

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL



Laudation

spoken by the University Orator

Professor P J H SCHOLTZ BA (Hons) HED (Natal)

in presenting

MICHAEL CONWAY O'DOWD

to the Chancellor at the Graduation Ceremony

held in Durban

on 18th April, 1990

CONFERMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
HONORIS CAUSA, UPON
MICHAEL CONWAY O'DOWD

Mr Chancellor,

It is a significant occasion when the University pays tribute to exceptional leaders and scholars in their respective fields by bestowing on them the University's highest honour; it is especially significant when such inspired leaders stand out as giants among men because of their readiness to devote a large measure of their lives to caring for the community around them.

Such an inspired leader is Michael O'Dowd, perhaps best known in University circles for his support of and interest in the work of the Universities' research units and individual academics, in his capacity as Chairman of the Anglo-American and De Beers Chairman's Fund. However, the contribution of the Chairman's Fund to social development in general and education in particular goes far beyond the Universities.

Even at an early age Michael O'Dowd demonstrated those qualities which have enabled him to scale the heights and reach the summits of achievement. While studying at the University of the Witwatersrand for the B.A. degree and LLB, which was subsequently awarded "cum laude", he was Vice-President of the SRC and President of NUSAS. These were smaller peaks, but no less important serving as a preparation for more formidable challenges, which saw him climb the foothills of the Everest of Industry as a Trainee with the Anglo American Corporation and finally scale the rarefied heights and attain the summit, to become a Director of the organization.

Effective leaders display a multitude of common qualities and characteristics - human understanding, professional competence and a strong independent character. A real leader must be creative, must encourage creativity when it would be easier to hew to the status quo. Michael O'Dowd is a man of wide-ranging interests, encompassing economics, sociology, politics, law, music and the arts in general, all areas of human activity to which he has a creative response.

He has distinguished himself by his contribution to intellectual debates. Once convinced he has never been one to avoid controversy, whether in intellectual argument or in supporting projects which challenged what the South African State regarded as acceptable in the period of high apartheid. He has a formidable list of publications to his credit in important journals, especially

for a person outside full-time academic employment. His writings are characterised by their support for free enterprise and opposition to bureaucracy, and he articulated these views long before the recent swing of opinion towards the free market. In terms of his published work, he is probably best known for his controversial contribution to the debate which raged in the 1970's about the relationship between economic growth and social and political change in South Africa. His views in this academic debate have become known as "The O'Dowd Thesis", and the O'Dowd Thesis acted as the catalyst in the 1970's for much important research in the social sciences around the issues of economic growth and political change in South Africa.

Impressive as these facts are they illumine only one area of Michael O'Dowd's achievements. Equally impressive and no less important is his commitment to the social needs of this country. Like Zeus, who broke off the ram's horn and created a cornucopia, a horn of plenty, so virtually every university in South Africa has benefited from the generous support of the Chairman's fund under Mr O'Dowd. The "Open Universities" in particular owe much to his belief in and support for the initiatives in the fields of educational development or academic support, residence development and bursary support which enabled them to fulfill their commitment to "openness". In the Social Sciences, Natal University benefitted from his support through the Chairman's Fund which allowed the establishment of the Development Studies Research Group within the Economics Department on the Pietermaritzburg campus, and the Development Studies Unit in the Centre for Applied Social Sciences on the Durban campus.

One of the attributes of greatness is to have the vision which can inspire others. In this respect Michael O'Dowd's role as Chairman of the Board of Continuing Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, and his personal role in the establishment of the Centre for Social Development at the same university, attest to his vision; his concern for the upliftment of disadvantaged individuals and communities through the provision of appropriate opportunities and assistance to facilitate individual and community development. In the same spirit he has devoted much personal time and effort to the development of organizations such as "Build a Better Society", a grassroots, community organization on the Cape Flats, the Black Management Forum, and the Free Market Foundation.

He has also distinguished himself in the service of education and educational institutions, from his role as secretary of the 1961 Education Panel, through his membership of the De Lange commission, to service on the Councils of several universities and service on the Senate of the University of the Witwatersrand. He also played a leading role in the private school movement, including the membership and Chairmanship of more than one school board.

Mr Chancellor, it is appropriate that Michael O'Dowd should be honoured by this University; the University owes much to his vision and support, and yet it is on a much broader scale that we pay tribute to his achievements on this occasion. His wide-ranging and uniquely important contributions to Education and Community and Social Development generally are deserving of this University's highest honour.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to present to you, for the degree of Doctor of Social Science, Honoris Causa, Michael Conway O'Dowd.

