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The Two Worlds of Higher Education

Under pressure of financial difficulties, many private universities are undergoing amputations of this or that limb. St. Louis University has abolished its engineering and dental schools. The University of Pennsylvania has recently published a report telling three of its component schools that, unless they can balance their budgets within 3 years, they may face extinction. New York University, one of the largest of all private institutions, has had to sell its Bronx campus to the public system of New York City.

Has this happened because of any rational, explicit, and conscious national decision that the private sector in higher education should shrink or be phased out? To ask the question is to answer it. Quite the contrary, it has been happening amidst a cloud of amiable rhetoric about the virtues of pluralism and diversity and the value of a healthy private sector.

Yet without a conscious decision to preserve and nourish the private sector, the phase-out will eventually take place. Without such a decision, private institutions will disappear one by one or become subunits of state systems. If it reaches the point where Harvard, with its \$1.25-billion endowment, and a handful of others are all that remain, it is doubtful that even they can be wholly immune. One thinks of Oxford and Cambridge, ancient and laden with traditions of independence, but now relying heavily upon the state and subject to rationalization as part of the general state-supported system.

Certainly those of us involved with private institutions would not argue that the private sector is of higher quality across the board than the public. The great state universities of this country are themselves unique phenomena of tremendous importance to the continuing vitality of our society. What we should urge is support for a reasonably competitive academic structure. We should not expect the government to supply all of our needs, for that would mean the end of our independence. Where government, at whatever level, does help, it should do so in ways that preserve our individuality and foster free choice.

I hope that the states will act to diminish—but not to eliminate—the steadily growing gap between what it costs to attend a public institution and what it costs to attend a private college or university. That gap was, on the average, about \$500 in 1957; next year it will be \$1800, with no sign of lessening. The process cannot continue indefinitely without some counter-effort on behalf of the private sector, if the private sector is to survive.

In all of this, I'm not suggesting that anyone has a monopoly on wisdom, much less that either private or public institutions should or can live by cutting each other's throats. We at Stanford tend to think that God and the citizenry of California will help those who help themselves. We're raising money by a time-tested appeal to the philanthropic spirit, which, to judge from our recent experience, is far from dead in America. We're cutting our costs, reexamining our programs, and working to dodge those twin evils—doing things because you've always done them that way, and doing things *merely* because you've *never* done them that way. We're convinced that higher education need not be turned into a vast machine or a soulless bureaucracy and that the surest way to prevent this from happening is to encourage healthy competition between the public and private sectors.—RICHARD W. LYMAN, *President, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305*