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President's Convocation Address 2003 – God and Evolution

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My topic today: “evolution.” No, I'm not a creationist, about to attack Darwin. I want to talk about institutional evolution, organizational change, transitions. I want to speak about LMU.

Concrete questions hug this subject, questions that, I know, roam many of your hearts: “is LMU becoming too corporate?”; “have consultants conquered our two campuses?”; “is our East Coast president trying to turn us into Georgetown?”

As background to this discussion, I'd like to share with you a parable from the late spiritual writer Anthony de Mello's book *Awareness*. De Mello writes:

There was a little town in America where people gathered in the evening to make music. They had a saxophonist, a drummer, and a violinist, mostly old people. They got together for the company and for the sheer joy of making music, though they didn't do it very well. So they were enjoying themselves, having a great time, until one day they decided to get a new conductor who had a lot of ambition and drive. The new conductor told them, “Hey, folks, we have to have a concert; we have to prepare a concert for the town.” Then he gradually got rid of some people who didn't play too well, hired a few professional musicians, got an orchestra into shape, and they all got their names in the newspapers. Wasn't that wonderful? So they decided to move to the big city and play there. But some of the old people had tears in their eyes, they said, “It was so wonderful in the old days when we did things badly and enjoyed them.” (p 92).

To complicate de Mello's parable and thereby make it more apt, some questions: “some of the old people had tears in their eyes” -- but did they all or even most?; and how did those new musicians feel?; and what about the people in town, hearing their first concert?; what about those in the big city hearing another?

Change is Janus-faced. For if one cluster of questions provoked by change looks longingly at the past, another looks impatiently toward the future: why aren't we playing more concerts?; what about a new concert hall?; a European tour?; why hasn't the library been built yet?; why don't we have more money for financial aid?; why do I still meet Angelenos who haven't heard of LMU?

Institutions, whether as small as orchestras or as large as universities, are made up of people with distinct personalities, diverse backgrounds, various skills and talents. They share a mission but have different life histories and different institutional histories as well. And so such organizations are complicated, experience the same changes in tangled ways. I hope that my words today will address at least some of your feelings.

This talk has three movements. First, some remarks about the tradition of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, the Jesuits and the other orders that have worked at LMU. Secondly, observations about the University in light of

modern corporate practice. Finally, a few personal reflections. In short, religion, business, and me! The aim: to understand more deeply a changing LMU.

RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The religious orders associated with LMU are “active” as opposed to “contemplative” or “monastic” orders. The monastic orders have been around far longer. The Benedictines, for example, were founded in the early sixth century. A certain stability marks these groups. Their members are attached to a monastery, their lives governed by an established regimen. There are fixed times for prayer, for recitation of the divine office in common, for meals and other activities. There are set times to rise and to retire. The monastic life retreats from the world to facilitate contemplation and thereby union with God; it is marked by peace, tranquility, stability. The monastery forms a society independent of the outside world.

The active orders are quite different. In his *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* H. Outram Evennett observed:

It is difficult for a modern Catholic to appreciate to the full exactly how revolutionary – how modernist – the institute of the Society of Jesus must have appeared in 1540. The abandonment of the common recitation of the daily hours of the divine office in choir, hitherto unquestionably accepted as an essential feature of all communal priestly life, seemed to some contemporaries so shocking as to be almost heretical. Action was prayer and prayer led to action.... This was no longer the monastic ideal, but something different. (pp 74-75).

Active orders take their meaning – and hence their spirituality – from their mission. They pray on-the-run, and the world they yearn to serve determines how they spend their days – and where. Or, at least, most of the time. Even though radically different from contemplative orders, active orders occasionally flirt with monasticism and are even seduced by its charms. That’s certainly been true with the Jesuits.

From time-to-time over the centuries, even during Ignatius’ lifetime and especially after the order’s nineteenth-century restoration, practices more appropriate for the stable lives of monks have insinuated themselves into our way of proceeding. My own novitiate, for example, where I spent my first two years as a Jesuit, was located in the Pennsylvania countryside – “centrally isolated.” Our days were strictly regimented, included prayer-in-common, and were ruled by long periods of silence. The whole experience better prepared one for the contemplative life of a monk than for the active life of a Jesuit.

And by now you may be thinking that the novitiate prepared me well, that this talk is becoming more and more “contemplative.” What does any of this have to do with the subject at hand?

What I want to suggest is that American universities face an analogous temptation to that which tantalizes active religious orders, the tendency to withdraw from the world, to form a society independent of outside influences. The architecture of campuses often suggests a contemplative enclosure, apart from the bustle of business and commerce, the noise of vibrant neighborhoods. Indeed many campuses were originally built in the country, away from the corrupting influences of the city. Moreover, it is not unusual for people to work at a university for life, and not just those with tenure, achieving an almost monastic stability. These universities are often marked by civility, at least on the surface, a shared commitment to higher human values, freedom from intense competitive pressures.

And perhaps most deeply, universities are about the love of learning, knowledge for its own sake, contemplation. And for millennia contemplation has been associated with distance from the surrounding world. There are reasons why universities are called “ivory towers.”

And, yet, at their heart, universities, certainly American universities, are, like active religious orders, also about service to the world. As the distinguished American historian Bernard Bailyn has written about Harvard:

Unlike the ancient colleges, American colleges and universities, starting with Harvard, did not develop as groups of teachers and students studying together, financed by secure income-bearing endowments, seeking protection from the world in collegiate and university charters. They were from the start deliberate and artificial creations, not of scholars or grand patrons of scholars, but of communities of ordinary people who felt they needed such institutions, created them, and then kept control over them.... As a result, Harvard has never been an ivory tower, a closed universe of scholars talking to scholars and students. It has always been, has had to be, open to the world, responsible to its founding and governing community – hence, in the service of society – and yet at the same time devoted to the demands of learning for its own sake.

LMU is governed and owned by a Board of Trustees, men and women ultimately responsible for the University and symbolizing the larger publics to which the University is accountable. At a university president's inauguration, the presence of religious, business and civic leaders, of benefactors and alumni, underscores that universities belong to larger worlds and cultures, serve interests outside themselves.

I have spent a long time on this opening section of my address, because it grounds all that I want to say. LMU has been experiencing great change and will continue to do so. We are changing because information technologies and new media are affecting the heart of the University: the creation, transmission and enjoyment of knowledge. And we are changing because we are eager to serve ever more the changing world around us. In other words we are not a group that has gotten "together [exclusively] for the company and for the sheer joy of making music." We have gotten together for a mission: to encourage learning, to educate the whole person, to serve faith and to promote justice. And we constantly want to do this better, not for our own prestige, not because we're intoxicated with the modern drug of change for change's sake, but because we want more effectively to help the young, and our great city, and the culture that surrounds us.

LMU AND MODERN CORPORATE PRACTICES

Now, with our mission as background, I'd like to look at LMU in light of some modern corporate practices. As a frontispiece to this section, some words from Eric Gould's recent book, *The University in a Corporate Culture*.

The corporatization of higher education takes many forms but includes the following: quality management criteria and strategies drawn from the world of business; an emphasis on marketing, visibility, and public image promotion; accounting concerns for contribution margins and the perennial cost effectiveness of learning; decentralized power structures with incentives for growth and gain-share revenues; the redistribution of labor – in this case away from tenured to part-time and adjunct faculty; the development of sophisticated ancillary products, patents and services; a vague rhetoric of excellence that replaces specific details of what an education is about, and, of course, research and other financial collaborations with the corporate world. (p 31)

LMU has been growing. Five years ago the undergraduate enrollment was 4,251; today it stands at 5,460. Five years ago the University did not occupy University Hall. The faculty of the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts were in Foley, North Hall, Huesman and Sullivan Halls; the School of Education was in the basement of Sacred Heart Chapel. The Fritz B. Burns Recreation

Center had not been completed nor the Girardi Trial Advocacy Center at the Law School begun. Leavey 4 and 5 and the O'Malley Apartments were not built. And there was no fountain!

All these changes were designed to help us pursue our mission more adroitly, but they have also brought dislocations and loss. The neighbors of years are no longer next-door. Encounters that were routine now seem rare. Fresh faces have replaced the familiar. People live farther from campus and walks at Westchester take longer.

In short, LMU is becoming a larger, more complex, more ambitious institution, and there is no going back. A challenge: to create community out of these circumstances. And the University has a rich tradition to draw on in trying to do so.

In fewer than a hundred years this institution and its precedent ones have experienced a series of significant changes. In 1865 the Vincentian Fathers started St. Vincent's College for Boys in Los Angeles. When this school closed in 1911, the Jesuits opened the high school division in their newly founded Los Angeles College and began the collegiate department that same year. The school found a new campus in 1917, incorporated as Loyola College of Los Angeles in 1918, relocated to Westchester in 1929 and achieved university status a year later.

The Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary opened Marymount Junior College in Westwood in 1933. In 1960 the School transferred classes to a new campus on the Palos Verde's Peninsula. Eight years later Marymount College moved to the Westchester campus of Loyola University as an autonomous college. The two merged in 1973 and became Loyola Marymount University.

And the Law School has not been still during these years. Beginning as St. Vincent's School of Law in 1920 it was located at 1801 West 16th Street (now 1901 Venice Blvd). In 1930, it became Loyola Law School and moved to the Byrne Building in the northeast corner of Third and Broadway. Three years later the offices of the Los Angeles Realty Board at 1137 South Grand in downtown Los Angeles were purchased and there the Law School remained until it moved to its present location in 1964.

At least all of our recent changes have happened in the same place! Through all the changes, quite remarkable in an institution so young, people sought both to carry out the University's mission more effectively and to build bonds of affection, care, and friendship. I see people making the same efforts today, trying new ways to form and sustain community.

Confronting change the University can draw not only on its traditions but also on modern corporate practice. Corporations are not simply about increasing profits and maximizing shareholder value. They are also about managing complex organizations and taking care of the people who work there.

LMU is, as many of you know, examining its staff classification and compensation policies. Responding to the needs and pressures of the moment, managers have made understandably ad hoc and idiosyncratic decisions which, over time, have distorted our compensation system. People doing basically the same job can end up paid differently, with different opportunities for advancement, even different perks. So we want a system that is more fair and equitable. We want to be sure that the compensation is appropriate and that, since people are rewarded for performance, creates procedures for honest evaluation and opportunities for improvement. Jobs change over time, some become obsolescent. So we want to provide ways for people to hone existing skills and develop new ones.

Good corporations do precisely these things, and so we look to them to benefit from their experience. To help us, we are working with consultants, Watson Wyatt Worldwide.

Why use consultants, with their fancy clothes and even fancier vocabulary, here and in other areas of the University? The answer is simple: humility. The issues we face are often

complicated, and so we turn to people with expertise. Of course we have to use them wisely. Good consultants don't make our decisions. They help us to analyze our situation, become aware of best practices, weigh alternatives.

Another area where we have used consultants is in marketing and branding. "Marketing and branding." If corporate practice worries us, business language riles us. "Alignment," "high performance culture," "transparency," "leadership team," why can't we just speak plainly? "Marketing and branding," after all, is basically about telling people who we are – or want to become – succinctly and honestly. Why not just say that?

In an op-ed piece, "*Speak, O Muse, of Strategic Synergy: the purpose, and the value, of business jargon*," Randall Rothenberg, a former reporter and editor of *The New York Times*, wrote:

Large, modern companies are confederations. Although convention would assume that all people in all divisions and departments are pursuing the same objectives, rarely is that the case. Instead, senior management spends much of its time seeking to reconcile the myriad competing interests inside the company – the battles for pieces of a limited budget, the fights for financial and psychic reward – trying to harmonize the many factions with the organization's goals.

In the continuous struggle, words are tools of negotiation. Jargon is frequently a placeholder. A phrase's meaning will be vague at first, and purposefully so, for the process of seeking agreement about meaning is essential to the ability of the enterprise... to move forward.

So what sounds like jargon to the outsiders often makes sense to the people with expertise in a given area – indeed is one of the means by which they make sense of their experience. And so I must honor that, respect their speaking in their own language. I've made an uneasy peace with words like "marketing and branding."

Before I went down this tangent – compensation to consultants to jargon – I was talking about the large topic of modern corporate practice as a help in managing complex organizations and taking care of the people who work there.

Modern corporations emphasize data. Decisions need to be, if not data-driven, at the very least data sensitive and informed. And we are becoming more data conscious as evidenced by the Diversity Scorecard, assessment projects, retention initiatives, and measurements of our IT progress and fundraising success.

In the coming year we will be collecting and refining more data, information about the actual costs of many segments of our operation and about our space requirements. Believe it or not, we do not have enough space for all our needs, and we want to be sure that our budget and space allocations are made on the basis of facts rather than as responses to squeaky wheels or administrative whims.

News organizations like scandal, and so stories about corporations usually focus on scandal, greed, corruption and insensitivity. But most corporations are not that way, and many corporate practices are aimed at equity, justice, fairness and the wise use of money. Is LMU becoming more corporate? I certainly hope so. At least in all ways save a few.

How easy – too easy – it would be if a university's improvement depended simply upon the appropriate adoption of sound business practice. But universities suffer a complication. At universities, corporate practices and business models serve a project that is profoundly un-corporate: the creation, transmission and enjoyment of knowledge. Or, more broadly in LMU's

case: the encouragement of learning, the education of the whole person, the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

Bailyn wrote this about Bertrand Russell's year at Harvard in 1914:

But if Russell liked, even admired, the students, he had little good to say about the faculty, which persisted in trying to recruit him. "Dull," "tiresome," "complacent" people, forced to spend themselves in endless teaching and to produce "quick results," they were deprived of the "patient solitary meditation ... that goes to produce anything of value." They lacked, he said, "the atmosphere of meditation and absent-mindedness that one associates with thought – they all seem more alert and businesslike and punctual than one expects very good people to be." (pp 21-22)

Learning, the nurturing of ideas, the creation of knowledge, the pursuit of one's passions and the growth of one's talents, these are not susceptible to strategic and tactical plans. They are even hard to measure; data here work more like clues for a detective than an accountant's tool. And for teaching and scholarship to flourish, leisure can be more important than work, patience more valuable than productivity. How, in a changing world, to create the conditions that truly foster the mission of the university and to assess success, these are tasks that challenge our skills and talents.

And it is not simply the process of acquiring, creating, and transmitting knowledge that is profoundly un-corporate. I speak a lot about the University at the service of City and Church, of our community and the culture around us. And I believe strongly in that mission. But there is another, equally important dimension to a university: the love of learning for its own sake, knowledge as valuable in itself; in short, contemplation. Even knowledge that is "useless," "unprofitable," "not-needed," is to be cherished. Aristotle observes in the "*Metaphysics*":

It is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about greater matters, e.g., about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe...; therefore since they philosophize in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end. (Book A.2, 982)

At LMU's heart is a tension between knowledge as power and an instrument of service and knowledge as a treasure in itself. In this way, the University mirrors the church, which encourages both active and contemplative religious orders. There is a profound sense in which we have also "gotten together for the company and for the sheer joy of making music."

CONCLUSION

As I bring this convocation address to a close, I'd like to offer a few more personal reflections. An overarching challenge for institutions, as for individuals, is to live fully in the present. And this present is constantly threatened: by the past and the future, by nostalgia and daydreams, by regrets and impatient hopes. Mature living doesn't deny the force of the past and the future but configures memory and desire to invigorate the present. The remembrance of things past enriches and inspires the present, while the "infinite passion of expectation" gives it goal and energy.

With its wonderful past and surpassing promise, LMU's living present – and experience of change – will from time to time be particularly intense. Anatole France once observed: "All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy; for what we leave behind is part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another." We will at times have some dying to

do. But this same past and promise can create a particularly rich present, call forth the best in us, give us ever new life.

“That’s easy for you to say!” you might be thinking. And in a sense you are right. Machiavelli famously observed:

Nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, then to put oneself at the head of introducing new orders. For the introducer has all those who benefit from the old orders as enemies, and he has lukewarm defenders in all those who might benefit from the new orders. This lukewarmness arises partly from the fear of adversaries who have the laws on their side and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not truly believe in new things unless they come to have a firm experience of them.

Machiavelli’s correct: it’s challenging to lead change. But it’s more difficult to be subject to changes one doesn’t lead, can’t control. After all, I got to choose the logo! Even when the process in place allows each of you to express your views, in the end I or another senior administrator – imperfect human beings trying to do the best we can – make the decision. And you live with the consequences.

But that’s not the whole truth. In a deep sense the really important changes are as much in your hands as in mine, maybe more so. How we create community out of ever shifting complexities and reconfiguring circumstances, how we ever better encourage learning, educate the whole person, serve faith and promote justice; how we do all this while at the same protecting leisure and wonder and the value of knowledge in itself; answering these questions depends on your ingenuity, creativity, dedication and hard-work. This institution’s future is more yours to fashion than mine.

Well, now is the time for my most personal reflection, the moment to come clean. I don’t particularly like change. I’m a creature of comfort, a reveler in routine, a stick-in-the-mud. Even when the details of my life are not what I’d like, I learn to negotiate a truce with things as they are. But, unfortunately, I also believe in a God who does like change.

God wants each of us to be fully alive. And so God never lets us rest for long. God works in the world to stretch our imaginations, sharpen our intellects, refine our skills, deepen our sensitivities. In short, God prepares us to love more fully and more richly. And all this means change.

I began this address by talking about the “active” religious orders in the Catholic Church. An important insight of this tradition is that the “salvation of one’s soul” is not a solitary, isolated activity, separate and apart from one’s serving others. In loving others I grow into God’s dreams for me, I become fully alive. I am, if you will, saved.

So through all these changes in our lives as we strive together to carry out even better the mission of this great university, God is at work in us, not leaving us alone, helping us to become who we are.

In that spirit I’d like to conclude with some words of Teilhard de Chardin, as true for LMU as for each of us:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God,
We are, quite naturally,
impatient in everything to reach the end
without delay.
We should like to skip
the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being

on the way to something unknown.
something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability –
And that it may take a very long time.

....

Only God can say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of
feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.

Let us together live boldly, think deeply, and help one another as we change.
Thank you for your kind attention.

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