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"Let there be light on academic freedom," address by Dr. Monroe E. Deutsch before the Commonwealth Club of California: November 2, 1951

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### "Let There Be Light on Academic Freedom"

Address before the Commonwealth Club of California

Delivered by Dr. Monroe E. Deutsch, Vice President and Provost Emeritus, University of California San Francisco, November 2, 1951

You may have noticed that the title of my remarks is based on the motto of the University of California — Fiat Lux (Let There Be Light). It is interesting to observe a certain common thread in so many of the mottoes of universities. Harvard's Veritas (Truth) says it most simply and directly. Stanford arrives at the same result in a different way — "The winds of freedom blow. Basically, these are the same. They set forth succinctly what the purpose of the institution is. Harvard says that the aim is Truth. California calls for light and yet more light; what is that but a search [sic] for truth? And Stanford emphasizes that it is only through freedom that truth can be attained.

Yes, that in simple terms is what these hundreds of colleges and universities exist for; they seek the truth and endeavor to teach it. After all how stagnant would the world have been if men had not boldly and courageously sought the truth, ignoring the traditional opinions of the society in which they lived! It does take a readiness to beat a new path, a willingness to be scorned for so-called absurd notions, a defiance of contempt — yes, and often persecution — to abandon the established road and seek the truth. But despite it all "the earth does move" as Galileo said, according to legend.

If universities did not exist to endeavor to find the truth, did not seek the light in all the multifarious fields of human knowledge, and pass on the results of their search to succeeding generations, one wonders what they are really for. Important as it is to train professional men and women, universities certainly do not exist solely for this purpose. But even in this realm the truth must be sought and taught; think of the changes in the training in medicine today as compared with that employed even three or four decades ago.

And there must be no shackles placed on the search for truth. We must not say: "You can seek it, but it must not upset any previously accepted laws (so-called) of physics or chemistry". The air of freedom must certainly blow — and without restriction.

That, my friends, is all that academic freedom is. There is nothing recondite about it. Universities exist to seek the truth; the search must be without limitation. And the members of faculties are the seekers.

How blind those are who strive to put halters upon them! If in the past limitations had been placed on scholars and scientists, think what a different world we would be living in. Don't you remember how it was generally accepted that men would never be able to fly? Do you think that telephone and telegraph, radio and television were deemed possible when first suggested?

Freedom means freedom — it doesn't mean fifty per cent freedom or ninety per cent. It means complete freedom.

And it is to guarantee this that academic tenure exists. It is something easy to comprehend. After a man or woman has reached the grade of associate professor or professor, or on the other hand has taught as a full-time teacher in the institution in any rank for seven or eight years (as may be determined), he or she is assured of permanent tenure. Obviously a period of trial in the case of a young instructor is not only desirable but necessary; the institution has a perfect right to test him out as teacher and scholar for a number of years before granting him assurance of tenure. For this means that indefinite connection with the institution is guaranteed, the only bases for severing it being proved incompetence or proved immorality. Then on those terms the professor can go forward without anxiety as to his retention, to carry on such investigations as he may deem wise.

And academic freedom is not likely to exist unless academic tenure be

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its partner. If there were no tenure, a president or a board of regents or trustees might, at the end of any year, dismiss a man; they would not have to give a reason, he merely would not be reappointed. The trustees might, of course, if they wished, cover it by ascribing it to poor teaching or temperamental difficulties or any other vague excuse that they desire.

So if universities are to fulfill their primary purpose, they must seek truth — seek it without barriers or handicaps. And this freedom would be seriously jeopardized if tenure did not accompany it. Society must therefore defend tenure if it wishes universities — I mean real universities — to exist.

And since boards of trustees are made up of business men, lawyers, and the like, the wise practice has been established that if it is proposed [sic] that a member of the faculty on permanent tenure be dismissed, a properly chosen faculty committee should be set up, to hear the evidence as to incompetence or immorality and make recommendations to the president. How is any board to pass upon the adequacy of a professor of physics or mathematics or indeed any other subject?

What is needed is a clear and unequivocal statement as to tenure written in the regulations of the governing board. And unless that is done, arbitrary exercise of power may at any time occur. When the reports of such committees are given scant consideration, one is reminded of the statement of the 49er concerning a criminal; "He's had his hearing; now let's hang him."

The trustees should serve as a buffer between society and the university; they should really understand the functions of the institution and interpret it to the public. They should not weakly yield to every outside pressure but should be a bulwark for the university and its faculty. I know that the threat of loss of funds is the bludgeon too often held over the heads of university officials. Money is needed and greatly; but even more — far more — is self-respect needed. If efforts are made to starve the university, those responsible for the attack should be informed that they are thereby debasing the education being given the hosts of young people of the state and at the same time depriving the people of the commonwealth — and mankind in general — of the fruits of the researches of its faculty. You can't starve an institution and expect it to go on in full vigor.

And if worst came to worst, I'd rather that the institution subsisted on crusts than play the part of a subservient lackey to those who dole out funds. Early in 1949 this very question became acute at Harvard University, but the reply of that great institution should be the reply of all colleges and universities: "Harvard, like any great privately-supported university, badly needs money; but Harvard will accept no gift on the condition, express or implied, that it shall compromise its tradition of freedom".

The alumni should be its stalwart defenders — defenders of the institution as a whole, and should protect it against the machinations of any who might seek to use it in their own interests. I sometimes wonder how well we have taught our former students what this thing called the university is for. They certainly know what a football team is for — and even a college daily — but how well do they understand the meaning of the

institution as a whole. And when they do, how much energy do they give to protecting it as a true university? Alumni gathering should not be exclusively or primarily athletic meetings; let the graduates understand what academic freedom is and why academic tenure exists. Somehow it seems to me that we are living in a strange age — not the stone age, but the mud-slinging age. It isn't necessary to prove any charge; just make it and the public, alas! will say: "Where there is smoke, there must be fire." I am sure that if the people of the state were to take a poll, an overwhelming number would say that college faculties had been found filled with Communists. Whereas the absolute contrary is the truth. I fear that certain of our newspapers have lent their prestige to this

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wholly unfounded charge. Newspapers are not always able to elect candidates for office, but they certainly can smear the reputations of institutions and men in the eyes of the public.

There is no assured freedom without tenure — and there is no tenure unless it is stated in clear terms, and the position of the faculty committee on tenure is recognized. And there is no university without freedom. It has been said: "The truth shall set you free"; likewise may it be said: "Only the free attain the truth".

We have had a perfect example of this statement in the several totalitarian lands. Be they Nazis or Fascists or Communists — all alike demand that scholars and scientists — yes, even musicians and artists — take orders from the state and make their work tools of the state. What think you would be the fate of a scholar in any field who sought to be independent? He would quickly be suppressed and find himself in the labor camps — or worse. May I be so bold as to say, however, that some of those who violently attack Communists and Communism give the impression of being less hostile to Fascism? I personally hate totalitarianism in any and every form and know that any aspect of it is fatal not merely to academic freedom — but to freedom as a whole. Beware lest Americanism under the name of attacks on un-American activities become a device for establishing some of the features of totalitarianism.

I regard freedom as indivisible. Freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, a public trial — these are aspects of a free world — a democratic world. And so too is academic freedom. Get started on the road of censorship and repression, and some day the effort will be made to go the whole way. We shall have spies in our midst to watch our every word, police to hustle us out of academic chairs — and newspapers forbidden to say a word about it all. I hear some men sneering at what they call "statism", and yet urging oaths and all types of loyalty inspections. To be sure the disloyal must be punished — but to accomplish this it isn't necessary to spread fear throughout a whole department, a whole university. The words of Franklin Roosevelt are in a somewhat different sense true today: "We have nothing to fear but fear itself". The atmosphere of the totalitarian state is filled with fear; we have given signs of it in our land.

I have spoken primarily of investigation. In the field of teaching there must be freedom too. Slavic studies (including the several languages) must be encouraged. Obviously they are useful both for future diplomats and consuls, and for soldiers in time of war. But it is valuable for all Americans to understand the institutions of the Soviets; we may have to live in the same world with them for a very long time. And, I beg you, do not spy upon those engaged in this instruction; they might now and then have a good word to say for a Russian in this field or that or may (even though seldom) commend some aspect of their society. They must be free to do so if they deem proper. I suspect that men can teach about Mussolini and Fascism and not be attacked if they occasionally say a good word for him.

We have spoken of academic freedom from the standpoint of those in charge of the institution — president and trustees — Theirs is the obligation to see to it that such freedom exists. However, it should be emphasized that the purpose of such freedom is not to give the professor the opportunity to carry on research and teaching without supervision or censorship; its aim is to guarantee to society, as a whole, the benefits that flow from such teaching and research. A new discovery, possibly a new remedy, is not simply something that will reflect

credit on its discoverer; it is a blessing to all the countless thousands to whom it will bring relief. And in varying degrees every new light shed on a subject, whether in the Natural Sciences, the Social

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Sciences, the Humanities, is of importance to mankind as a whole. We must constantly emphasize this fact; the Freedom which we ask for — nay demand — we seek not for our own sakes but for the sake of society which has created our universities to bear the light of truth. And not only are new discoveries of importance, but of great importance too is it to teach in all our classes the truth as scholars have found it. It is no kindness to a following generation, no kindness to future teachers, no kindness to those being trained for all the professions, to let them go forth, stuffed with false theories or facts that scholars have long discarded. It is "the truth that shall set you free".

However, every right or privilege entails corresponding responsibilities.

We call for academic freedom that we may ascertain and transmit the truth. Our first task then is to do all in our power to attain the truth. Our teaching should not be slipshod, but as accurate as our research should be.

Great teaching is an art — and when one thinks of the important fields of study into which we are introducing our students, it is one of the greatest. And so I say the teacher should not only be secure in the material he presents to his class but seek to present it to the very best of his ability.

Unless a teacher does these two things and carries on his own research with meticulous care, one wonders whether such a one deserves the privilege involved in Academic Freedom.

At the same time, knowing how seldom the last word on a subject has been said, the teacher should not speak as an oracle but with the humility befitting a true scholar. It is good for students to realize the changes in point of view in the various subjects of study and therefore to understand that by the time their lives come to an end, there may well be similar changes from the points of view accepted today. A course in the history of science is very valuable for this purpose. We must assuredly see to it that academic freedom is not what one modern definition humorously declares it to be: "the right to say what one thinks without thinking what one says." <sup>1</sup>

C. H. Haskins, *The Rise of Universities* (Henry Holt and Co., 1923), pp. 75-76.

And at the same time, especially in such fields as philosophy, anthropology and sociology it is only fair to ask that the teacher, without sacrificing one iota of the truth as he sees it, take account of the special views and the religious attitude which students bring with them from home and present his point of view with tact and also with the clear statement that in these realms we cannot arrive at results by weighing or measuring them and that great scholars differ widely in their points of view. They must not claim to have final knowledge in areas where there are constant fluctuations of opinion, remembering too that irreparable harm may be done by an assumption of certainty where certainty is impossible.

It is the status quo which is the enemy of academic freedom. If we were willing to settle down and make no changes as the result of research and teach what we were taught, there would never be a case to come before the American Association of University Professors. And yet intelligent men and women know that the status quo must ultimately yield to a new status and so on till the end of time.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new; And God fulfils himself in many ways, Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

In a certain sense then teachers should be expected to question aspects of the status quo, eager to thrust society out of the comfortable lethargy into which it tends to sink. And those thus disturbed will always feel indignant both at the ones responsible for the disturbance and the academic freedom which is responsible for it. Of

course, when it results in a scientific discovery which ministers to human health or adds to human wealth, society willingly

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condones it. It is in fields that are more controversial, that society wishes the muzzle applied. But those who do, will then destroy the purpose for which the institution exists.

The academic world is after all a single one; the work of a scholar be it in Spain or Germany, Brazil or Italy, is as important to an American scholar as if it were the work of an American. Scholarship is a unit, and so the academic world is a unit. Think how much would have been lost to the world — and to ourselves — if the work of German scientists had been hemmed in within the borders of the Reich. Therefore academic freedom is essential in every academic institution. The world suffered when the Nazis muzzled German scholars and the Fascists Italians. And so today the shackles of totalitarianism deny freedom to scholars in the Soviet Union and all the pitiful group of satellites. Would that it were possible to break these chains and at the same time destroy the Iron Curtain which prevents access to and egress from those lands, save under the ever-present eye of the Communist government!

But where help can be given, it should be given. Whenever an American institution suffers the loss of or even an infringement of academic freedom, I rejoice when the sister institutions and the sister faculties rise in protest. It is a thing which I fear is so little understood in general, that those who know it intimately must speak loudly and clearly.

But at the same time we should make every possible effort to have the people as a whole understand what it is and why it is. When alumni get together, let them learn what this cornerstone of the university is. I sometimes become very greatly discouraged and wonder if they have taken away from college merely an enthusiasm for athletics and a memory of the detailed plays at football games. Have we been remiss in not teaching them what the institution itself is? Let us now seek to remedy this — it is not yet too late.

When we see violations of academic freedom, remember that they usually concern individuals. So our defense should be not merely of the abstract principle but of the persons who have suffered by its infringement. I do not wish to see our faculties engage in strikes, especially general strikes, but I do feel that there should be more solidarity in the profession, and that when an outrage occurs, we should all at once make clear our feelings and at the same time seek to help those who have been mistreated. We are after all members of one brotherhood, all disciples of truth — and we should feel as though we ourselves had been stricken, when one of our fellows somewhere within our nation's boundaries suffers just because he belongs to our brotherhood and seeks the light which is but another name for truth.

I have a feeling too that if infringement of academic freedom becomes common, many a young man or woman who has had in mind the pursuit of an academic career, will say: "This is the last straw; I knew that the financial rewards of teaching are far less than in its sister professions, but I always felt that the freedom which the life afforded, the lack of intrusion on one's work, was a great compensation. Now that that is gone, I prefer to go into some other field."

And this disease of curtailing academic freedom is "catching", Unfortunately if a great institution sets the pace, it is easy for other institutions to follow in its path.

Let me make myself crystal clear. I never should tolerate on the faculty of an institution with which I was connected, anyone who sought to undermine the foundations of our government, who endeavored to destroy it by force or violence (as the phrase goes), nor (to be more explicit) should I appoint a Communist on the faculty. I do not object to his holding whatever views he may desire but such a one would of course, in his teaching on the campus and his writings, be loyal to the Soviets and defend their system and their practices;

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he could not be expected to prefer our democracy. Moreover he would go forth to lecture in various communities and before various societies, bearing the title of a professor in a reputable institution, and thereby secure entrance where ordinarily a Communist could not obtain entry. Besides he would gather about him in his study and in his home liberal-minded young men and women and seek to win them over to the same cause. No, I definitely should not permit the appointment of a Communist to the faculty. But at the same time I should resolutely fight the weak-minded and the foolish who brand every liberal a Communist and who (alas!) do not know the difference between a Communist and a Socialist and who call all who seek social welfare or fair treatment of minorities Communists.

I have spoken of Academic Freedom, since that is the goal we seek. But we must never forget that we have learned that the protection of Academic Freedom lies in Academic Tenure. If you permit that to be harmed — and there have been cases where it has been outraged without any adequate reason — you will readily find that those responsible will proceed step by step to destroy it entirely. We must stand together in demanding that those dismissed in clear contravention of tenure be restored, and that no such action be permitted in the future. Do not consider that the loss of a battle through the possession of power is to be the end of the war; we must keep our eyes fixed on the eventual victory.

When I defend academic freedom, remember I am defending the freedom of investigators and teachers. They are given freedom so that there may be no curb on their research or their presentation to their classes. But I take it that this is where it begins — and ends. If one is a professor of physics, the presumption is that his knowledge of economics is no greater than that of any other intelligent man. If the professor of physics writes on economics or lectures on it, he cannot claim academic freedom, for this is not the field of study in which he is a specialist; however, he does have the right which is available to any American citizen — freedom of speech. It is not as a professor that he speaks or should speak, but merely as an American keenly interested in the well-being of this nation of ours. And I have always had the feeling that under such circumstances he should not use his academic title or if he does, should make clear that economics is not his specialty. But his protection against those who might wish to muzzle him, is that powerful document — the Constitution of the United States. And here too no Board should interfere, whatever the views the individual sets forth. Do you remember the case of certain Midwestern colleges which dismissed a group of professors, because they were supporters of Henry Wallace for the presidency in 1948? This was the grossest of interferences with the rights of American citizens; and I am sure all of us agree on this, whether we supported Dewey or Truman. Professors are citizens and should not be treated as beings to be supervised or have their rights curtailed.

When men and women are dismissed, not because of any offense they committed, not because of incompetence, not because of membership in the Communist Party, that is a blow — and a grievous blow — at academic freedom and equally is it a blow against the tenure which they had earned.

But time rights many wrongs. And I look forward to the day when the evils of the past will be wiped out, and fair dealing once more prevail.

We must remember that in this we are not innovators but have noble precedents. You recall, I am sure, that Thomas Jefferson in drawing up his own epitaph, wrote as follows: "Author of the Declaration of Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia." Observe that these three acts of his were in his eyes of far more importance than the series of illustrious offices he had held, including the presidency of the United States. And you may be sure that in the University which he founded, this statement of his was not forgotten: "That it

is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its offices to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order; and finally that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict

unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate; errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them." <sup>2</sup> And to this could be added a series of

Jefferson's statements to the same tenor. May I quote one which in reality sets forth succinctly what democracy is? He wrote to his friend, Dupont de Nemours: "We both consider the people as our children... But you love them as infants whom you are afraid to trust without nurses, and I as adults whom I freely leave to self-government." Is it not obvious what Jefferson would have said as to academic freedom?

It is interesting and at the same time enlightening to recall the various subjects which have throughout the years called forth attacks on academic freedom. In some instances, the offending professor was dismissed; in others legislation was adopted to prevent such transgressions.

In American colleges the attack first centered on religious issues. Somewhat later some professors suffered discipline for not attacking the excesses of the French Revolution. Professors, both in Western Reserve University and the University of North Carolina, were dismissed and made to resign because they were abolitionists. Evolution began to cause trouble in 1870 when Professor John Fiske was attacked at Harvard. But in addition a considerable number of denominational colleges and state institutions too indulged in expulsions on this ground. However, this issue has by no means died. The "teaching of evolution" is legally prohibited in Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas. Many of us still recall the well-publicized trial of Scopes, a young teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, who was tried and found guilty of the crime of teaching evolution. He was defended by Clarence Darrow and among the prosecuting attorneys was Wm. J. Bryan, candidate for the presidency three times.

However, in recent years as a whole academic freedom has been attacked on economic and political bases. President E. B. Andrews of Brown University was forced to resign by his trustees because he advocated bimetallism. Even that great sister university, Stanford, cannot afford to throw stones, recalling the case of Professor Ross whose statements concerning the Southern Pacific Railroad strongly offended Mrs. Leland Stanford, whose husband, you of course remember, was one of the Big Four of the S.P. There were numerous attacks on academic freedom in the period between 1914 and 1923. In the State of New York the Lusk Laws in effect from 1920 to 1923 not only required of teachers certificates of loyalty but forbade the employment of any who had criticized the government of the United States. <sup>3</sup>

Ralph H. Lutz, What is Academic Freedom within the Framework of Academic Responsibility, in Bulletin of Western College Association, Spring meeting, April 1, 1950, pp. 17-27; this is the source of most of the examples cited.

All this illustrates the many ways in which academic freedom has been abrogated, and suggests the infinitely larger number of bases of attacks if the principle is not defended.

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Once let a crack be made in the dyke of academic freedom, and it may so readily be widened; the waters of ignorance and tradition will sweep in and engulf the universities which the dyke protected. Think of the way in which people are speaking on contemporary problems; tolerance for great differences of opinion has become less and less. Name calling is a favorite pursuit. It has made the Senate of the United States the arena in which no attacks are so baseless that they may not be made. I suppose next those who support liberal candidates (branded as Communists by their opponents), will themselves be subject to suspicion.

In such a popular frame of mind academic freedom is all the more necessary. There must be some place at least where opposing views can be presented, and where every effort is being made to arrive at the truth. Destroy

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Gilbert Chinard, Thomas Jefferson, The Apostle of Americanism, Little, Brown and Company (1944), p. 103

that refuge — and we should be indeed in a pitiful state. How wise were the makers of our State Constitution in writing this provision: "The University shall be entirely independent of all political or sectarian influence and kept free there-from in the appointment of its Regents and in the administration of its affairs." <sup>4</sup>

Article IX, Section 9.

If academic freedom goes, the University in its true sense goes, and if it goes, what reason have we to expect that freedom of the press should be allowed? If the "teaching of evolution" for example be a crime, would a newspaper be permitted to make a statement based upon it as truth? And if not, where is freedom of the press? Assuredly, if the newspapers are muzzled, what likelihood is there that freedom of assembly will be permitted? Suppose young Scopes or Clarence Darrow had sought to secure a hall in Dayton to argue as to the validity of evolution, would he have found a hall available and even so, would he have been permitted to set forth his position? And if all these freedoms can thus be nullified, if groups of people are so sure they possess the truth that they refuse to permit other views to be presented, how far is this from interference with religious freedom? To be sure we still have a Constitution and a Supreme Court to interpret it, but there have been subterfuges resorted to for the purpose of circumventing other sections of the Constitution. In the words of James Madison: "Wherever the real power in a government lies, there is the danger of oppression." <sup>5</sup>

Hunt's Madison's Writings, Vol. V, p. 271.

In part, infringement of academic freedom is based on the assumption by trustees that professors are not officers of instruction but employees. And they sometimes feel that the employee must not embarrass [sic] the institution or its governors by his statements — nor utter words with which the employer is wholly out of harmony. They forget, on the one hand, that the relation of employer and employee is no longer as it was a hundred years ago; the power of employees is evident, I am sure, to all employers who are not blind. But personally [sic] I deplore the term employee as applied to a professor; this suggests that there is no difference between a great scholar who is a professor and a workman on the grounds, in their respective relations to the institution. A university can get along without gardeners, if necessary — and have no lawns or landscaping. I even date to say trustees are not so necessary as the faculty. It is the faculty who are the very heart of an institution; without them it cannot exist.

In discussing the university of medieval times Professor Chas. H. Haskins of Harvard University said: "As there were no endowments of importance, there were no boards of trustees... In a quite remarkable degree the university was self-governing as well as self-respecting, excaping [sic] some of the abuses of a system which occasionally allows trustees or regents to speak of

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professors as their 'hired men!'" <sup>6</sup>

The entire board of a college might resign or be removed and replaced by another group of men; the life of the college could go on without perceptible change. But dismiss an entire university faculty — and you will have destroyed the very life blood of the institution. Even the dismissal of thirty-one professors is bound to have an adverse effect upon a University. President Wheeler, the great executive and scholar who headed the University of California from 1899 to 1919, said it with clarity and force: "(Professors) are not employees of the University, but members of it. The right attitude of service in the manifold demands of the University cannot be obtained or expected from men uncertain of their tenure; neither can freedom of thought, research or expression, especially in subjects traversed by the daily thought of the community... If the teacher is hampered, whose ideas does he teach? Those of the regents? Of the president? Or of the legislature? But sciences does not

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follow the election returns. Within the range of the teacher's special equipment and knowledge, not as oracle at large nor as bearing an arbitrary license, but in the name of his science, he must be free to teach. Otherwise the university is an imitation and a sham." <sup>7</sup>

Wheeler, *The Abundant Life* (University of California Press, 1926), pp. 128-129.

Yes, indeed, the faculty are not employees — in very truth they are the university.

When all is said and done, one's attitude toward the question of academic freedom depends on one's conception of the university. To me it is the greatest institution that mankind has created; it serves as the storehouse of the knowledge of the past and of the present; it is the area in which the frontiers of knowledge are ever being pushed forward, be they in the biological or physical sciences, or in the social sciences and humanities; it is the means of transmitting this knowledge to following generations; it is too the center at which men and women are being trained for all the professions and trained with the best knowledge available; it is the seat at which the teachers and the investigators of the next generation are being given the tools and the inspiration to carry on their work. It is in short the intellectual center, the very heart, of our society, and each such university is bound by chains of sympathy and understanding to its sister institutions throughout the globe.

And this greatest of human achievements would weaken and perish if it were deprived of freedom. Yes, the air of freedom must blow; without it the university cannot exist. An Alma Mater bound and fettered could never be a nourishing mother. And there is no nobler cause than to stand in her defense.