

*Remarks Given at the  
Dedication of the Library of  
Sacred Heart University*

*By*

*Mr. Philip Scharper*

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## *A Message to Our Alumni, Parents and Friends:*

On September 28, 1968, Sacred Heart University dedicated its new library, the first structure erected since the creation of the original campus in 1963.

Our dedication speaker was Mr. Philip Scharper, internationally recognized editor-in-chief and vice president of Sheed and Ward, Publishers. Educator, author, business executive and a leading interpreter of past, present and future intellectual trends, Mr. Scharper prepared remarks which not only dealt with the place of the library within a Christian University but which offered additional insight on the nature of Christian education in general.

At a time when the minds of many wrestle with such difficult questions as the nature of freedom and authority or the relationship of Christian scholarship to secular learning, Mr. Scharper's comments have special significance. We are, therefore, reprinting them for study and reflection.

All associated with the University were inspired by the substantial interest reflected on the part of several hundred alumni, parents, and friends who visited us either for the dedication or "open house" activities. This support indicates increasing participation in University affairs and I hope that each of you will have an early opportunity to inspect the completed new library.

In the meantime, may I extend warmest personal wishes to you from the members of our faculty and staff and express the hope that you may find Mr. Scharper's remarks both informative and inspiring.

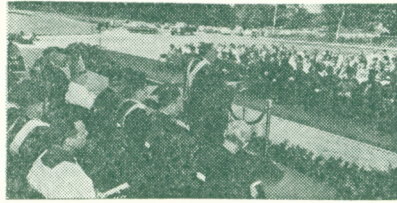
Sincerely yours,



WILLIAM H. CONLEY

President

Sacred Heart University



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This occasion is, indeed, a joyous one for each of us, because it represents the dedication of a library, thus bringing into being a living repository of the living past. But a library is, of course, much more than a link to the past, vital though the uses of the past are to our present needs. A library must also mirror in itself the present — and mirror it fully and accurately, or it becomes a museum and should, in the interests of honesty, be so named.

*A library, then, is not only placed in the present, but must be responsive to the present, even while it offers us a link to the vital, the irreplaceable, past. And because the library brings together in one place both the present and the past, the Now and the Was, it becomes a womb of the future, an agent of the What-will-be.*

It is for this reason that the opening of a library — any library — is a moment of high seriousness. For such a moment to be charged with meaning, the library need not be large in the number of its holdings, so long as its promise is great. It is a moment shot through with meaning as, for example, when a newly-wed couple kneel together on the floor of their first dwelling and together open the boxes of books which were once his and hers, but which will now be theirs.

If such a private event as this can bear so heavy a weight of significance, then it is obvious beyond the need of telling that the opening of the library at a university bespeaks a moment not only of seriousness, but of deep solemnity.

*For such a library—to paraphrase Carlyle—is “the beating heart of a university,” and the whole rhythm of life here at your university will be affected by what goes on in the building we dedicate today. In any true university, the library is where the action is, or at least a major part of it. And if little or no action takes place there, one has reason to suspect that there is something gravely ill within the university—or the library.*

Indeed, I would dare to suggest that the person seriously interested in Christian education would be as profoundly shaken by a poorly frequented library as he would be to discover that most of the pews in the college chapel showed a patina of dust.

For a library, like a chapel, represents, in the Christian intellectual tradition, a sacred space, and we are gathered here today on holy ground. “*Res sacra, homo.*” Man is a sacred being, and all the works of his hands, his head, his heart are — or can be — holy. It is for this reason that the dedication of the library at a Catholic university takes on a quite specific and, indeed, a sacred as well as a solemn character. For the dedication of a Christian library takes place within the context of the Christian intellectual tradition, and the Church, in its wisdom, had long ago decreed that libraries should be consecrated as well as dedicated.

## *A Broad Intellectual Tradition*

*This Christian intellectual tradition is amazingly broad, and surprisingly sensitive to every nuance of the human mind—more sensitive, indeed, than some of the present official bearers and teachers of that tradition seem aware.*

If one were to flip through the pages of history to find an authentic expression of this Christian intellectual tradition, he would find it first expressed in memorable and irrevocable terms by Origen, that bright morning star of the Patristic Age. Origen as you recall, established the first Christian school known to history, and he established it in Alexandria at the dawn of the third century, when Alexandria held the world's most famous library and was the cultural and intellectual center of the world.

In establishing his school, Origen did not warn his students against the wisdom of the pagans, nor was the famous library of Alexandria declared off-limits. Strongly to the contrary, Origen stipulated that his students were to avail themselves to the full of the riches that Alexandria offered to the youthful mind, and insisted that his Christian students be exposed to the whole range of traditional Greek liberal education.

“For,” said Origen, “these studies will be of no small help to the students in their study and understanding of the *Scriptures*.” Thus, Origen, a Christian intellectual, at the dawn of the third century broke the old iron circle of Greek humanistic studies. These studies had been deemed by centuries of Greeks and Romans as the core of *liberal* education, that befitting the free man, the privileged; yet Origen saw these same studies as a preparation for the study of the Gospels which present to man’s astounded gaze a portrait of the Incarnate Word, “who took upon himself the form of a slave,” the Son of Man who had not “whereon to lay his head.”

It is significant for this occasion to recall the description of this school at Alexandria given by one of Origen’s great pupils, Gregory, of Neo Cesarea. “Nothing,” he wrote, “was forbidden us, nothing hidden from us, nothing inaccessible to us. We were to learn all manner of doctrine, Barbarian or Greek, mystical or political, divine or human. We went into and examined with entire freedom all manner of ideas, in order to enjoy to the full these goods of the mind. When an ancient thought was true, it belonged to us, and was at our disposition with all its possibilities of delightful contemplation.”

*This search for an all-inclusive knowledge, as described here by Gregory, represented at the same time a yet more demanding task — the task, as Saint Gregory expressed it, “of subsuming all these truths under the Holy Word — the loveliest thing there is,” in Gregory’s hauntingly beautiful phrase. This is indeed, is it not, the Universum, the idea of the university where all truths, at least in effort, are turned into one fashioned and hammered into a unity.*

For to the Christian and to the Jew, in the ultimate analysis the word *truth*, like the word *God*, has no plural. And truth for the Christian and for the Jew is, indeed, in the ultimate analysis, a person, and man's restless search for truth becomes not the play of intellect but the pursuit of a person in love.

### *"Love of Learning and the Desire of God"*

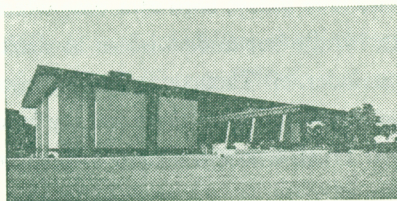
This understanding of the life of the mind for the Christian we find caught up from its Patristic origins and woven into the living fabric of the Christian intellectual tradition at its best. *We find it, for example, expressed, in the labors of centuries, by the Benedictine monks who bequeathed to us of later generations both the love of learning and the desire of God.*

*The Benedictine tradition saw no incompatibility between these two human drives, but saw, indeed, each complementing the other. It is this tradition which was caught up and richly embodied centuries later in the work and the life of St. Thomas, whose character for the Christian intelligence might almost have been expressed in his dictum that "whatever is true, regardless of who said it, comes from the Holy Spirit."*

We who gather here today, born of a time which has more information than it can handle but finds wisdom in short supply, need almost daily this reminder of Thomas to his students, that whenever we lay hold of the truth — any truth — we lay hold, no matter how dimly, of the primal Truth who is a Person and whose name we know.

This brief journey to the past brings us once again to the present, to the realization that the consecration of this library represents not only a solemn, but a truly sacred occasion. For here in this building, through the efforts and labors of the men and women who will staff and use it, here the words of men will be placed at the service of the Holy Word, "the loveliest thing there is."

Here, as in the classrooms and chapel, will come the lived realization that when we discover truth, we discover Christ. An awesome discovery, indeed, because for a Christian to discover Christ is to discover himself, and to make a pledge of himself to what he has discovered. We who follow Him must likewise imitate Him, and He came among man, not to be ministered unto, but to minister; not to be served, but to serve. *This library, then, is dedicated in and to a tradition of scholarship and service. For this reason the dedication of this library is an Act of Faith — an act of faith in God, the architect of history, and an act of faith in man, whom God created in His own image. An act of faith, then, as well as an act of dedication and consecration: for this library must be the beating heart, not only of the community of learning; as a Christian library, it must be the beating heart of a community of love.*



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Bridgeport, Connecticut*