The Strategy of Truth

Inaugural Address

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President of The University of Chicago

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Rockefeller Memorial Chapel

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trust I will be forgiven a personal word. I approach this unlikely moment with many memories. I corne to italso with understandable concern. I do not misconceive the importance of this office which has changed through the years. Rather the goals, achievement, and tradition of this University are disturbingly impressive. Our Universityhas had a standard of extraordinary leadership, difficultto maintain. I am grateful to Chancellor Hutchins, Chancellor Kimpton, and President Beadle for their presencetoday. They will understand my anxiety. It is not that wefear mistakes. Perhaps we should fear not to make them. President Hutchins in his address — given forty years ago— spoke of the University's expérimental attitude, itswillingness to try out ideas, to undertake new ventures,to pioneer. In some cases, he said, the contribution wasto show other universities what not to do. Let me say.with rueful pride, since that time we have made man\similar contributions. I hope we always will. It is natural for this University to believe it believes inpioneering. After all, this University came into being as apioneering first modern University, borrowing ideas fromGermany and England, building upon the New Englandcollege, joining undergraduate instruction and a panoply ofgraduate research in what, some said, surely would be amonstrosity — all this done with Middle-Western enthusi-asm and a confidence that the best could be obtained hereif only it could be paid for. Much has been written of thefinancial arrangements of those days, the creative use ofmaterial resources generously given. But the basic faithwas not in material resources. The faith was in the intellectual powers of the mind. It was considered important,more important than anything else in the world, to uncoverand understand the cultures of the past, to appreciate theworks of the mind, to penetrate the mysteries of the universe, to know more about the environment, the societies,and the nature of man. The

University's seriousness ofpurpose was proven from the first by its insistence uponfreedom of inquiry and discussion. Intellectual tests fortruth made other standards irrelevant. Schools for thepropagation of special points of view might exist, Harperwrote, but they could not be called universities. The emphasis on the need to question and reexamine, both aspart of the inquiry of research and the inquiry of teaching,established a basic unity for all of the University. The basisof that unity underscored the relationship between teachingand research. That unity encouraged discussion amongdisciplines. It supported the individual scholar as hecrossed accepted boundaries of knowledge. It made possible — even compelled — continuing debate concerning theplace of professional, specialized, general, and liberal education within the University. It made the University self-critical."On an occasion such as this," as Mr. Kimpton statedon a similar occasion, "the important rôles are not playedby those who are présent... Our efforts arc given importance by the opportunities and responsibilities... weinherit." So I have stressed those virtues which from thebeginning and until now have characterized our institution:a willingness to experiment, a commitment for the intellectual search for truth, freedom of inquiry, and a concernfor the educational process as though the freedom of mandepended upon it. This is our inheritance. It is an inheritance preserved and strengthened. indeed made possible,by the action and faith of many who arc présent today. We meet in a time of great difficulty. The society isdivided. The conditions of public discussion have changed. More people can take part and react because they can bereached. Both the numbers involved and the means of communication increase the likelihood — and certainly thepowers — of distortion. The problems are complex; thelimits of knowledge are agonizingly apparent in matters ofpublic policy. Meanwhile the investigations of the socialsciences have made clearer the non-rational components ofhuman behavior. The relevance and integrity of reasonare questioned at the same time as impatience emphasizes the manipulative aspects of concepts and institutions. The outrage of this war continues. The view of the world as it is or could be is conditionedfor many by the protective walls or barriers of higher education. Formai education at both

the college and graduate level is highly regarded as the gateway to success. Morethan forty-five percent of our young people in the applicable age group are in college — an extraordinary changeand, with some qualifications, an extraordinary achievement. But the joyous knowledge that the bank of knowledge is overstuffed, and can be drawn upon only with theassistance of the latest generation of computers, adds to the impression of a technical industrialized society inwhich individual thought and concern are powerless — inwhich basic decisions appear to have been made in othertimes or by other people in other places. The very ideathat centers of education are for thoughtful, and thereforePersonal, consideration of values, and for increased understanding, is lost by those who insist that universities aremechanisms of service to be used in a variety of ways for the interests of the larger community. There are many institutions for service in our society. Centers of learning and instruction have considerable difficulty in performing their central tasks; one may question the wisdom of assigning to them additional duties. In anyevent, among colleges, schools, and universities there areimportant differences. Our history, capacity, and objectivesare not all the same. Each institution must find its ownmission. The mission of The University of Chicago is primarily the intellectual search for truth and the transmission ofintellectual values. The emphasis must be on the achievement of that understanding which can be called discovery. President Beadle has spoken, as is his special right to do,of "the incomparable thrill of original discovery." He hasreferred to the importance of having students participatein the process through which knowledge is reaffirmed andadditions to knowledge are made. This, of course, is theprocess of education — whatever the means used, and itapplies to the dialogue as well as to the experiment. Weshould reaffirm the close connection between the creativityof teaching and the creativity of research. And we shouldreaffirm also our commitment to the way of reason, withoutwhich a University becomes a menace and a caricature. It is of course easy to be in favor of reason. But thecommitment is somewhat more demanding and difficult. President Harper in his decennial report took occasionto emphasize "that the principle of complete freedom ofspeech on all

subjects has from the beginning been regarded as fundamental to The University of Chicago." At the same time he repeated the policy that "The University,as such, does not appear as a disputant on either sideupon any public question and... utterances which anyprofessor may make in public are to be regarded as representing his opinion only." Academic freedom is strongernow than it was then. But the propriety of the corporateneutrality of the University on public policy issues havingmoral aspects has been seriously challenged. The positionquestions the power or persuasiveness of ideas in themselves, recognizes the superior authority of official certification, or places reliance on other forms of power. Perhaps the position reflects the kind of frustration describedby Louis Wirth in 1936. Professor Wirth wrote: "At atime in human history like our own, when all over theworld people are not merely ill at ease but are questioning the bases of social existence, the validity of theirtruths, and the tenability of their norms, it should becomeclear that there is no value apart from interest and noobjectivity apart from agreement. Under such circumstances it is difficult to hold tenaciously to what onebelieves to be the truth in the face of dissent, and one isinclined to question the very possibility of an intellectuallife. Despite the fact that the Western world has beennourished by a tradition of hard-won intellectual freedomand integrity for over two thousand years, men are beginning to ask whether the struggle to achieve these was worth the cost if so many today accept complacently the threatto exterminate what rationality and objectivity have beenwon in human affairs. The widespread depreciation of the value of thought, on the one hand, and its repression, on the other, are ominous signs of the deepening twilight ofmodern culture."The issue raised is central to what a university shouldbe and what it should stand for. It is of course quite truethat the ideas of individual scholars in universities are notlikely to immediately sway the world, although some havehad considerable effect. The tasks which university facultyhave undertaken, sometimes within, sometimes without theuniversities, should not obscure the fact that universitiesexist for the long run. They are the custodians not onlyof the many cultures of man, but of the rational processitself. Universities are not neutral. They do exist for thepropagation of a special

point of view; namely, the worthwhileness of the intellectual pursuit of truth — using man'shighest powers, struggling against the irrelevancies whichcorrupt thought, and now standing against the impatienceof those who have lost faith in reason. This view does notremove universities from the problems of society. It does not diminish, indeed it increases, the pressure for the creation and exchange of ideas, popular or unpopular, whichremake the world. It does suggest that the greatest contribution of universities will be in that liberation of the imind which makes possible what Kenneth Clark has called,the strategy of truth. "For," as he says, "the search for truth, while impotent without implementation in action,undergirds every other strategy in behalf of constructivesocial change." One would hope that this liberation of themind would result from a liberal education at Chicago atboth the undergraduate and graduate level. One can well understand the impatience of those whoprefer a different relevance of practical action. In someareas, implementation, leading to a more basic examination of conséquences and meaning, has been made anappropriate part of training and research. But this may beinsufficient to satisfy those who for the time being at least,and for laudable and understandable reasons, would prefera different way of life. Nevertheless they stay within theeducational System, caught by its pretense and rigidity. They feel they must stay a long time. Not only has thenumber of years required for formai education steadilyincreased as college and graduate work are treated asnecessitics, but the model presses for the total absorptionof the student's interest either in the curriculum or in ancillary activities. We are set on a course which suggeststhat every young person up to the age of twenty-fivc, everyyoung family really, should have an educational institutionas a surrogate for the world. Quite apart from the factthat institutions of higher learning should not be surrogates for the world, the satisfaction with which this development is greeted should be tempered. This developmentin part is a response to distortions caused by the SelectiveService System. Much of the education at the graduatelevel — in some areas, not all — is unnecessary, or evenworse is disqualifying for professional work, as for example the undergraduate teaching for which it

is required. I donot expect agreement on that and I am probably wrong. For some areas I doubt whether the extended time can bejustified as a reflection of the increase in knowledge. Rather, it appears as an unimaginative response on thepart of the educational system to the existence of increasedleisure time within the economy. And if the goal of acollege education for everyone is to be met in a way todo the most good, the purposes and ways of that education, even the period of time involved, should be re-examined. I realize this has been done before, but perhapsit will not hurt too much to take another look. What I amtrying to suggest is that for those who are interested inpioneering, there is much to think about. The University is a member of many communities. Wecherish the relationship with other universities. We are amember of their world community. We are also an urbanuniversity on the South Side of Chicago. In many waysthrough many activities various members of the Universityfaculties and students are working within the community. We seek to be a good neighbor. Most of us are in factneighbors. The community has much to offer us. The factthat most of our faculty live here has helped to maintain the oneness and interdisciplinary character of this institution. It has made it possible to measure the effect of newenterprises and responsibilities upon the institution as awhole. This guideline enforecs self restraint. It is, I think,of benefit both to the community and to the University. New models for pediatric care, for counselling and psychiatric assistance, and new approaches to the major problems of urban education should emerge from the endeavors which have been planned and developed with representatives of the community. These are not the only scholarly-service-training activities in which members of the faculty are engaged within the community which havesignificance far beyond the problems of one neighborhoodand which over time may well determine the quality oflife in world urban centers. The work in the complexproblems of communities within the city is an encouragingcontinuation of historic research begun fifty years ago by the Chicago school of sociology. In 1902 President Harper referred to the firmly established policy of the trustees "that to the faculties belongto the fullest extent the care of educational administration.""The responsibility,"

he said, "for the settlement of educational questions rests with the faculty." On this policy the initial greatness of the University was built. The trustees, whether they agreed or not with particular decisions,have been the strongest advocates of this policy. And thefaculty have fulfilled this responsibility, protecting on theone hand the freedom of the individual scholar, and shepherding at the same time, although not without some pain,some of the most interesting programs for both undergraduate and graduate instruction attempted in this country. I stress the position of the faculty because obviously the quality of this University rests upon them and is createdby them. And the burdens upon them have increased because the conditions of education have changed. Sir EricAshby in a notable address at the University of Witwatersrand quoted from an essay on "The open Universities ofSouth Africa" as follows: "There is no substitute for theclash of mind between colleague and colleague, betweenteacher and student, between student and student... It ishere the half-formed idea may take shape, the groundlessbelief be shattered, the developing theory be tested... It is here the controversy develops, and out of controversy,deeper understanding." Today when there is doubt andskepticism concerning the very tradition of intellectualfreedom and integrity upon which the intellectual pursuitof knowledge is based, it is important that the universitythrough its faculty meet these questions head on. This University has indeed been fortunate in the dedication which throughout the years it has evoked. It hasbeen surrounded by a circle of friends, who by their aspirations for the University and their own self sacrifice haveassured its pursuit of quality and its inner integrity. I am proud to be in this place and I shall do my best.

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