First of all, congratulations to the newly installed Endowed Professors and award winners: it is a privilege to share this day with you. And thank you to the leaders of the University of Dayton President Curran, Provost Saliba, Dean Benson, who invited me to spend a few years of my retirement with you. And thanks to all of you who have been so welcoming to me and my wife as we join the UD community. John Cardinal Dearden, one of the great leaders of the American Catholic Church in the years after Vatican II, once referred to the Catholic Church as “a community of faith and friendship”. As you have welcomed us, I have thought that, in an almost sacramental way, the people of UD, whatever their faith, embody that image of faith and friendship.

In 1976 Seton Hall University invited me to deliver an address on the legacy of the University’s patroness, Elizabeth Ann Seton, recently canonized as a saint. On a hot May afternoon we all attended a celebratory Mass at the Newark cathedral, then returned to campus where the faculty, sweltering in academic gowns, joined a large audience to hear greetings from many notables, then listen to an extended account of the saint’s remarkable life. At about 5:00 I was finally introduced. As I began to speak, the doors at the back of the large hall opened and white-coated waiters wheeled in carts of cold drinks and attractive snacks. Heads turned, appreciative murmurs were heard, and the speaker got the impression that interest in his forty minute lecture might be eroding. I cut my remarks short. Today I will once again try not to ask for excessive patience as we anticipate the reception to follow.

What I will try to do is offer some words of encouragement to you in your work of American Catholic higher education. We are at an important moment in the history of our colleges and universities. You here at UD have worked hard over a number of years to consider your Catholic and Marianist mission: it has meant a lot of meetings. The hard part is that the future of these institutions, like the future of our church and our country, is in our hands. For us at least, shared historical responsibility, as scholars, as
citizens, and for some of us, as Catholics, is a fact, not an option.

You and I do our work in colleges and universities that are American and Catholic. We are located at the intersection of three overlapping sets of responsibilities, academic, civic and religious. These are colleges and universities, first of all. They are also Catholic, often intimately related to particular religious orders, in our case the Marianists. And, less noticed, they are American, chartered by the state, recipients of public financial support, committed to good citizenship. In that sense, you may notice, these institutions are like us, for we too acknowledge professional, civic and religious or conscientious responsibilities, and that resemblance is no accident.

After all, why have Catholic colleges and universities, to the distress of so many, chosen to take on academic and public responsibilities as serious as their ecclesiastical responsibilities? The answer is because we have. When I graduated from Notre Dame forty nine years ago, honored by the presence of President Dwight Eisenhower, medical missionary hero Tom Dooley, and the future Pope Paul VI, the trajectory of the American Catholic story had brought us to 1960, with one of our own running for President. We went into business, finance, education, scientific research, military service, politics, even history. We freely chose vocations that required commitment to professional standards and to the shared obligations of citizenship, while we remained, most of us, committed Catholics. I could provide considerable evidence that we did so enthusiastically because the common good for us was, and remains, a genuine good.

In later years, as a Catholic and as an American, I came to have reservations about some of the ideas and actions of President Eisenhower, Cardinal Montini, and Tom Dooley. Nevertheless I believe that both their presence, and my later reservations, testify to the importance of Notre Dame’s insistence that we were American citizens as well as adult Catholics. Through the University our church accompanied us as we entered the so-called mainstream, but with that new acceptance came new responsibilities. Before we knew it those responsibilities regarding race, war and social justice opened some critical distance from people we loved and policies we had taken for granted. But it was our job to change the world, not turn away from it. For Notre Dame and its graduates, or UD’s, to retreat from that position of shared responsibility, in church and society, into a moral or philosophical exclusivism, to give up on the possibility of a common good and adopt a stance that precludes
deep engagement with democratic culture and politics, such an option would be a tragedy for our country, a disaster for our church.

Theologian David Hollenbach, recipient of your Marianist Award two years ago, has helped us understand that what some describe as inappropriate accommodation to secular powers was our stumbling into solidarity.¹ In fact, on the ground, in places like this, intellectual, social and political solidarity is central to our best work. Here at UD Marianist leadership, the work of the Fitz Center, the commitment to the city of Dayton, all demonstrate that academic and Christian responsibility draws us more deeply into the human family, and into partnership with others. We really care, and we hope our students really care, about how history turns out. In our lifetime we made a decisive historic turn away from counter-cultural Catholicism and we learned to measure our experience by what serves the human family, the common good, all of us. That is solidarity.

So, for each of us and for our Catholic and Marianist university, professional and public commitments make serious demands. To take the professional first, we belong to a wide range of professional academic organizations, from accrediting agencies to professional societies for administrators and staff to the learned societies within each discipline that define much of our vocational practice. As full participants in these important institutions, we share responsibility not just for the quality of American higher education but for the quality of American intellectual and cultural life. This draws us into the politics of knowledge, which makes us very nervous.

Yet there was a time when the American university and its emerging disciplines saw themselves as custodians of the public good, pledged to insure that knowledge was at the service not of corporate elites but of the people. Organizations like the American Economic Association, the American Historical Association, and professional organizations in education, law, medicine and engineering were founded just before or during the progressive era by advocates of the Protestant social gospel and idealistic students of social science who helped staff settlement houses and did research for reform organizations.² Later those organizations tended to become protective of professional interests, but that idealism lives on in groups like Physicians for Social Responsibility or the Union of Concerned Scientists. At Catholic universities where we take seriously the idea of vocation, we are drawn to ask how we can help support professional networks of social responsibility that are needed if knowledge is
to serve public purposes. In short, consideration of the politics of knowledge is required as an integral feature of UD’s commitment to “practical wisdom” and “education for service, justice and peace”.5

While we are committed to the academic vocation, we also affirm our university’s continued fidelity to American Catholics and to the sponsoring religious orders that shaped the history of each institution. Our commitment is expressed in mission statements, significant investment in campus ministry, Catholic theology and Catholic Studies, and chairs of faith and culture. But these commitments, too, carry responsibilities, of course to present our faith and our church honestly to our students and other constituents, but also to speak boldly and honestly to the rest of the church about what we have learned about our community’s pastoral and political options.6 In fact Catholic colleges and universities organized effectively in recent years to deal with the hierarchy on governance questions, but they are very shy about discussing controversial questions in our increasingly divided church. They are even nervous about assisting in developing a capacity for dialogue within the church.7 I believe that American public life and American academic life pay a high price for our avoidance of the politics of knowledge. I also think that the American church and thus the American public pay a heavy price for our avoidance of the politics of religion and the politics of the Catholic Church.

One reason for our modesty about Catholic public affairs may be our sense of American Catholic history. Our images of past, present and future have a great deal to do with the way we understand our ongoing experience. Here at UD you have spent a lot of time in recent years reflecting on your history as a Marianist university and you are drawing on that historical reflection to make decisions about the university’s future, and your own. With Marianist comes Catholicism, American Catholicism.8 Unfortunately the story of American Catholic history as usually told has a tone of pessimism, anxiety that Catholics and their church won their way into American life but put at risk their integrity as a community of faith. When bishops and prominent lay people attacked the University of Notre Dame last spring because the university honored our President, they clearly thought that the University had become too academic and too American, at the cost of its Catholic heritage. Behind that controversy has been a long process in which more and more Catholics have become convinced that not just Catholic universities and Catholic hospitals and Catholic charities, but many if not most of us lay Catholics, are too American, too little Catholic.
In my Marianist lecture here at Dayton three years ago I offered an alternative interpretation of the trajectory of American Catholic history, arguing that our family histories, and the histories of these institutions, are histories of genuine liberation in need of theological and political reflection. I could summarize those ideas this way: 1) that the combination of the post World War II Americanization of ethnic Catholics, the American experience of Vatican II, and the conflicts of the “long 1960s” brought about the demise of the remarkable, self-constructed American Catholic subculture; 2) along with the much discussed changes in understanding of the faith and the church there was an immensely important demise of Americanism, the set of ideas and images that gave meaning to the process of Catholic Americanization; 3) that the natural, inevitable outcome in religion of Americanization is a more evangelical, and I would say democratic, practice of the faith, with emphasis on scripture, personal conversion, and local congregational community, requiring intelligent pastoral planning if we are to maintain distinctive Catholic liturgical, spiritual and ecclesiological practices; 4) that Pope John XXIII and Vatican II provided the ingredients of a new vision of American Catholic mission, one centered in service to the human family in the quest for peace, justice and liberation; and 5) that implementation of that vision requires commitment, collaboration and deliberate action across the American Catholic community. The future of the American Church is in our hands and how we deal with that responsibility will in the end determine the meaning of American Catholic history. As Martin Marty once said, the future will determine the meaning of the past.

So both our academic and Catholic commitments lead us to our third area of responsibility, the civic. Unlike Catholic elementary and secondary schools, and like Catholic hospitals and social service agencies, our Catholic colleges and universities are independent, self-governing institutions chartered by the public, recipients of public funds, and pledged to public service. Our leaders joined accrediting agencies from the start, they fought to insure that their graduates were accepted into secular graduate and professional schools, they welcomed the military to campus, won the right to serve veterans under the GI Bill, and at a moment of crisis they joined with other private colleges and universities to win dramatic increases in federal support for financial aid and campus expansion. Only a few years ago many leaders of Catholic higher education joined their colleagues in signing public pledges to improve the quality of their civic engagement, even promising to undertake civic audits of all aspects of university affairs.
This is not news here, for you at UD have been honored for your impressive civic engagement, across the University and especially in the work of the Fitz Center. Dayton’s President has insisted that the University has a sense of urgency about its work with the community of Dayton. Your trustees have given that commitment expression most recently with investments in community assets.

Yet higher education has its own interests. Associations of college and university presidents are well represented in congressional discussions of education funding and student loan programs and, full disclosure, as the trustee of a small Catholic college in New England I am letting my elected officials know we would not be resistant to an earmark for a new science building. Here again, I guess, as in the politics of knowledge and the politics of the Church, many of us are able to mobilize some power around questions deemed of vital interest, maybe not so good at engaging overall questions of the public interest and the common good. That is why the University of Dayton’s work and witness with the Dayton community stands out, and why we need to think a little harder about how training in citizenship can be more fully embedded into the whole range of the University’s research and teaching.

All this talk about politics may seem inappropriate for an academic lecture, but politics does in fact intrude into our affairs. In Dayton the economic crisis has sharpened your already strong commitment to civic engagement. In the Jesuit world I come from every talk on higher education includes, quite properly, reference to the murdered Jesuits of the University of Central America. Their martyrdom, and our American connections with it, lends a note of seriousness to these discussions. So do similar subversive memories of the murders of the Ohio-based American sisters in El Salvador and that of Dorothy Stang from this UD neighborhood, murdered in Brazil just five years ago. In a few weeks we at UD will bestow an Archbishop Romero Award and recall his murder thirty years ago. And death in public service, and political responsibility, sometimes comes closer to home. A year ago my daughter-in-law’s young cousin was killed while serving us in Iraq; his civil religious, American and Catholic funeral brought home to me once again how intimate is our association with war, as we decide, democratically, to ask people to kill and die on our behalf. As I left for Dayton on Monday of this week the front page of the Worcester newspaper carried news that the Gengel family of neighboring Rutland had received news that their daughter Britney’s body had been found. This is the family who were told she was safe and rushed to Florida to welcome her, only to learn that the news had been a mistake. Sunday, as the family
greeted the press outside their home, they had a large poster-sized photo of Britney on the first day of her college service trip, her face beaming with joy amid the smiling children around her. She died that night.\textsuperscript{13}

All of us in higher education have been troubled by deaths in military service for which we share political responsibility and we have been inspired by young people like Britney, students whose compassion, generosity, and capacity to be transformed by such service experiences enrich our own vocations. In recent years we have gotten better at encasing student service projects in analysis and reflection, with mini-course preparation and debriefing exploring power and policy as well as personal service. Many of us now speak of community-based learning rather than service learning in order to emphasize mutually beneficial community partnerships, community organizing and shared civic responsibility. We are enormously proud that so many of our graduates take on a year or two of service after graduation in one of the ever multiplying domestic and overseas service opportunities. We know we are doing a good job encouraging such idealism, our mission statements almost always give testimony to our commitment to justice, peace and the common good, but somehow it all seems a bit at the edge, not at the center, of what we do.

I think this is partly because, even in the best programs dealing with human rights, justice and peace we have not made the constructive turn in the journey of social conscience. We provide wonderful opportunities to experience injustice and explore personal responsibility, fewer perhaps to translate that awakening into exciting options for work and politics. Here at Dayton the set of learning outcomes introduces Catholic social teaching under the heading of critical inquiry: enabling students to “evaluate critically and imaginatively the ethical, historical, social, political, technological, economic and ecological challenges of their time in light of the past”.\textsuperscript{14} Yesterday Vincent Miller spoke of a turn among theologians away from dialogue with contemporary elites in the age of Neibuhr and Tillich to a more explicit rejection of modernity in a way that leaves “an almost exclusive posture of critique”. One of my generation’s most respected students of Catholic social teaching, economist Charles Wilber of Notre Dame, ended a recent article with these words: “finally we must remember that as Christians we are short-term sojourners in this world. It is a temporary dwelling place, where we reside not as citizens with full rights but as aliens or pilgrims whose true home is in a city yet to come. The church’s tendency to provide religious legitimation to the debilitating and sometimes lethal workings of the market and/or the state must be resisted. Instead
the members of Christ’s body must mount a critique of the iniquities of both the market and the state, and carry out their obligation to love and serve God and their neighbor.”

I suspect that this approach, and it is felt on both the left and right ends of the spectrum of Catholic opinion, all but eliminates the possibility of a deep vocational connection between institutional mission and graduate and professional education, research and vocational preparation, at least outside the helping professions. Theologian Karl Rahner once argued that one could in the name of the faith state that a certain condition or action was evil, and in the name of the faith demand action to correct the evil, but one could not in the name of the faith claim that any one program or policy was the Christian program. This explains the difference between abolitionism and reconstruction, between an anti-war and a peace movement, between protests against poverty and direct service to the poor and specific actions to empower the poor and change social structures. Yet Catholic social teaching affirms in the strongest terms the need for to take such constructive action, action that requires the expertise of our universities. In Pacem in Terris Pope John XXIII affirmed human rights and opposed nuclear war, but he also emphasized the need to construct national and global institutions that would protect rights and provide alternatives to war. At Hiroshima in 1982 Pope John Paul II told an interfaith gathering of scientists and other scholars that the building of a new international order was not a utopian dream or a “vain ideal” but a “moral imperative” and a “sacred duty”. Recent Marianist texts underline the community’s option for the poor and then argue constructively for community building and civic engagement exemplified in the work of Brother Ray and Richard Ferguson at the Fitz Center. Marianists regularly recall the work of Father William Ferree who defined the act of social justice as “organizing groups and communities to transform social structures so that they are a better realization of the common good”.

So of course as disciples and citizens we must defend human rights and advocate on behalf of the poor, but we also are obliged to take the ambiguous, conflict ridden, political turn toward constructive action to fix institutions and change policies. That is essential if Catholic social teaching is to penetrate departments and disciplines outside the liberal arts, inform the vocational choices of students, and shape the economic, social and political lives of our lay graduates. We need, the world needs, witnesses but also architects, liberation theologians but also liberation teachers and engineers, technicians and entrepreneurs.
At Notre Dame and Holy Cross and the University of Dayton we once celebrated alumni who became priests and sisters and served our upward bound church. Then we honored the professionals and business people who broke through into the centers of power and privilege in America, not a few of whom devoted time, talent and treasure to our institutions. And now we will do our best to honor those who go to the rough edges of the world to use the democratic community building skills they learned through the Fitz Center. And we will also honor those in business and law and engineering and other professions who go to the centers of economic and political power to try to fix our institutions at their broken places. Both prophets and politicians, Catholic Workers and Catholic engineers and business leaders will need and deserve our support. With them we can get serious about justice seeking and peacemaking and the politics which comes with them, in the same way those who went before us got serious about liberating our own people and, as the Italians said of success in the raw, “making America”.

Yet another word needs to be said. The thing about solidarity, care for the common good, is that it doesn’t work without love. Churches, like universities, are voluntary associations which reflect the investment, or lack of investment, of people who share their common life. The public common good comes about only when each of us puts the good of the commons ahead of our own self-interest, whether that interest is economic or ethnic or even moral. Marxists once thought that the working class, by following its self-interest, would bring about the common good. But no class or ethnic group or religious denomination is going to bring about the public interest for us. The common good at UD, in Dayton, in our country or our church, will come about only when people care enough to put the community’s good ahead of their own interests. Solidarity in action is making the common good a factor in our decisions at home, at work, in the marketplace, the laboratory and the board room, as well as in community organizations and political action. Until that cultural change happens, through the work of universities, churches and voluntary associations, and until many organizations like Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Union of Concerned Scientists appear to turn personal commitments into social change, then it is simply silly to think that the common good will be a factor in legislation or administrative decisions. In short, responsibility is a fact, not an option, but solidarity, being responsible for history’s outcome, is always a choice.

What motivates that choice? I think the answer is love, perhaps the most taboo subject in academic gatherings. In the Marriage
Encounter movement years ago we learned that “love is a decision”, a choice: it’s a verb. And from Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement we heard a line from Dostoevsky: “love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams”, a line that arose from Dorothy’s effort to live the politics as well as the poetry of love. At Oslo our President honored Gandhi and Martin Luther King, who agreed that we must love one another or die, but he proceeded to assert the need for statesmen like himself to confront evil, as if they had not. Religious leaders from around the world meet in World Parliaments of Religion and with the Pope at Assisi and they agree on the imperatives of peace and the principles of a global ethic and the universal common good, but little happens. We know that we do a good job at our universities, we cherish the spirit of hospitality of the Marianists and what the Jesuits call cura personalis, care for persons, and we are often in awe at the goodness of so many of our students, But we wonder, don’t we, why our popular culture is so coarse, our political economy so broken, our international policies so bankrupt. We dream of being, and educating, liberated and liberating scientists and engineers, teachers and architects, entrepreneurs and labor leaders, even as a friend once proposed, barefoot bureaucrats to accompany barefoot doctors. We look around at the community, our programs and colleagues, and we see many of the pieces are in place, but are we ready to take the risks of the politics of knowledge, the politics of church, the politics of our country and world? That is where my campaign for a revival of Americanism comes from.

One of Notre Dame’s finest theologians and teachers of my generation records in his soon to be published journal that he was once asked by a reporter what he hoped to achieve as a teacher. “To instill a love of learning”, he responded. Later he wondered why he had not quite known how to say what he really meant, the well known phrase of an influential book: “a love of learning and desire for God”. In the Christian vision he so well taught the desire for God is the desire for God’s people, that is everybody: communion with God and with one another are one and the same. And I thought to myself as I glossed that passage: there it all is, the whole dream of Catholic higher education. The love of learning we share with all other scholars and artists, the desire for God we believe all persons share that inspires our efforts to reintroduce religion into higher education everywhere, not just among ourselves, and the sense of universal, global solidarity we learned from Pope John XXIII, that we care about human history, not just Catholic history, about the human family and not just our own. Follow that path as our usable future, out of the trajectory of our history, and our identity will be placed at risk, but I
suspect the work of love and justice and the witness of our communities to faith and hope, will open hearts to the Gospel.

I bet the white-coated waiters are ready for us in the Torch Lounge, yet I hesitate to draw my remarks to a close. I am worried that as we make our way out of this hall you will meet colleagues who were unable to attend this ceremony and they will ask you what Dave O’Brien said in his lecture. You might respond “He talked a bit about politics and I think he said we should love one another”. “Oh, great”, they might respond. “Now the Provost will appoint a Task Force to deal with the love deficit and Dean Benson will send the Common Academic Program back to committee to increase its love quotient.” Even worse, as my wife and I make our way to the table loaded with snacks a path might open as shy people turn away, fearful that I might give them an uninvited hug.

So I need to add a couple of academic footnotes. One comes from lapsed Catholic and post-modern icon Terry Eagleton, whom I admired in his youthful days as a Catholic socialist: his most recent book makes an offhanded suggestion that Christian love just might provide an uncomfortable alternative to reigning academic orthodoxies. Even better is the work of Stephen Post, one of America’s leading bio-ethicists and editor of the five volume Encyclopedia of Bioethics. In 2001, when Post was at Case Western Reserve, he received a huge grant to establish the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love. When I heard the news I tried to persuade some high placed Jesuits to consider research on the widely used phrase “men and women for others”. They smiled in a knowing way and said no. So far the Ohio-based Institute has funded over 50 studies in multiple disciplines, many demonstrating that, in some circumstances at least, love works.

Now it will probably be awhile before President Curran persuades the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities to rename itself the Association of Institutes for the Study, and Occasional Practice, of Unlimited Love, but if I understand all that Marianist talk here at UD, it might not take that long for Fr. McGrath to get the Association of Marianist Universities to consider the possibility. In the meantime we could take note of the strategy of Pope Benedict XVI who modestly suggests that in order to practice love in business we might make just a little space for experiments in an economy of communion. We could try that with unlimited love. And those Jesuits who smiled at me actually are pretty skilled in Ignatian spirituality which teaches us to attend more carefully to the movements of our hearts, an approach familiar to those like Provost Saliba who have taken part in Thomas Landy’s Collegium program. The bemused smile from those
Jesuits, I think, expressed not so much skepticism as humility, and a touch of humor, at the reminder of the gap that always exists between what we do and what we would truly like to do. So I know all this politics and love is a stretch, but let’s remember the aspirations of immigrant workers in your own family histories, aspirations that inspired risks taken for the sake of dreams not easily imagined, and maybe we can construct together the pieces of an inspiring vision of American Catholic higher education.

So, finally, those white-coated waiters are probably ready, my time is certainly up, and the moment has come to say: thank you for listening. And I promise: no hugs.

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1 Cardinal Dearden used the phrase in his opening talk at the 1976 Call to Action Conference, the first and only national convention of American Catholics, called to assist the development of a pastoral plan for the pursuit of justice in the world on the occasion of the national bicentennial. I borrowed the phrase for my history of the Diocese of Syracuse: Faith and Friendship: Catholicism in the Diocese of Syracuse, 1886-1986 (Syracuse, 1986)

2 My major work on this subject was From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture (Maryknoll, 1994) For a more recent statement see “Developing American Saints: The Contribution of Catholic Higher Education to the American Experience, Cresset, LXX (Easter, 2007) pp. 14-21


4 See for example Gerald Geison, editor, Professions and Professional Ideologies in America (Chapel Hill, 1983); Nathan A. Hatch, editor, The Professions in American History (Notre Dame, 1989); William M. Sullivan, Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America (New York, 1995); Samuel Haber, The Quest for Authority and Honor in American Professions, 1750-1900 (Chicago, 1991)

5 These terms come from UD’s “Habits of Inquiry and Reflection” and “Service, Justice and Peace” from “Characteristics of Marianist Education”. I have commented on vocation in “A Catholic Commentary” in Pamela Schwandt, editor Called to Serve: St Olaf
and the Vocation of a Church College (Northfield, 1999) pp. 240-246


7 See my “Education in a Church in Crisis”, Conversations on Jesuit High Education Fall, 2004

8 I have written on the relationship between Catholic identity and religious order sponsorship in “Conversations on Jesuit (and Catholic?) Higher Education” Jesuit Si, Catholic...Not So Sure” which originally appeared in Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education in 1994 and is included in an anthology edited by George W Traub, S.J. A Jesuit Education Reader (Chicago, 2008), pp, 217-231.

9 “The Missing Piece: The Renewal OF Catholic Americanism”, 2005 Marianist Award Lecture (copies available in office of the University Professor of Faith and Culture


11 The Wingspread Declarations, one for research universities and another for colleges, appear on the website of Campus Compact.

12 See my comments on this funeral in “A Death in the Family” in America, May 18, 2009, pp. 18-20.

13 Worcester Telegram, February 2010

14 From “Habits of Inquiry”


17 Pope John XXIII, “Pacem in Terris” in David O’Brien and Thomas Shannon, editors, Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage (Maryknoll, 2008), par 31-38

18 John Paul II, Hiroshima Speech, February 25, 1981, mimeographed copy in my possession

19 This is Brother Ray Fitz’s summary of Ferree in “Civic Engagement in the Catholic and Marianist Traditions of Education: A Continuing Conversation” (2008), p 4.

20 See William Miller, A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement (New York, 1973)

21 Lawrence Cunningham, “Things Seen and Unseen” to be published by University of Notre Dame Press, manuscript in my possession


23 For the Institute see www.unlimitedlogeinstitute.com