Throughout much of his presidency, James Rowland Angell relied on Charles Seymour to help institute his ideas. He had chosen Seymour as Provost in 1928 and turned to him to serve as his liaison to Edward S. Harkness, who was not fond of Angell. Seymour devoted his many years in the provostship to establishing the residential college system, working to convince many of the skeptical faculty that it would revive the College and was “evolution, not revolution.” He even agreed to be the first master of Berkeley College while serving as Provost.

It was rumored that Seymour had been on the long list of candidates for President in 1921, but at thirty-six was considered a bit young for the position. Now, as the Corporation pondered the question of Angell’s successor, several faculty names were reviewed, but the popular and obvious choice was Provost Charles Seymour. It could not have been unknown to the Corporation that two presidents of Yale were among his ancestors: Thomas Clap was his great-great-grandfather, and Jeremiah Day was his great-uncle. In addition, his father, Thomas Day Seymour, had been Hillhouse Professor of Greek Language and Literature at Yale for more than a quarter of a century. Charles Seymour was born in New Haven and spent virtually his entire life there. He attended Hillhouse High School in New Haven and did leave the city for England to study at King’s College, Cambridge, where he received a B.A. after three years. He returned to New Haven to enter Yale with the Class of 1908, went back to England to study at Cambridge after his graduation, and received a master’s degree in 1909. He earned a Ph.D. in history from Yale in 1911. He joined the faculty of the History Department as an instructor, rising to full professor by 1918. Four years later he became one of the youngest men ever to be named a Sterling Professor.

Seymour’s inauguration as the fifteenth President of Yale University took place on Thursday, October 8, 1937 in Battell Chapel. In keeping with Seymour’s predilections, it was in all ways a traditional Yale inauguration. In contrast to Angell’s ceremony, where all was changed both in the place and order of the ceremony and by the fact that the Commencement and Inauguration took place together, a news release noted: “The order of old inauguration ceremonies which has been used at Yale will be followed for the installation of Dr. Seymour. For more than two centuries these exercises have begun with instrumental music followed by prayer, then a hymn. After this, one of the Fellows of the Corporation, designated Presiding Fellow, formally installed the president-elect in his new office by addressing him in Latin and presented to him the symbols of his new authority — the charger, keys, records, and seal. A Latin response by the President was followed by ‘solemn music by the College Choir.’ Then came the inaugural address by the pres-
ident, a second hymn, and benediction. The Presiding Fellow was Wilbur L. Cross, former member of the faculty and Dean Emeritus of the Graduate School who, as Governor of Connecticut, was an ex officio member of the Yale Corporation and in light of this, could be properly designated.

Seymour faced difficult times in his administration: the depression was barely over when World War II began in 1941. Wartime restrictions prevented any new construction and the campus was in operation twelve months a year, with units established for all branches of the services. Proudly, Yale could declare that 21,887 men had been trained at Yale for various armed forces. Seymour turned his attention at the end of the war to converting the campus to its normal peacetime operation, but the first few years were difficult with an influx of veterans. He was forced to construct quonset huts and barracks to house the overflow of students on campus and worried about the quality of education. Even during wartime, Seymour had presented to the Corporation a resolution drawn by the faculty which stressed the need to continue Yale’s traditional strength in the humanities. He believed that universities “are guardians of our culture and especially of those aspects which do not serve an immediate material utilitarian purpose.” He later said, “Higher education must not be limited to the preparation of students merely for economic prosperity . . . but for the love of literature, the appreciation of beauty, the passion for truth, which are the essentials of civilization.”

Upon reaching sixty-five, Seymour announced his desire to retire. Though he continued to live in New Haven, he took little part in university affairs and spent much of his time working on the House Collection in Sterling Memorial Library.

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1 News Release, Yale University, Thursday, October 7, 1937.
2 Holden, 127-128.
Charles Seymour Inauguration
James Rowland Angell and Charles Seymour
Members of Yale:

To us has been given a sacred trust, nobly established by our forefathers, which it is our duty and privilege to maintain and develop, so that it may be passed on to future generations, unimpaired in spirit, enlarged in usefulness. Of the nature of that trust there can be no question. We are bound to devote ourselves to the enrichment of learning and the enlightenment of men, for the guidance of the mind and spirit of the nation. From this obligation nothing can absolve us.

The opportunity is as bright as our duty is compelling. The generosity of loyal benefactors has endowed Yale with great material resources which enable us confidently to plan our intellectual and spiritual mission. We are inheritors of academic traditions beyond price, which have come down to us from the wisdom of our predecessors. These physical and spiritual legacies have been multiplied during the last sixteen years. We are under especial obligation to President Angell, who in a period of extraordinary material growth devoted himself without respite to the scholarly purposes of the University and discovered the means to prosecute them actively. We who worked under him would emphasize the extent of the debt Yale owes to this great figure in American education, and we pay him our tribute.

We are a university with a collegiate foundation. This fact involves devotion not merely to an increase of the world’s store of knowledge but to the training of the mind and character of every member of the University. We are consecrated to learning, in the simplest meaning of the word—not to a mere abstraction, but to an intellectual and spiritual exercise. Our purpose is to furnish the approach to wisdom, by improving the process of learning and adjusting it to the changing conditions of the world we live in.

To this purpose all the work of the University is subsidiary. As we plan each year or decade of University policy, we must subject every proposal to the test of its contribution to the central design. We must carefully prune away unprofitable offshoots so as to foster the main growth. Our criterion must be the quality of the fruit rather than the size of the plant or the magnificence of early decaying blossoms.

I do not believe that we shall achieve this purpose through revolutionary steps, whether of educational philosophy or of administrative reorganization. We are at a point in Yale history where violent deflection from the charted course is not desirable. The opportunity calls for consolidation rather than expansion; for the expenditure of efforts and resources upon
existing processes of learning which will clearly hasten our progress; for
determined elimination of the mere appurtenances of academic life which
may hinder it. Such a program is not spectacular. I am convinced that it is
wise.

Our first duty is to develop what may be termed the essential educa-
tional interests of Yale, whether by economies from within or gifts from
without. We must strengthen the library, the laboratories, and the muse-
ums. Enthusiasm and capacity in such development will stand as criteria of
our academic wisdom. As the Founders of 1701 clearly understood, these
provide the raw materials of learning. Some of them may have dramatic
quality—a Gutenberg Bible, a Brontosaurus, a Gilbert Stuart. Others are
quite unspectacular—forbidding monographs, Parliamentary Papers,
tanks of chlorine, photographs, white rats in their cages. But they are the
necessaries of scholarship, without which the arts and sciences grow
mouldy.

We must multiply our funds for fellowships and scholarships, espe-
cially in graduate work, enabling students of intellectual power and high
character but of limited means to seek a Yale education. Such graduate fel-
lowships will help to fulfill Yale’s obligation to scholarship in the abstract
and also provide us with a reservoir of scholars from which to draw our
faculty of the future.

For above everything else we need men for our faculty. Without
enlarging the student body we must materially enlarge the faculty, and
every addition must assure us of improvement in quality. This should be
the alpha and omega of university policy. Upon such strengthening every
suggestion of a bettered curriculum depends, and in place of it no paper
program or administrative admonition will suffice.

We need a larger faculty in order to ease the existing teaching burden
and thus to provide opportunity for the individual faculty member to carry
on advanced study. Without such opportunity his intellectual life and his
teaching powers will dry up. We need more scholars especially on the facul-
ties of our graduate and professional schools, to meet the necessities of
learning in new fields that are being opened and demand exploration, as
well as to apply new methods to old problems, whether in the natural, phys-
ical, or social sciences. Pride in the recent development of these schools
should crystallize our determination to carry them on to new levels of dis-
tinction.

Chiefly we need a larger faculty for the undergraduates, in order to
develop plans for giving to the individual student personal supervision in
his studies, plans to which I am myself committed. The most important
and the most successful single accomplishment in Yale’s history of the past
sixteen years has been the establishment of the undergraduate colleges. They have revived old and created new values, cultural and social. They have also provided us with a matchless opportunity for stimulating the student to appreciation of intellectual values, and this it is our duty actively to capitalize. I do not intend that the colleges should assume the educational functions now exercised by the departments; but I am convinced that they can and must work with the departments in helping the student to meet the requirements laid down by the faculty. Given the necessary man power and utilizing the opportunity inherent in the colleges, we can create a teaching force in Yale which will never have been rivaled.

It goes without saying that the quality of the faculty is of greater importance than its size. The primary test of the men we appoint must be a consuming devotion to the ideals of scholarship. By scholarship I understand a disciplined and instructed enthusiasm for learning, so intense that it must be imparted to others, consciously or unconsciously, whether by the mere force of example, through the production of books, to a small group in laboratory or around the table, or, in different form, to the large lecture class. Among the men we seek there can be no distinction between the so-called “researcher” and so-called “teacher.” Our ideal is Chaucer’s clerk: “Gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.” There will be different types of scholars on our faculty; some intensely interested in the difficulties of the dullard, others qualified to guide only the brilliant; some better fitted to understand men, others to understand things. But all should be filled with the same crusading spirit — to foster learning and make it available to others; and in pursuance of this end, like our forefathers, “to scorn delights and live laborious days.”

Such a spirit is the one sure defense against the greatest danger a university faces, the insidious virus of self-contentment. Yale must be vigilantly self-critical. We professors must be incessantly on our guard against the hypnotic drug of habit. Always there prowls around us the temptation to maintain ancient requirements of study because of the bother of change or the difficulty of administration. We must beware the tendency to utilize teaching methods which are convenient to the teacher rather than conceived for the welfare of the student; the urge to pursue our research for the mechanical exercise it gives us rather than the learning it gives to the world. I who have sinned proclaim the danger. From it there is no guaranteed protection except the spirit of the faculty itself.

In thus emphasizing the faculty I am not for a second forgetful of the students. It was for their training that Yale was founded. But they are brought here under false pretenses except we give them the highest type of teaching. To recognize this fact is not to ignore the values that come into
student life from a variety of sources, often by-products. The richness of Yale’s social life—colored by the traditions, the poetry, and the romance of the older Yale—can be appreciated only by those who year by year watch the character of the individual student expand. There is no curriculum in any school of government that provides a course in good citizenship equal to those lessons in social responsibility here enforced. By no means will all of our undergraduate students be able to achieve Phi Beta Kappa. Many, I hope, will be the sort able to develop character and common sense as a substitute for the more delicate mental processes. It is likely that they will learn more here from other men than from books. For such undergraduates Yale’s training in social responsibility is beyond estimate in value and must be preserved.

But I do not believe that the spiritual and social intangibles of Yale can permanently exist except as her eminence in the strictly educational field is maintained and developed. I am not speaking as the pedagogue puffing his own profession. This insistence upon teaching strength is the echo of the demands of the great body of the alumni, upon whose devotion we count and to whom we here must always hold ourselves responsible. We covet as students the sons of Yale graduates; but whatever the devotion of the alumni, we cannot expect to attract their sons except upon the assurance of the best imaginable faculty guidance. We owe it to the alumni, scattered throughout the nation, to see to it that the University sends out not merely men who are qualified to be good citizens but those who, having acquired wisdom, are capable of leading the mind of the nation.

Nor can Yale men expect to lead the national mind without an understanding of it. We of the University, seeking the peace that permits the pursuit of our main purpose of learning, must beware of the peril of isolation from the main currents of national thought and feeling. We have been given a position of extraordinary privilege on the understanding that we justify it by our service to society. We shall certainly lose that position if in sequestered self-satisfaction we fail to redeem the debt under which our endowments have placed us. Our services to the nation may be of many kinds, but none will be more important than that given through educating our students to appreciate the needs of America. I do not know how this can be accomplished steadily and effectively save through the teaching of a wise and liberal-minded faculty.

Even more insistent is the duty of meeting our obligations to the immediate community. These obligations we acknowledge and solemnly promise to fulfill. Yale owes her legal existence to a charter from the State, and we recognize a special responsibility for the education of the sons of Connecticut. We owe our physical existence on this spot to the invitation
extended by New Haven. We remember the educational privilege that the citizens promised themselves in bringing Yale here. We pledge ourselves to maintain and develop that privilege to the utmost of our ability. We must constantly study effective lines of cooperative effort by University, State, and City. We may even hope to provide, from time to time, magistrates for our chief executive offices. But our greatest contribution to the community will lie in the assurance that here the sons of the citizens will find as effective a group of teachers as in any spot in the country; that they are fortunate to be Connecticut-born, since nowhere else will they find a better chance of education; that the very names, New Haven, Connecticut, by natural association with Yale shall connote the highest distinction in learning.

We are a university; that is, we are all members of a body dedicated to a single cause. There must be among us distinctions of function, but there can be no division of purpose. Corporation, administrative officers, faculties are all working together for a single end: the improvement of learning. Upon the faculties must fall the responsibility for carrying out university policies. Upon them, as those immediately involved in the academic process, depend the vigor and usefulness of the institution. In recognition of such facts the principle of faculty responsibility has become traditional at Yale. I inherited that tradition, was brought up in it, and I believe in it. It operates effectively just so long as the assumption upon which it rests remains valid—the assumption of a company of scholars not so much working for the University as themselves each an essential member of the University, as the heart is of the body; interested not in prerogatives but in scholarly service, militant in the defense of learning; self-sacrificing in any conflict between particular interests and those of Yale as a whole.

The principle of faculty responsibility cannot imply an absence of central control or an abdication of leadership by University officers. Conflicts of interests among schools and departments are inevitable; they are a symptom of healthy if sometimes bothersome vitality; but they have to be settled and there must be authority for the decision. Nor can the President assume merely the role of moderator. His should be the duty to awaken to life a comatose department, to clear away the debris of outworn tradition, to push forward new plans, pleasantly if he can, unpleasantly if he must. The President is the servant of the scholars, laboring to create for them free opportunity whereby they may pursue their research and carry on their teaching; but he is also their standard-bearer and his place must be in the vanguard.

As the University counts upon the intellectual quality and the spiritual devotion of the faculty, so it assures absolute intellectual freedom. It is the *sine qua non* of our scholarship. We seek the truth and will endure the
consequences. Unless the spirit of complete freedom prevail among stu-
dents and teachers, freedom from external influence and internal pressure,
we commit the unforgivable sin against the first of educational principles.

One charge alone I give to youth,
Against the sceptered myth to hold
The golden heresy of truth.

Let us not deceive ourselves. It is not so difficult to achieve intellectual free-
dom in those fields of study that are somewhat remote from the prejudices
and passions of daily life. But in the fields that touch our social, political,
and economic relationships the principle is much easier to enunciate than
to maintain.

Nevertheless, our guarantee of complete liberty of speech must be
absolute. In no other way can we discover the truth, correct the half-truth,
and destroy the lie. The London policemen in Hyde Park have learned that
the surest method of exposing incompetent charlatanism is to give the
charlatan a protected forum. We may well ponder the advice of the sagac-
cious Gamaliel, who urged free speech for St. Peter and his companions:
“Refrain from these men and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work
be of man it will come to nought. But if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it;
lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”

The duty of protecting freedom of thought and speech is the more
compelling in these days when the liberal spirit in the world at large is in
deadly peril. We may look across the seas and take warning. The Yale atmo-
sphere must be so completely impregnated with the sense of freedom that
our students going from here will serve naturally and universally as its
apostles. Every student at Yale should be impressed with the conviction that
only through the spread of the liberal attitude in life can the nation find
protection from an obscurantist reaction on the one hand or a blind revo-

Yale has a further manifest duty, the maintenance of an atmosphere
dominated by spiritual values. Never in the history of the world has the
menace of materialism been more appalling or the disastrous consequences
of its triumph so obvious. In the political, economic, and social fields of
endeavor it has produced and it will perpetuate suicidal strife. Whether
nation, class, or individual be considered, it is literally the sauve qui peut of
civilization: everyone for himself and the devil take the hindmost; a terrify-
ing apotheosis of the philosophy of egotism.

Such a philosophy the University must utterly abhor and actively
combat. If our historical studies have taught us anything, it is that selfish
materialism leads straight to the City of Destruction. To fight it we have
need of clear intelligence. We have no less need of unswerving loyalty to the Golden Rule. Yale was dedicated to the upraising of spiritual leaders. We betray our trust if we fail to explore the various ways in which the youth who come to us may learn to appreciate spiritual values, whether by the example of our own lives or through the cogency of our philosophical arguments. The simple and direct way is through the maintenance and upbuilding of the Christian religion as a vital part of university life. I call on all members of the faculty, as members of a thinking body, freely to recognize the tremendous validity and power of the teaching of Christ in our life-and-death struggle against the forces of selfish materialism. If we lose in that struggle, judging by present events abroad, scholarship as well as religion will disappear.

To us has been given a sacred obligation; we are consecrated to a scholarship that seeks the truth and illumines the truth with the light of freedom and spiritual faith; we must ask whether for the fulfillment of that obligation we shall not need something more than purely intellectual weapons. We do well to observe the example of our Yale forefathers who were not ashamed to confess the power of the Christian God. “Look at the generations of old,” we are warned by the ancient prophet, “and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in his fear and was forsaken? or whom did He ever despise, that called upon Him?”