

HAROLD BRYAN CROSBY
COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 16, 1978

Late in the year 1942, when the tide was finally beginning to turn in the long and wearying Battle of Egypt, Winston Churchill said in one of his stirring wartime speeches:

"This is not the end. It is not even the beginning
of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

During these past eight or nine years many of you here tonight have seen and been a part of many beginnings in the life of this young University. As I prepare to pass the baton (we are still hoping for a university mace) to your third president, it is tempting to reminisce about the events of those early years, especially those in which I had the opportunity to participate. I shall, however, resist that temptation. Instead, as we approach what may be, in Churchill's terms, the end of the beginning, I should like to talk for a few minutes about this University and its possible future. If I were to dignify these remarks with a title, I think I would appropriate the title which I coined or borrowed--I am not sure which--for the Nontraditional Accreditation Self-study that is currently under way: The Only Thing We Can Change Is the Future.

As we look at that possible future, perhaps it would be helpful to look at the nature of the institution we call university, as it has evolved in our society. You will recall that the modern university, as we know it in the Western World, had its beginning in the City of Bologna, in Northern Italy, centuries ago when a group of students--many of them from other cities and countries--banded themselves together in order to cope with what they regarded as extortionate exactions from local landlords and merchants. From that start the university has evolved into one of the major institutions in our society. In manifold ways it exerts enormous influence upon each of us. It collects and stores the knowledge of the past. It generates new knowledge by exploring beyond the boundaries of the past into new and often unexpected domains. It is the principal transmitter of knowledge and, we like to hope, wisdom to each succeeding generation.

I think we agree that the fundamental purpose of the university is to encourage the pursuit of truth. In order to accomplish that purpose, it has developed certain characteristics. Important among these are, first, its universality. That rather obvious statement has profound implications, because it means that the university recognizes no limitations upon the quest for truth, honestly pursued. Among other results, this quality has, on occasion, brought the university into apparent opposition with segments of the larger community which it serves.

During the reign of George I of England the king, who had recently caused a regiment of troops to be sent to Oxford because of certain unfriendly demonstrations there, donated to the University at Cambridge the library of the late Bishop Ely. To memorialize this expression of royal preferment from the Oxford point of view, the Reverend Joseph Trapp composed an epigram:

The King, observing with judicious eyes,
The state of both his universities,
To one he sent a regiment, for why?
That learned body wanted loyalty;
To the other he sent books, as well discerning,
How much that loyal body wanted learning.

Sir William Browne, of Cantabrigian persuasion, was thereupon impelled to pen this riposte:

The King to Oxford sent a troop of horse,
For Tories own no argument but force;
With equal skill, to Cambridge books he sent,
For Whigs admit no force but argument.

Fundamentally, the tension involved is that produced by the desire of men for individual freedom and the need of society that freedom be exercised with due regard for the rights of others. In a University it centers upon the need for freedom of inquiry, which in turn presupposes a broad freedom of expression, a right of dissent. Also presupposed is a high tolerance for controversy. Within the university difference of opinion should be dealt with rationally, civilly and--we can hope--with good humor.

Universality must be accompanied and supported by the quality of integrity. The search for truth demands no less; and even though those

within the university may on occasion find their views at odds with the views of others, the university will survive so long as truth is honestly and fairly sought and professed.

Integrity must, in turn, be accompanied by rationality. The medium of the university is the intellect, and rational thought is its weapon for good. It searches for truth, seeks to give expression to truth, and believes that in the minds of rational men truth will prevail. Recognizing that not all men are rational, it teaches rationality. Conscious of its own fallibility, it respects the honestly and rationally held opinions of others. Sincerity, without rationality, becomes either a nuisance or a deadly weapon. In either eventuality, the university recognizes, as did the ancient Greeks, that senselessness is the ultimate tragedy.

Still another essential quality of the university is its humanity. It is an institution devised and maintained by men to serve all of mankind. On the one hand, the university studies and seeks to understand the human condition, in all of its delightful variety and baffling complexity. As Alexander Pope said, "The proper study of man is man." On the other hand, a university is humane. People are its business, and all of us need, not only fairness and justice, but also understanding and compassion. The university should be in the vanguard of the movement which has lifted man from the lex talionis of the jungle toward that ultimate millennium when all men will treat each other as brothers.

Finally, a university has the quality of usefulness. It serves people. Without neglecting its lofty obligations to all mankind, it must be attentive to the needs and aspirations of its more localized communities and stand ready to make its special competences available to them as they deal with the progressively more complex problems and opportunities of the future. It should, indeed, be prepared to take proper initiatives in behalf of these communities.

The underlying utility of the university is to individual men and women. Education is a process in which we must engage one by one. It is a process which should help the individual to live in a way that is fulfilling to himself and useful to the society of which he is a part. It is important, I believe, to maintain a proper balance between these two objectives. My hope is that in some future time our debates over liberal versus vocational education will seem as archaic as those heated discussions among certain medieval scholars over the number of angels who can stand on the head of a pin.

What of the future of Florida International University? That is in your hands, and you will shape it. From its inception this University has charged itself with a threefold mission: education of students, service to the community, and promotion of international understanding. That remains, in my judgment, a valid charge.

Some years ago one of the great leaders of this century began a speech with the words, "I had a dream." Dr. King's dream still not fully realized, is nonetheless bringing about a transformation of our country.

I have a dream of this university--our university, for it will always be partly mine too. I dream of a university dedicated to the pursuit of truth, infused with the qualities of universality, integrity, rationality, humanity, and usefulness. I dream of a university which will take its place among the great universities of the world and, in the words of the English statesman Disraeli, will "be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning" for all mankind. I dream of a university in which every student can join in Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes' hymn to the individual human spirit:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul;

As the swift seasons roll,

Leave thy low-vaulted past,

Let each new temple, nobler than the last,

Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,

"Till thou at length art free,

Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.

The future is in your hands

The only thing you can change is the future.