharp at forming a plan and completing in action whatever they resolve," lose to the dull-witted Spartans.

Colleges and corporations today embrace strategic planning, but for most of the world's history, war has been strategic planning's natural home. I mention that as a matter of fact, not because of what is going on in our world today. Nor do I mention the faltering and ironies of planning because I doubt its importance. As is probably clear, I am a strong believer! But all our planning must proceed with a certain humility and a consequent happy excitement. Humility, because we know that chance will chase our cunning. Happy excitement, because we can turn and capture chance and end up calling "accidents" good fortune. Moreover, as we negotiate the dictates of our dreams and the demands of circumstance we will not only nurture LMU but our own skills and talents as well. And we can also expect to have a lot of fun in the process.

I am grateful for the ways many of you have participated so far in the development of a strategic plan for the University. I am especially grateful to the University Planning Council, to those of you who've been part of the many groups I've met with over the past nine months, to those who've commented on the draft of the Plan available over the web. You've all been helping to shape a course of actions that will enable the University to live up to its enormous promise. We will present the Plan to the Board next week for preliminary approval and then it will go back to

the Planning Council to have the price tag detailed. With final Board approval in December, the Strategic Plan will then drive both our budgeting and a coming Capital Campaign.

Of course, any strategic plan must be flexible. And tactical plans will have to be developed. Many of your comments will inspire and inform our tactics in the years ahead. New opportunities will arise, and unforeseen challenges, too. I am confident that we will execute the Plan in a way that combines flexibility with focused firmness so that LMU can become truly distinguished in educating and developing the whole person through the pursuit of academic excellence, the advancement of scholarship, the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

Certain larger themes thread through the Plan: academic distinction; the Catholic tradition; the relationships among Campus and city, country and world; diversity. It is that latter theme that I'd like to discuss today. I realize that for many of you this is an old topic, rooted in the realities of this great State. But it is also ever new, a dimension of the particular struggles of each of us to understand the world, to become ourselves, and to live together. In this talk I won't be proclaiming initiatives or even assessing LMU's strengths and weaknesses. I want to take some deeper soundings, concentrate on the fundamental considerations that undergird all our planning and assessment. I'll be looking at diversity under three headings: education; citizenship; justice. My overarching message: diversity is fundamental and critical to what this University is about. My subtext: gratitude for the efforts of so many of you to care for the rich diversity of this institution.

The probing of cultural diversity has held a special place in education for millennia. Of course, much of this education has taken place outside the setting of a school. The beginning verses of the Bible, for example, those stories of creation at the opening of Genesis, reveal ancient Israel's contact with the Babylonians and the Canaanites. Throughout the pages of the Hebrew scriptures, we see ancient Israel in dialogue and debate with the civilizations around her, at times becoming like them, at times condemning their ways. In the New Testament the coming of the Magi and the miracle at Pentecost proclaim a God reaching out to people of every nation. The movement of early Christianity, from Jerusalem through the Hellenistic world to Rome and its empire beyond, provides a fascinating study of cultural contact. Indeed, had the earliest missionaries not been open to other cultures, Christianity itself would have died a short-lived sect.

The challenges of cultural contact, needless to say, have not been unique to the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Greek encounter with the Persians, Romans, Celts and Jews during the Hellenistic age provides a parade example of this phenomenon. And countless secular texts across the centuries testify to the attempts of educated men and women of one culture to understand other peoples and civilizations. In short, the study of other cultures and traditions has a natural place in any person's education. Indeed, since education has as one of its chief aims enhancing the imagination, cross-cultural education should have a privileged place, since struggling to see the world through a whole other set of lenses stretches the imagination in an intense way.

How does the modern American university inherit this history? It's fair to say, at the outset, that universities are in some ways not very diverse. University populations are overwhelmingly young, healthy, well-fed. No matter how large the faculty and staff, students usually

predominate and, because they are young, college students rarely confront their own mortality, live with broken dreams or carry around hurts so old that they've calloused the heart. The future stretches infinitely before them and quickly comforts them amidst their setbacks. Obviously, I am overstating my point. The people on a campus reflect various ethnic backgrounds, political beliefs, and intellectual interests. Nevertheless, there are probably many shopping malls with more daily diversity than a typical college campus.

But diversity in itself has never been a distinguishing mark of universities. What makes universities special is that they are places where differences can be talked about, diversity probed, divergent perspectives explored and analyzed; in short, places of education. Varying viewpoints enliven the conversation that universities relish, stretch the imaginations of professors, staff, and students, help us all see more clearly reality's richness. Leisurely, sustained argument and debate, at times, exhilarating, at times painful, finds a home on a campus, and the greater the diversity of those participating in the discussion the livelier the campus, the richer the education.

Honest discussion, of course, demands as its prerequisite the felt freedom to say what one thinks. Serious, sustained cross-cultural education can only happen where freedom of thought and freedom of speech flourish. The threats to such freedom are usually subtle. Ideologies – and ideologues – can dominate disciplines, departments and meetings. People who view a field differently are simply not hired. Journals can silence opinions out-of-the-mainstream by rejecting manuscripts.

And these threats can easily creep into the classroom. It is often difficult to get the young to say what they think. They are so anxious to please us and their peers. They want to get good marks and so they frequently tell us what they think we want to hear. Professors face the challenge of creating an atmosphere in class that encourages students to bring their views, even if ill-formed, or prejudiced, or wrong-headed, into the light where they can be probed, criticized, appreciated, taken into account. And – perhaps the greatest challenge of all – professors have to find ways to frustrate the students' desires to tell the teacher what they imagine he or she wants to hear.

This talk is taking a turn. The topic is diversity, but I've begun reflecting on freedom of thought and speech. The turn has been deliberately taken. If what distinguishes the university is not diversity as such but the exploration of diversity, then universities must zealously promote freedom of thought and speech if they are to make their contributions to cross-cultural understanding.

For a Jesuit to stress freedom might seem strange indeed. As Macauley once observed, Jesuits "appear to have discovered the precise point to which intellectual culture can be carried without risk of intellectual emancipation." And were Francis Parkman in this room right now, he would no doubt be bewildered. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Parkman recounted the struggle of France and England to dominate the new world. The Jesuits were allied with France. Had they been victorious, Parkman believed, freedom would have been the victim along with England. In the conclusion to his *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century*, he wrote:

Liberty may think thank the Iroquois, that, by their insensate fury, the plans of her adversary were brought to nought, and a peril and a woe averted from her future.... Populations formed in the ideas and habits of a feudal monarchy, and controlled by a hierarchy profoundly hostile to freedom of thought, would have remained a hindrance and a stumbling block in the way of that majestic experiment of which America is the field.

The Jesuits saw their hopes struck down; and their faith, though not shaken, was sorely tried. This Providence of God seemed in their eyes dark and inexplicable; but, from the standpoint of liberty, that Providence is clear as the sun at noon.

This view, I hasten to add, reflects more Parkman's prejudice than Jesuit character. St. Ignatius, the Jesuit founder, deeply respected individual freedom. In his *Spiritual Exercises* he stresses that the Exercises must always take into account the varying background and circumstances of the one making them and warns the director not to project his own desires onto the retreatant. Indeed, Ignatius considered careful, respectful listening the presupposition of the Exercises. He writes:

In order that the one who gives these Exercises and the one who makes them may be of more assistance and profit to each other, they should be more willing to give a good interpretation to the statement of another than to condemn it as false. If he cannot give a good interpretation to this statement, he should ask the other how he understands it, and if he is in error, he should correct him with charity.

I have been talking about those two basic human acts that are at the heart of a university: speaking and listening. I emphasize these because it is, in the end, through speaking and listening that we will probe diversity, work through the challenges it poses, reveal the richness of its promise. I've spent much of my life studying other cultures; have lived in two countries besides my own. Coming to understand another culture - even somewhat - is a difficult, delicate task. If universities are to help in this great human project, then they must be places where people feel free to say what they think and where they also listen with respect to what others say. And not simply in the classroom; but also in residence halls and dining rooms, in staff and faculty meetings; when two people talk on the bluff.

But promoting and exploring diversity are not important to LMU solely because of their significance to the private struggles of each of us to become ourselves and to come to terms with the world around us. Respecting diversity is critical for citizenship. As Professor Lawrence Bobo observed in his commencement address here last May:

We stand today still at the early dawn of a new century.
This perch affords us the opportunity to look back on the
successes and failures of the previous century and to entertain

great dreams of the future that lies ahead. Our current situation has much in common with the beginnings of the previous century: as was true back in 1900, today a massive wave of immigration is rapidly transforming the racial and ethnic make-up of our society and often arousing great anxieties over how we are to forge yet again one nation, one people, out of so many different languages, cultures, and identities. Nowhere is this modern dilemma, this renewed challenge of immigration, of diversity, of a great multiethnic swirl, pressed more immediately upon us than here in the City of Los Angeles.

He continued: The University... is, I believe, an incubator of democracy. And this is an enormously important role for universities to play since democracy is a bold experiment, an experiment that is more precious and more vulnerable than we often realize.

The great challenge “to forge yet again one nation,” to which Professor Bobo points out, demands more than tolerance. It requires genuine respect for other cultures and identities. And this, of course, is a task not just for the classroom. It is the work of all of us faculty, staff, and students in all the aspects of our life together.

And our challenge as citizens is even larger for we are the citizens of the most powerful country in the world. If we are to wield this power wisely, then, as the events of the last weeks make clear, we must understand this world better. Not that we, or our students, can come to know every other country and culture. Today, the focus is on Islam and on Afghanistan. Who knows what lenses tomorrow will require. But we must find ways, at this institution, to borrow a phrase from Professor Bobo, “...to build into our lives the experiences, ideas, and values necessary to effectively bridge the great divides of ethnicity, race, nationality, and class.”

Respect for diversity is fundamental, moreover, not just for the education of the individual and the formation of citizens. An active, passionate respect for diversity answers the call, indeed the claims, of justice. Professor Bobo again:

We know two further things about poverty: first, that the condition of low-income and especially of adult joblessness go hand in hand with the breakdown of families, poor performing schools, and social disorder. Second, that the experience of these conditions is not evenly spread across the social landscape, but still falls with heavy disproportion on the African American and Latino communities. And thus, the problem of poverty becomes welded to that of quickening diversity and the often great divides of race and ethnicity.

The great prophets of the Hebrew tradition were not against people enjoying life and having a good time. What they attacked was self-absorption, the failure to care for the poor, the marginalized, the rejected in the community.

How can we care for what we don't see? When our campus is richly diverse, we can begin to see the world through the eyes of those whom society disadvantages, reflect on our responsibilities to our city and country, create the possibilities for a response in love. And, it should be noted there are many ways in which a society can disadvantage –not just economically. A society's myths and stories, institutions and symbols, can exclude people, keep them from the cherished sense of belonging, lower their expectations for becoming fully human. So, responding to the call of a just God who loves the poor, a Catholic university yearns by its very nature for diversity, both to offer the advantages of education to the marginalized and dispossessed and to open the eyes of all to the needs of the world around them.

Education. Citizenship. Justice. Diversity is central to LMU's mission and purpose. I said at this talk's beginning that I would not be proclaiming initiatives today. I do want to stress, though, that diversity is too important to be "disposed of" by a course or two, an initiative here and there, a new position or program. Protecting, promoting, and cherishing diversity must be the responsibility of all of us in multiple ways.

Education. Citizenship. Justice. All of these are important. In the end, though, at least for me, respecting and protecting diversity is about something even deeper. It's about caring for God's richly diverse world. That's God's charge to all of us at the Bible's beginning. It means a great deal to me personally. When Jesuits are ordained priests they usually include on their announcement card a favorite passage from scripture. At my ordination some twenty years ago, I chose instead a passage from David Jones' poem, "The Sleeping Lord." I'd like to close by quoting it now.

Queen of the differentiated sites, let our cry come unto you.
In times of empire, save us from the guile of its agents.
When they proscribe the diverse uses and impose the rootless
uniformities, pray for us.
When they sit in council to liquidate the holy diversities,
Mother of particular perfections,
Queen of otherness,
Mistress of asymmetry,
Patroness of things counter, parti, pied, several,
Protectress of things familiar and small,
Receive our prayer.
When they come in the bland megapolitan light
Where no shadow is by day or night,
Be our shadow
Empress of our labyrinth
Keep our green valley.

Thank you for your kind attention.