

## **HESBURGH AWARD**

**January 2010**

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### **Intro:**

It is deeply humbling to join the ranks of those who have received the Hesburgh Award, starting with Fr. Ted Hesburgh himself. I should borrow some of President Obama's remarks in Oslo when he received the Nobel Prize.

I thank most sincerely the ACCU board for this great privilege to be even mentioned in such company, and I thank especially Mary Lyons, Board chair of ACCU and Dick Yanikoski, President, my close colleague and friend. My special thanks to the AJCU staff members here tonight who make me look much better than I ever could without them.

I am especially happy to be honored at the same time as Cardinal McCarrick, a great friend of all in Catholic higher education, and a personal friend as well. I often think of the night the Cardinal, Fr. Howard Gray, and Dr. Jack De Gioia spoke at Georgetown on "Lay-Jesuit Collaboration in Higher Education." What I heard that night was the powerful synthesis of a bishop's understanding, friendship and support, a member of a sponsoring group, in this case a Jesuit, effectively and inspirationally sharing the sponsoring charism, and a very special lay colleague rising to the challenge in superb fashion. If we can repeat that triad on each of our campuses, in all of our distinctiveness, we have indeed a very promising future for Catholic higher education.

Thank you, Cardinal Mc Carrick, for setting the bar so high in being supportive of what we do and for inspiring us all.

By the way, I have to be careful tonight in what I say, since the Cardinal has rebuttal privileges tomorrow morning in his talk.

I am reminded of the story of Mario Cuomo being invited to speak on a Jesuit campus and his asking a friend for advice. He was told, that a Jesuit talk was intelligent, well written, clever, humorous, and totally devoid of facts!

I have been involved with Catholic higher education for over 40 years, with the scars and war stories to prove it, but more important, with the many great relationships with folks like yourselves -- on our campuses, in meetings like this, in workshops and seminars, with many different congregations and schools. Thank you for the privilege of working with you. I wish I could cite specific examples, but we would be here all night.

Last Tuesday, as I was thinking of the many things I might say tonight, I was struck by a passage from Paul's Letter to Timothy from last Tuesday's Mass on the Feast of Sts. Timothy and Titus:

“For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather of power and love and self-control.”

As we look back on the legacy of Fr. Ted and the many women and men who have followed in his footsteps, and as we find ourselves today in a climate of fear, uncertainty, and intense partisanship, I would suggest that we are all challenged to live lives not of cowardice, but of power and love, or as we might say, courage, and self control, which we might translate as civility.

Courage and civility are both synonymous with the life of Fr. Ted Hesburgh and the great leaders of Catholic higher education. Both qualities are desperately needed today. We are surrounded by, naysayers, cynics, pessimists and fierce partisans in society and in the Church. I would submit that an essential part of our identity today in Catholic higher education is to be advocates and exemplars of courage and civility for our students, for one another and for the larger world around us.

### **Courage**

First something about courage.

Read the histories of just about any of our colleges or universities, and you read stories of incredible courage in the face of what lesser folks would see as insurmountable odds: few, if any human and financial resources; often great opposition; and very little idea of how it would all turn out. But these women and men of great faith were determined to make it all work, no matter what those odds might be. And amazingly, it did work and tonight we happily stand on their shoulders.

You will find the same courage in the exhibit, “Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America”, currently at the Smithsonian. This fascinating exhibit chronicles the moving story of women religious living heroic lives in education, health care, social service and justice while helping to shape the life and culture of our Church and nation.

The story of Catholic higher education since Vatican II is clearly a story of courage led by giants such as Ted Hesburgh and Paul Reinert, but also by the sometimes forgotten second recipient of the Hesburgh Award, Sr. Ann Ida Gannon, BVM, who as the president of Mundelein College, led the way for women’s colleges in those crucial years. She was still a visionary in her nineties when I spoke to her just two years ago.

One of the more courageous events of that time was the often misunderstood Land O’Lakes Statement, derisively called by its critics a “Declaration of Independence” from the Church. Critics often forget the distinguished composition of the group issuing that statement. It included two bishops, two high-ranking monsignors, one of whom was our distinguished friend, Cardinal McCarrick, the superior general of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, the assistant superior general of the Society of Jesus, and the presidents of Notre Dame, Boston College, Fordham, Georgetown and St. Louis. Also forgotten is that of the ten sections of the document, only the first spoke of autonomy and academic

freedom. The other nine sections were devoted to how Catholic universities could assure that Catholicism would be “perceptibly present and effectively operative,” and that has been our agenda ever since.

I think of the courage and vision of Sr. Alice Gallin and Dr. Monika Hellwig in leading this Association and all of Catholic higher education in the challenging years of the development of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.

And think of the many examples of contemporary courage in this room -- women and men, with and without habits and collars -- who have given and are giving their lives in service to Catholic higher education. I would like to name names but fear I would omit someone. An obviously key variable in the history of the past fifty years is lay leadership that has made such a positive difference and brought so many new and enriching gifts to the enterprise.

We need to keep alive the courage of former years and celebrate the courage of today as we chart new territory for Catholic higher education.

Sandra Schneiders has reminded us of how the Church seems to alternate between periods of courage and vision and periods of fear and defensiveness. In an admittedly simplistic read of history, the early Fathers of the Church courageously grappled with Greek thought and integrated it into Christianity. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Albert and Thomas did the same with so-called pagan philosophers.

But in the Counter-Reformation years and beyond, we became fearful and turned inward and insular. Galileo and the new sciences, the Enlightenment, and evolution were threats to be shunned or fought, rather than opportunities to discover new ways of thinking. In the United States, the Church, except for visionaries like Archbishop John Ireland and Paulist Isaac Hecker, emphasized protecting the faith of Catholics against real and perceived threats from the surrounding culture. Much the same could be said of the Church prior to Vatican II, until Pope John XXIII wanted to open the windows of the Church and was willing to confront the prophets of doom.

Today, some suggest that Pope John is running around heaven trying to close those windows. Some are talking about “reforming the reforms” of Vatican II. While we should respect honest differences of ecclesiology here, I would suggest that it is desperately important for the Church, and Catholic higher education specifically, to recover the courage of those who have gone before us as we dialogue and work with our interreligious, ecumenical and secular colleagues for the mutual benefit of both.

Our Catholic identity should not be some sort of museum piece we are trying to protect, but a dynamic reality being forged in a complex dialogue with our surrounding culture. It is to such a dialogue that we are encouraged by *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, and by Pope Benedict in his talk at Catholic University last spring, when he exhorted us to bear witness to hope..

As Sandara reminds us, rather than retreating from a world which God so loved as to give us His only Son, we have been sent into that world to proclaim the good news of the Incarnation, Resurrection, and the ongoing presence of the Spirit to ground our courage in the face of whatever obstacles, fears and doubts we certainly face in all their reality.

Armed with this Good News, we should be countercultural to the gloom, pessimism and cynicism of our time, not by pretending serious problems and obstacles don't exit, but finding and, when necessary, fighting our way through them, confident that we can make a difference.

For years, Hesburgh Award winner David O'Brien has been calling on Catholic higher education to be more generous and courageous in exercising our responsibility of service to the Church, and challenging us to be a "bit bolder and a bit less patient." This could be the subject of a whole other talk, and David has given it many times and much better than I could. But I think it is fair to say that our schools remain untapped resources for a Church that too often fears them when it could very profitably benefit from their many resources. Sometimes we are too timid in offering ourselves in partnership to the local or national Church, taking more responsibility for the life and work of the Church and Catholic intelligence in parishes, chancery offices and public forums. In fairness, we don't always find welcoming partners like Cardinal McCarrick, but we need to try nevertheless.

Our demons are not within the church alone. We face all sorts of excuses to be fearful, careful and timid today: our fragile economic reality, increasing questions about the efficacy of what we do as educators, constant challenges to do more with less, competition from many fronts, and badgering from our critics ready to pounce on what we do.

It will never be easy, but we can be confident of what we have to offer to higher education in the best of the Catholic intellectual and social traditions, taught and lived in enriching educational communities. We also offer a host of both/and rather than either/or solutions to supposed dichotomies: being serious about academic excellence and our Catholic identity; being serious about learning and scholarship and about educating for justice; developing critical intelligence and ethical, moral concern; being competitive and collaborative.

We stand up very well against the criticisms leveled against higher education today by Derek Bok in *Our Underachieving Colleges* or Harry Lewis' *Excellence Without a Soul* or in response to the many questions raised by critics, friendly or not. The point is not smugly to pat ourselves on the back, but to be aware that we have something to say to our peers today, and that we should be saying it. Again, we have Fr. Hesburgh as our model. He worked incessantly to build the story of Notre Dame and was eloquently effective in telling it. The rest of us may not have the inspirational impact of the Golden Dome, but each of us has our own great story to tell. That is one of the best things I have learned and experienced in my 40-plus years working with you.

## Civility

A few words on civility.

It is no secret that this town has become a hotbed of partisanship, where political foes intensely dislike one another, where one's ideas are regularly distorted so as to be more easily dismissed.

When the best ideas from every vantage point are needed to address the complex issues of our time we can't afford to demonize and dismiss those with whom we disagree. By the way we act, speak, and write, we are challenged to teach and model how to respect others and their ideas. We are challenged to teach the difference between criticism based on careful analysis of another's arguments and turning those arguments into straw men we caricature and automatically reject.

The Catholic Church today has its own form of partisanship. Clearly, there are different understandings about what it means to be a Catholic college or university today. This can be related to different ecclesiologies or understandings of (and comfort levels with) what the Church is about. At one extreme is a Church kept relatively pure and unsullied by limiting interaction with the world around it. One tends to see threats of "secularizing" influences and behavior everywhere, and to have a very clearly defined notion of the Church (and its institutions) that one seeks to protect. At the other extreme is a Church so deeply embedded in the surrounding culture as to be almost indistinguishable from it.

Most of us live somewhere in between, being comfortable with the healthy, if challenging interaction with our surrounding culture that *Ex corde* describes as the role of the Catholic college or university:

*(a Catholic university) is ...a primary and privileged place for a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture....A faith that places itself at the margin of what is human, of what is therefore culture, would be a faith unfaithful to the fullness of what the Word of God manifests and reveals, a decapitated faith, worse still, a faith in the process of self-annihilation. (#44)*

In the often polarized society and Church in which we live, we are challenged to find ways to be civil, and to be good dialogue partners. Examples of such efforts are: Cardinal Bernardin's *Common Ground Initiative* and his disciple, Msgr. Phil Murnion, pleading on his death bed for "Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue."

In Catholic higher education, we can hope to get back to the genuine dialogue between presidents, trustees, theologians and bishops led by Bishop John Leibrecht, Fr. Terry Toland, Fr. Bill Byron, and Monika Hellwig in developing ways to implement *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.

No one has combined courage and civility better than Ted Hesburgh, in educational circles and in public leadership roles, serving many popes and many presidents on countless commissions and committees. He has been ever strong, but ever civil – no

small challenge to all of us today as we confront problems, challenges, polarization and partisanships on so many sides. I think of great women like Hesburgh awardees Maureen Fay, Dorothy Kelly and Colette Mahoney who could do great things because they could bring people together seeking common purposes..

I congratulate each of you here tonight for your own stories of courage in your struggles to make the best of the Catholic intellectual and social traditions come alive on your campuses, to exercise leadership on and off campus, and to be role models of civility.

May we go forth energized by one another and empowered by a God who did not give us “a spirit of cowardice, but rather of power and love and self-control.”

Thank you again for this great honor, and for the privilege of being a colleague with you in a great venture.