A. BARTLETT GIAMATTI

In December of 1977, the Corporation concluded a long presidential search headed by William P. Bundy. The selection of A. Bartlett Giamatti, Professor of English, proved an inspired one. He had earned his B.A. and Ph.D. in English (Renaissance literature) from Yale, and except for a brief teaching appointment at Princeton, had spent his whole career there. Giamatti loved the institution almost as much as he loved the Boston Red Sox.

In a departure from the past, the Inaugural Committee consisted of three faculty members—Professors Georges May, D. Allan Bromley, and William Kessen—who undertook all the planning. They hosted a luncheon in Commons before the inaugural procession, and May, who served as chairman of the committee, noted that “Today’s plans depart from past inaugurals. The faculty has been involved in the planning, and the responsibilities are so widely disbursed there is no one to blame if anything goes wrong.”

The inaugural weekend began with a concert on Friday evening by the Yale Symphony Orchestra, with a performance of Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto by Yale senior Jonathan Shames. The Alumni Weekly published a complete description of the ceremonies:

“The Operations staff spread wood chips over the muddy patches on the Cross Campus, and at a few minutes past three the procession, several hundred strong and colorfully robed, marched from Sterling Memorial Library. Procession Marshals… emerged from the Library entrance followed by the Inaugural Committee and President Giamatti, then the banners and the deans and faculties, and behind them the delegates from other institutions, including the presidents of Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania, and Cornell, and the Rector of Jagiellonian University of Krakow, Poland. As this group moved slowly toward the Cross Campus walk, the Corporation left Woodbridge Hall, led by its marshals and Senior Fellow J. Richardson Dilworth… With them were the officers of the Corporation, the fellows, Governor Grasso, and New Haven Mayor Frank Logue. At the Cross Campus, Senior Fellow Dilworth was to invite President Giamatti to leave the faculty and join the administration for the rest of the procession…

“The ceremony continued with the President joining Mr. Dilworth and the Corporation party. The procession marched through the Noah Porter Gate and on to Woolsey Hall. The familiar sound of the Newberry Organ heralded the approach of the marchers, who came down the right aisle The faculty and delegates took seats in the front rows of the auditorium. The officers and fellows, deans and masters, former officers, marshals, and the governor and the mayor sat on the stage, with the President and the Senior Fellow in the center of the front row behind the
podium. The chest for the mace was on one side of the podium, the symbols of office on the other. The symbols are the original Charter of the University, issued on October 9, 1701 by the Colony of Connecticut and carried in the procession by Provost Goldstein; the Seal of the University, an engraved disc, carried by Secretary Chauncey; and the Keys to the Library, carried by Vice-President for Finance and Administration Jerald L. Stevens.

“After a prayer by University Chaplain John Vannorsdall, Mr. Dilworth inducted the President, presented him with the symbols of office and, with the help of the Secretary, put the gold and silver gilt President’s Collar around Mr. Giamatti’s shoulders. Said Mr. Dilworth: ‘Mr. President, on behalf of the Fellows of the Corporation, I entrust to your care the Charter, Keys, and Seal of Yale University as symbols of our authority, in the certain knowledge that you will lead us surely, wisely, and well.’”

Yale’s nineteenth President delivered his Inaugural Address, and at the conclusion, an Inaugural Anthem with lyrics chosen by President Giamatti from The Faerie Queene by Edmund Spenser, composed and conducted by Fenno Heath, Jr., Professor of Choral Music, was sung by the Yale Glee Club. With the ceremonies concluded, all celebrants in Woolsey Hall strolled up Hillhouse Avenue to the courtyard of Kline Biology Tower, where the President and Mrs. Giamatti, and Mr. and Mrs. Dilworth welcomed more than 5,000 people including students, staff, faculty, New Haven residents, and friends. Guests celebrated at the reception until seven o’clock, and then two dinners were held for out-of-town guests and members of the Yale community in the Presidents’ Room in Woolsey Hall and in the Great Hall of Peabody Museum. President and Mrs. Giamatti visited the two dinners, and listened to many toasts. In the final toast to them, Professor Kessen “drew upon Dante’s writing, very freely translated, ‘This umpire will be independent, sensible, and fair.’”

Giamatti inherited a stalled capital fund-raising campaign and budget deficits created by a declining national economy. Under his tenure, the endowment increased and in four years’ time, the budget had been balanced. There was a ten-week strike by the clerical and technical workers union, but a contract was signed and peace returned to the campus. The physical plant had deteriorated during the years, and Giamatti gave so much attention to improving buildings and grounds that he once noted that he would be remembered as “Bart the Refurbisher.” He announced his intention to leave the presidency in 1985, hoping to write a major book on the Renaissance, but instead accepted a new presidency offered by the baseball club owners of the National League.

1 “Inaugural Ceremonies,” Yale Alumni Magazine (November 1978), 17-19
2 Ibid., 19.
A. Bartlett Giamatti Inauguration
From left to right: Kingman Brewster, Jr., A. Bartlett Giamatti, Hanna Holborn Gray
A. Bartlett Giamatti Inauguration
Giamatti delivering inaugural address
INAUGURAL ADDRESS
A. BARTLETT GIAMATTI, OCTOBER 14, 1978

We at Yale have never been stronger. In the last twenty-five years, under three presidents, the University has steadily grown in the depth of its faculty, the diversity of its students, and its commitment to equity in its daily processes. Under Presidents Griswold, Brewster, and Gray, Yale has become a truly international university, its affiliations through scholarship and students reaching all over the globe, its men and women drawn from every part of America, its ancient purpose (inscribed in a New England town) now a banner flown everywhere. And when the country needed a standard in times of uncertainty and disaffection, it found it at Yale, where the courageous stewardship of Kingman Brewster reminded a university of its heritage of ordered openness and thus kept it free.

A civilized order is the precondition of freedom, and freedom—of belief, speech, and choice—the goal of responsible order. A university cannot expound those goals and expect a larger society to find them compelling; it cannot become a repository of national hope and a source of national leadership unless it strives to practice what it teaches. If its goals are noble, so must be its acts.

The American university constantly challenges the capacity of individuals to associate in a spirit of free inquiry, with a decent respect for the opinion of others. Its values are those of free, rational, and humane investigation and behavior. Its faith, constantly renewed and ever vulnerable, holds that if its values are sufficiently respected within, their growth will be encouraged without. Its purpose is to teach those who wish to learn, learn from those it teaches, foster research and original thought, and, through its students and faculty, disseminate that knowledge and transmit those values of responsible civic and intellectual behavior. That purpose can never become the captive of any single ideology or dogma. Nor can it be taken for granted.

In its purpose, the University embodies the pluralistic spirit of America, and it embodies that spirit in another way as well. The country’s promise that diverse peoples, with diverse origins and goals, can compete on the basis of merit for the fulfillment of their aspirations is also the basic premise of the University’s composition. But while the University engages the best hopes and, at various stages, the ablest people of the larger society, it does not pretend in every respect to be a microcosm of the larger society. While it has democratized its values, it has not in every sense made its structure democratic. The University’s structure is a hierarchy unlike any other,
it is neither military nor corporate; nor is it even a hierarchy like the Church whence sprang the earliest University teachers. With its instincts for collaboration and its strategies for consultation, the University is finally a patient and persuasive hierarchy, designed to cherish a particular value-laden process and the individuals within it. That process is, of course, the educational process, wherein the individual, often alone, often with others, seeks constantly to clarify limits in order to surpass them, constantly seeks to order the mind so as to set it free. That seeking is the University’s essence.

Intellectual and civic in nature, pluralistic in purpose and composition, hierarchical in structure, the University exists for that play of restraint and release in each of its individual members. Through that creative play of opposites in teaching, learning, and research, the University nourishes at its core the humanizing and spacious acts of the individual imagination. Those acts are found in every area of study, whether lasers, literature, or law, and are proof of the human capacity to make and to impose a design. Those designs made by the imagination are the signs of our ability to shape instinct and flux, to find or reveal patterns in the seemingly unplanned. The University is the guardian of the imagination that both defines and asserts our humanity.

The University is not only the guardian of that human capacity; it is also its triumph. For as the University is devoted to fostering these individual acts of imagination, so the University is an imaginative act in itself. In its mixed structure, its assertions about itself, its mingled character as a force for change and a wellspring of continuity, the University is in a sense self-consciously artificial. The University is something made, not born, cradling those individual acts of shaping that it figures forth. It is our culture’s assertion that what is made by the mind has value and can convey values. Thus the University, rooted in history, open to every new impulse, insistson its centrality to culture and on its uniqueness. Thus it is so powerful and so fragile, the foe of the merely random, insistent on order while urging freedom, convinced that the human mind, out of nature, can fashion shapes and patterns nature never bore, and convinced that it is prime among the artifacts.

Where universities, or those within them, falter is in believing that the formal nature of the university, what I have called its artificial character, necessarily removes them and their inhabitants from the common stream of society; that because universities assert the mind’s capacity, in the best sense, to contrive, they can condescend to or smugly disdain whatever is not encompassed by them. Such an attitude has brought many institutions the scorn they deserve, for they have chosen to be sanctuaries from society and not tributaries into it. To wish only to be removed from the culture, and not
to be part of its renewal, is to long for the atrophy, not the exercise, of the imagination and its works. I return to where I began—no university is strong if it is unsure of its purpose and nature and is unwilling or unable to make vital that nature and purpose for others beyond it. We lose our public trust when we treat only as private our principal obligations.

Only when we clarify what we believe are the larger values, and value, of a private education can we expect that education to have a significant effect for the public good. I began by speaking of Yale’s strength. But our strength is not simply our numbers and our variety and our quality. Our basic strength derives from our common sense of what we do, why we do it, and whom we mean to reach.

Our strength also derives from our capacity to know where our problems will occur. While no Sibyl has yet vouchsafed me certain knowledge of the future, even one unencumbered by special vision can see the outlines of our path. Let me review what is perhaps known to all here and then speak of some particular challenges before us.

Earlier this fall, I had occasion to note a mood of closure and withdrawal that seems to be growing around us. I sense more than the contraction and spasm of isolation that would inevitably follow a period as expansive as the sixties and an experience as searing as the war in Vietnam. This mood of disaffiliation has these roots and others as well, and it casts a longer shadow. We are coming to the end of the twentieth century, and the knowledge we bear weighs heavy. Part of our knowledge is the realization that systems, technological and ideological, in which we had such faith, have their limits, and that we may have reached those limits and are being left with only the fragments of our hopes. We are closing not only a century but also a millennium, and the accumulated force of that realization heightens a certain apocalyptic impulse, a febrile fatigue. As if to accommodate this spirit and contain it, the country seems to want to settle only for a credible competence in its education, its government, its means of pleasure, its craftsmanship. It should never want less, but it ought to aspire to more, and universities and colleges must have the will and the energy to focus themselves, and the nation, on renewal despite the entropy that a sense of closure creates. Because the next years in our enterprise of education will be difficult, because nothing one can see will make them easy, our faith in ourselves and our courage to do what we believe in must be all the stronger. Let me be specific.

The general economic conditions, specifically a corrosive inflation, will place educational institutions, with their concentrations of people, increasingly on the defensive. These institutions will be harder pressed than ever to retain their levels of financial aid, to keep tuitions from escalating at
anything less than the national rate of inflation, to compensate those who work in them at levels commensurate with their skills. And these assaults of a fiscal nature will only be abetted by inevitable demographic curves. Within a dozen years, there will be just about a million fewer eighteen-year-olds in America than there were three years ago. The competition for potential college applicants will increase dramatically, and no institution will be immune. For even those universities whose colleges will still attract a greater pool of applicants than there will be places in a class will feel this shrinkage because their doctoral candidates will find, as so many are now finding, that there is no market for their skills. Indeed, of all the immediate challenges facing the major research universities—to sustain research libraries, to support academic science in the context of a university population that will shrink, to plan the direction of medical education, to finance graduate students, and to embrace part-time or older students in new patterns—of all these challenges, the most difficult and internally consequential will be the need to attract into the academic profession the ablest and most dedicated young men and women. Nothing we do in colleges or universities, or that the country wants done, is possible without the next generation of teachers and scholars. I will return to this concern.

In the years ahead of us, precisely because the pressures on private institutions, whether large or small, old or new, will increase, it will be essential to affirm the particular character of private institutions and to remember that because times are financially strained, the government is not always the place to turn for help. Such rescue, even if it were to occur, would result in more regulation. Of course we depend on federal funds for a wide variety of crucial research and financial aid; of course there are legitimate requirements of accountability for the taxpayers' dollars that follow federal funds; of course there are legitimate regulatory functions of the federal government. But the capacity of a private institution to choose for itself what its course will be, in keeping with the law of the land, is essential to its nature and purpose, and we must be constantly wary of governmental intrusion and of not asking for or accepting more. We must retain our freedom of expression and of purpose.

Private educational institutions, however, must not only resist external interference. They must also realize something else, perhaps for some as difficult. They must realize they are an integral part of the private sector. And other portions of the private sector must also come to this realization. As I have had occasion to say, the ancient ballet of mutual antagonism—at times evidently so deeply satisfying—between private enterprise, on the one hand, and private education on the other, is not to anyone's interest. That ballet of antagonism must give way to a capacity for responsible collaboration. There
is a metaphor that informs the private business sector as it informs the private educational sector, and that is the metaphor of the free marketplace. Whether the competition of the free marketplace is of commodities or of ideas, it is a common metaphor and a precious asset.

Obviously, I am not asking to resist governmental intrusion in order to encourage or accept intrusion of any other kind from any other quarter. What I am saying is that precisely to retain our capacity to choose, and to survive as we wish to survive as a private institution, Yale, and places like Yale, must recognize their natural alliances with other private institutions. Such alliances must spring from a perception that all portions of the private sector—voluntary, corporate, and educational—have a common goal, in a pluralistic society, of providing alternatives to public structures and solutions.

Lastly, and this is less a problem than a challenge, we must be mindful of the community in which we live. No college or university in a city can regard its fortunes as separate from that city. The economic and cultural health of New Haven is intimately tied to Yale’s health, and our future is intertwined with New Haven’s. The City and the University share the same ground and over 250 years of history. Yale cannot look at New Haven as if the City were an endless impediment, and New Haven cannot regard Yale as a smugly unresponsive savior. Neither attitude reflects reality, and the only attitude that will reflect reality is one of mutual regard and collaboration. The University must do all it can to assist the City in its development, and in those ways that it legitimately can, it will. The City must also understand that Yale’s resources are limited and that Yale’s first obligation is to fulfill itself as an educational institution. If Yale falters in that, the City cannot flourish. Those who chide Yale for not being primarily an agency of specific, local reforms in fact misapprehend the University’s nature and purpose. That misapprehension in part is Yale’s fault, but misapprehensions, of all kinds, should be dispelled if our common future is to be shaped in common.

And what are the prime imperatives for Yale’s future? I think they are three: First, Yale must use its financial and human resources prudently, imaginatively, and wisely. We must affirm those internal affiliations, among Schools, among Schools and the College, among departments, that will focus on critical strengths and encourage new patterns of teaching and research to emerge. We will not be able to do everything, but what we choose to do we must do well. The purpose of the next years of budgetary contraction is to consolidate in order to preserve excellence and to maintain Yale’s finest tradition—the offering of a private education for the public good. We
cannot blink at the need to live within our means, but budgetary balance can and must be achieved in a way that enhances our quality, not in a way that sacrifices our quality.

Second, Yale must continue to reflect and nourish the pluralism of America. I take the diversity in this country—of peoples, of kinds of freedoms, and of humane and rational values—to be both a source of the country’s strength and a vital principle in itself. To be truly a national institution, playing its educational and civic role to the fullest, Yale’s texture can never be less varied and many-grained than the fabric of America itself. If Yale is to train leaders, they must come from and respond to every part of the larger society. This heterogeneity of talent and origin, experience and interest, is not achievable by simple formulae or by institutionalizing special privilege. It is done by continually seeking out, as students and faculty and staff, men and women of merit with a capacity to contribute to the fulfillment of themselves and hence of the place, and by continually urging and encouraging them to become part of Yale. This affirmative attitude is translated into action by never waver ing in our commitment to seek out these individuals as widely and diligently as possible.

Third, and I return to and close with a concern expressed earlier, Yale must expend every effort to nourish and encourage its young or non-tenured faculty. The University must demonstrate its belief in them and their efforts. If it does not, it cannot expect younger faculty to believe in the institution or in their vocation. That vocation, the academic profession, and the younger teacher and scholar, most particularly in the humanities and certain social sciences, are now subjected to the savage pressures I noted earlier—the declining numbers of students, soaring costs, and diminishing number of jobs. And, I respectfully suggest, these pressures are only exacerbated by state legislation that, in Connecticut, has recently denied private institutions the capacity to determine for themselves when faculty must retire. Here a governmental act, however well intentioned in its specific mission, has a devastating effect in areas clearly not envisaged by its proponents. With no age limit for faculty in private educational institutions, the private and public institutions are set at odds; the capacity of individuals and institutions to plan ahead is confounded at a critical time; the young person is placed in a hopeless position, with no sense of movement within and diminishing chances without. Finally, if one cannot recruit young faculty of quality, and give them some hope, there is a serious threat to our capacity to fulfill the human and moral principles of pluralism expressed in programs of affirmative action.
There are, of course, measures one can take, and of course, my concern for the younger faculty in no way bespeaks a lack of regard for the older faculty. I use this example as a way of describing how so many of my concerns—about excellence, about resources, about diversity, about the character of a private institution—intersect in issues concerning the faculty, and particularly concerning our young colleagues. I believe the faculty is at the heart of this place, and I believe that at the heart of the faculty in a place like Yale is the teaching function. All the research we want to do, all the obligations we must carry as faculty, are in some sense nurtured by and are versions of that first calling, which is to teach our students. We want always to do more, but we can never do less. Nor can we ever forget that. Everyone in this hall can recall certain voices, the voices of teachers who changed the way we live our lives. I am concerned, at last, with the next generation of voices. I wish them to be as strong and confident and effective in what they do as those who came before. And they will be, if we recall our nature and our purpose and engage each other to fashion our future together.