

The Catholic College: At the Crossroad or at the End of the Road?

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The Problem

The Catholic college is gravely ill, perhaps terminally so. The very titles of James T. Burtchaell's probing study, "The Decline and Fall of the Christian College," and Kenneth Woodward's more anecdotal commentary, "The Catholic College: What happened? A Parent's Lament," suggest that something has gone awry.¹ Jesuit Michael Buckley certainly thinks so and has written perceptively on the subject.² Philip Gleason has long been an intelligent voice in the chorus.³ George Marsden's scholarly examination of the gradual erosion of religious traditions at mainline Protestant universities has to be dispiriting to Catholics also, especially when they read it in conjunction with Burtchaell's essay.⁴ Though Church historian David O'Brien takes a rather benign view of developments (possibly because of a more lat-

¹ Burtchaell's two-part essay appears in *First Things* (April 1991): pp. 16–29 and (May 1991): pp. 30–38, Woodward's in *Commonweal* (4 April 1993): pp. 15–18. Burtchaell first studies the process by which Vanderbilt University gradually lost its Baptist character and then, using the stages of change at Vanderbilt as a model, seeks to alert Catholics how dangerously far along the same path they have come.

² Michael Buckley, S. J., "The Catholic University and its Inherent Promise," *America* (29 May 1993): pp. 14–16.

³ Philip Gleason, "The Crisis of Americanization," in Philip Gleason, ed., *Catholicism in America* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970), pp. 133–53; "What Made Catholic Identity a Problem," Marianist Award Lecture, University of Dayton, 1994.

⁴ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

itudinarian conception of Catholicism as well as a more optimistic view of American culture), he leaves us with no doubt that the changes in Catholic higher education of the last thirty years have been profound and sweeping.⁵

The essays gathered by Theodore Hesburgh under the title of *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University* are for the most part hopeful but all acutely aware of difficulties.⁶

⁵ David J. O'Brien, *From the Heart of the American Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1994). O'Brien gives other relevant sources, especially in the notes to Chapter 6. The book has much valuable information and interesting argument, though one sometimes wishes for a sharper distinction of argument and history.

To identify O'Brien's benchmark of the authentically Catholic, one should study the first chapter closely. There O'Brien expresses nervousness over proposals that there is "some foundation—reason or faith—on which ideas [can] be erected and sustained" (p. 5). Distrustful of philosophy, especially epistemology (*ibid.*), and not too comfortable with theology either, he prefers to arrive at his understanding of the Church by concrete appeal to history. Prominent in this approach is his own autobiography—in which family, the Catholic Worker movement, the Catholic Committee on Urban Ministry, and the 1976 Call to Action Conference play important roles (pp. 7–11); these help explain O'Brien's paradoxically strict requirement that Catholic education, or at least Jesuit education, be rather directly aimed at promoting peace and justice (Ch. 10). Though O'Brien allows parenthetically that texts and institutions may be "precious" (p. 14), his approach seems frankly historicist; and he admits that he is not particularly bothered by the accusation that his is a "cultural Catholicism" (*ibid.*). He stresses that the Catholicism that he knows is American. If what has happened to Catholic colleges in the last thirty-plus years is that they have become more American, that is nothing to worry about—unless Americanization is inherently secularization (e.g., p. 22). But O'Brien finds too much good in the larger American culture to see as threatening many of the changes that bother Burtchaell, Woodward, Gleason and others.

See also David O'Brien and Michael Buckley, "A Collegiate Conversation," *America* (11 September 1993).

⁶ Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., ed., *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994). Father Hesburgh's opening essay, with its stress on the key roles that Catholic theology and philosophy play in Catholicizing education, its insistence on the compatibility of intellectual openness and academic freedom with institutional religious commitment deserves attention. Other highlights of this valuable book merit special comment.

David B. Burrell, C.S.C., developing what Hesburgh has to say on commitment, argues that if all inquiry is tradition-directed, one of the merits of universities with a Catholic tradition is that they can serve "to open conversation more widely."

Richard McBrien calls attention to some of the key difficulties that Hesburgh and some other Catholic college presidents had with the 1985 Proposed Schema for a Pontifical Document on Catholic Universities.

Frederick J. Crosson discusses the issue of academic freedom in the context of the religiously inspired university.

Ralph McInerney sees the Ellis essay (see n. 10) as skewing the conversation in the direction of ever greater educational homogeneity and secularism.

I begin these remarks a bit nostalgically, not so much out of a romantic desire to caress the past as to mark the distance that we have come and to suggest features of an older model that may be adaptable to present constraints. In the fall of 1948, just out of the Army a few months, I arrived at St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto. The society in which I found myself was solidly intellectual and at the same time deeply religious. The program of studies was challenging, the system of annual examinations spread over a month daunting. The priest-professors of the Congregation of St. Basil, on top of their theological studies, had graduate degrees from the most eminent North American and European universities.⁷

Joined with them in the academic enterprise were such distinguished scholars as Etienne Gilson, Anton C. Pegis, and Ignatius Eschmann in philosophy, and Herbert Marshall McLuhan in English. Jacques Maritain was an occasional visitor, and his writings gave form to the undergraduate curriculum in philosophy. Gerald B. Phelan would soon return from a stay at Notre Dame, and Joseph Owens was about to begin his distinguished teaching career at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. All these men set the highest standards of scholarship. The classroom treatment of religion was scrupulously academic, and no trace of apologetics crept into theology. Outside the classroom, of course, religious practices were encouraged. In those days, happily prior to the establishment on our campuses of a distinct chaplaincy personnel, every priest-teacher could be seen at the altar and was available for confession and spiritual direction.

George Marsden, lamenting that Catholic universities have let so much of their heritage slip away, contends that the fundamental task is to build a respected tradition of Christian education and in all disciplines to recruit faculty disposed to wonder about the implications of Christian faith to their explorations of reality. He has hope that such a project will attract the necessary donors.

Wilson Miscamble, C.S.C., sees faculty hiring as the critical issue for colleges that would retain a Catholic identity and calls for postdoctoral programs on the model of the Lilly fellowships conducted at Valparaiso University, to prepare young scholars to make distinctively Catholic contributions.

Indispensable reading on what is required for a Catholic college is, of course, Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, in *Origins* 20 (4 October 1990).

See also Margaret and Peter Steinfelds' interesting contributions in *Origins* 25 (24 August 1995). And particularly valuable, both for its description of Notre Dame strategies for safeguarding the religious tradition and for its analysis of thinking that puts the tradition at risk, is David Solomon, "What Baylor and Notre Dame Can Learn from Each Other," *New Oxford Review* (December 1995): pp. 8-19.

⁷ The Basilians included John Madden and Laurence K. Shook in English, Armand Maurer, Ralph MacDonald (whom Maritain praises in the foreword to *The Degrees of Knowledge*), John Kelly, Victor Brezik, and Robert Miller in philosophy, Eliot Allen and Wilfrid Dore in theology.

Like Sertillanges, we saw our secular studies and our religious life each feeding the other.⁸ The entire resident student body was expected to turn out for Mass six mornings a week, and Sunday nights would see us by the hundreds in St. Basil's church for university sermons often of a quality to warm Cardinal Newman's heart. Sometime before the Dublin lectures on university education, St. Michael's already had established the house system that Newman was to recommend. Many of the houses were literally that, wonderful old Victorian mansions of a sort to encourage camaraderie and the informal exchange of ideas. Of course there were also fun and games in abundance. But study—that is what the place was principally about. One event of my freshman year captured the spirit nicely: the Arts Banquet, a dinner for students and faculty celebrating the accomplishments of the year, featured an address by none other than Jacques Maritain, who chose the occasion to share his latest ideas on the role in art and morality of knowledge through connaturality. I had the good sense to know that the ideas were above me; but I was grateful to be in an institution that so respected the intelligence of its students as to challenge them in this way.⁹

This picture that I paint does not square well with that suggested by John Tracy Ellis in his influential 1955 essay, "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life." Admittedly, south of the Canadian border, where Catholic colleges exist apart from large state universities, education could not be quite the same. Still, in the fifties and early sixties across the United States hundreds of institutions were doing something like what St. Michael's was doing: providing an education that was Christian in more than motivation and attendant spirit, marshalling all forces, curricular and extra-curricular, to serve this purpose. No doubt Ellis was correct in maintaining that these colleges had failed in preceding generations to produce their share of people who would be in the vanguard of creative intellectual activity. No doubt he was correct too in identifying ghettoism as an ingredient of the Catholic mentality that interfered with the intellectual greatness—especially if greatness was to be on the model of the leading secular research universities. But the education supplied by Catholic colleges was one that served well

⁸ A.G. Sertillanges, O.P., *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Method*, trans. Mary Ryan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987). First published in 1946, this book has a tone that seems a bit dated now, but its content remains valuable. Would that it could be required reading for teachers and campus ministers.

⁹ No doubt, like many another recalling his undergraduate days, I look through rose-colored glasses. But articles in such magazines as *Jubilee* (January 1958), *Sign* (April 1961), and *Time*, 25 January 1963, support my general appraisal.

the needs of the typical undergraduate who sought, among other things, a Christian perspective on the world.¹⁰

Today perhaps no change in Catholic colleges is more obvious to the casual observer than the dramatic reduction in the number of priests, brothers and nuns serving as teachers and administrators. In the fifties these religious were major forces, especially at small undergraduate colleges. No longer. At St. Michael's today not a single member of the Congregation of St. Basil remains on the undergraduate faculty. St. John Fisher, where I now teach, has but three Basilians teaching full time, none likely to be called young. Even a much larger community like the Jesuits suffers comparably. Only twenty-nine Jesuits are expected to finish doctoral studies in this academic year—for staffing all departments of all twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities across the country. The expected number for the following year is about the same; then the drop is precipitous to thirteen and nine for the following two years.¹¹

Now, absent this living endowment of low-cost teachers, the colleges have to experience financial strain. This is part of the reason why in New York State there is, to my knowledge, but one college founded as Catholic that has not chosen over the last twenty-three years to distance itself from its original Catholic moorings in order to qualify for State financial assistance in the form of Bundy money. David O'Brien reports that across the country for diverse reasons religious communities have simply given their schools away.¹² Replacing the once impressive array of Catholic colleges we now have throughout the United States religiously independent schools claiming vaguely to be in the Basilian, Jesuit, Vincentian, Josephite or some other religious tradition. Ironically for us in New York, just in the last three years State budgetary curtailments have reduced the flow of public money to a near meaningless trickle—though the religious disavowals remain to affect membership on governing boards, advertising, recruitment of students and faculty, range of course offerings, content of curricula, classroom emphases, fund-raising, and more.

¹⁰ John Tracy Ellis. *Thought* 30 (1955): pp. 351–388. Apropos of this essay Ralph McNerny fairly observes: “Ellis did not ask how Catholic universities could be better Catholic universities, however; he asked how they could be more like their secular counterparts, many of which had been founded under religious auspices and then drifted away.” See McNerny's essay in Hesburgh, ed., *The Challenge and the Promise*, p. 176.

¹¹ Report of the Jesuit Conference, 21 August 1995, Washington, D.C. The picture is bleaker still if not all of these new Ph.D.'s are university-bound.

¹² Cf. O'Brien, *From the Heart*, p. 76.

Of course, even did not our law constrain a secularizing of institutions coming to the public trough, the shortage of priests, nuns and brothers interested in teaching (even teaching theology) would leave us confronting much the same problem. And even if there had been no shortage of religious, the Second Vatican Council with its accent both on new roles for the laity and the value of working with non-Catholics on common concerns was enough to ensure growing diversity of academic personnel and therefore of ideas about how a college should operate. Besides, Ellis's tracing of Catholic intellectual inadequacies to a ghetto mentality had already got college leaders thinking that maybe they should turn more to the leading secular universities for models and for personnel. Newly recovered appreciation, thanks again partly to Vatican II, of the freedom and dignity of all people and widespread acceptance of the standards of the AAUP meant that the many new voices on campus were sure to be heard. These would often represent a greater commitment to the now quite secularized disciplines than to the cause of religiously-inspired education of the whole person.¹³

Within the college, then, we can see with O'Brien three main obstacles to a concerted Catholic educational program: "separate incorporation [giving the college a legal status independent of the Church and her agencies], professionalization [making faculty appointments according to criteria internal to each discipline, following the practice of the best secular schools without much attention to specifically religious concerns], and internal diversity."¹⁴

However, what makes the future of Catholic colleges particularly ominous are forces extending beyond the schools themselves. The last thirty, forty, fifty years have brought such profound cultural and religious changes that it is harder now for the average citizen, Catholic included, to see the point of Catholic education. The laudable post-Vatican-II emphasis on what we have in common with out "separated brethren" has understandably distracted us from what is distinctively Catholic. And as concern for the distinctively Catholic erodes, we cannot be surprised that concern for the dis-

¹³ George Marsden considers the "methodological secularization" of the disciplines at graduate schools a major factor in the erosion of religious traditions at undergraduate schools. See especially Chapter 9 of *The Soul*. Note that faculty indifference to religious issues was occasioned, paradoxically, by John Tracy Ellis's clarion call for a new commitment to intellectual excellence on the part of Catholic scholars (see n. 10).

¹⁴ O'Brien, *From the Heart*, p. 118.

tinctively religious wears away.¹⁵ Moreover, across society the popular confusion of truth with one's awareness of the truth and the confusion of our right to hold an idea with the soundness of the idea have contributed to relativism that shies away from unflinching intellectual commitment, religious or secular. Of course, one does not have to be religiously indifferent or an intellectual relativist to wonder whether the vast educational project of an earlier American church is still worth the effort. Are not most people basically pretty decent? Do not most Americans, whatever their religious adherence, accept the life-liberty-and-pursuit-of-happiness motif, give elbow room for private pursuits (like religion?), act justly and display civic friendship? Why should Catholics hesitate to participate in the common educational enterprise at public universities?

Granted that the young may encounter more challenges to their faith at the public university, modern technologies, especially in communication, ensure that at an early age these people will already have been exposed to many of the ideas and values against which parents of an earlier age wanted Catholic colleges to protect them. The protectionist argument for Catholic higher education may never have been the best, but it is one that used to resonate in the psyche of many a Catholic parent. Its undermining means that we can expect fewer parents nudging their sons and daughters in the direction of Catholic colleges and fewer contributors thereto.

With the fortress mentality out of vogue, we are disposed to think of Catholicism less as a way of being set apart from the world than as a special way of being in the world, caring for it, working hand in hand with non-Catholics in all that promotes the common good.¹⁶ Amen. And echoes of St. Augustine's *City of God* suggest that at least the best minds always knew this.¹⁷

Such considerations give David O'Brien a certain equanimity in the face

¹⁵ I am talking here about what in fact occurs and am in no way suggesting that Catholics should see Protestants or other non-Catholics as the enemy or that they should not seek projects on which they can collaborate with people of other faiths or of no faith.

Apropos of my remark that seeing the point of Catholic education is becoming harder I should add that Woodward (see n. 1) is far from being the only parent to lament what has become of most Catholic colleges. Schools claiming to be Catholic ignore the concerns of this constituency at their peril.

¹⁶ See the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), p. 200.

¹⁷ St. Augustine, *City of God* XIX.17.

of the progressive secularization—he calls it “Americanization”—of our religious colleges.¹⁸ Of course, one may accept the ideals of openness and ecumenism and service to one’s fellows and still suspect that some kind of religious and intellectual ivory tower is a wise stopping-off place for those who seriously want to make the best contributions. But the ivory-tower image is out of favor, and O’Brien is certainly not alone in thinking that the kind of education that Church institutions used to provide is no longer what is needed. The life-expectancy of most Catholic colleges looks short. And the reasons go well beyond the often self-destructive policies¹⁹ of the schools themselves to the religio-cultural sea-changes that have occurred, especially in the last thirty years.

The Principles

The death of the coherently and concertedly Catholic *college*²⁰ cannot, however, be allowed to mean an end to Catholic higher *education*, which in

¹⁸ See note 5.

¹⁹ Some of the self-destructive policies that I have in mind are: (a) failing to include in its charter a statement to the effect that a college belonging to the Basilian, Franciscan, or other such tradition has a continuing *special* and *pervading* interest in informing students about and cultivating appreciation of the Catholic intellectual heritage; (b) failing to make Catholicism, or at least intelligent goodwill for the project of Catholic education, a factor in hiring (though, if special interest in the Catholic heritage ideally should be felt throughout the curriculum, no candidate’s attitudes toward that aspect of the college mission should be a matter of total indifference); (c) largely abandoning courses in Catholic theology in favor of courses in methodologically neutral religious studies; (d) reducing or abandoning requirements in Christian philosophy and religious studies in order to become more marketable to transfer students from community colleges, and thus losing the most obvious curricular indicator that the school belongs in the Catholic tradition of higher education; (e) failing to advertise the institution’s abiding special interest in Catholicism (where it is still honest to do so); (f) doing little in its community outreach programs to cultivate in adult Catholics an ever deeper appreciation of their heritage and its implications for contemporary culture (and thus ensuring that the number of people disposed to support the Catholic college will gradually diminish).

²⁰ The Franciscan University of Steubenville (OH), St. Thomas Aquinas College (Santa Paula, CA), and St. Thomas More College (NH) are among a handful of colleges in clear reaction to the general trend that I have described. Cf. Samuel Casey Carter, “Ten Colleges to Consider,” *Crisis* (January 1995): pp. 33–36. Time will tell whether these new or newly reshaped institutions are as concerned with being colleges as they are with being Catholic. Carter’s list of identifiably Catholic colleges includes some well-established schools: St. Anselm College (Manchester, NH), Assumption College (Worcester, MA), Loyola College (Baltimore, MD). In connection with the newer and smaller ventures in particular, one longs for a way of adapting the Toronto scheme of religious colleges within the non-denominational (or multi-denominational) university so as to mitigate the very real dangers of undue insularity.

one form or another simply must survive and flourish. The requirement of religious education follows from the obligatoriness of religion itself. St. Augustine credits Cicero with recognizing what Plato's *Euthyphro* earlier suggested and what St. Thomas clearly teaches: justice demands religion.²¹ Anyone who admits the existence of a Creator and yet fails regularly to go down on his knees in humble thanks and adoration fails to pay what is due, is unjust. And since we don't come into this world already knowing that it is a created world or that all that we are and have we owe to God, we need to be taught! So given that the existence of God is indeed demonstrable, philosophy by itself comes to see religion and religious education as obligatory. It is not surprising that even a pagan like Plato made provision for regular religious worship in the program of his Academy.²² And what reason concludes faith gives us additional basis for affirming: "Go and *teach* all nations," said Jesus.

Many will object that the conviction that there is a loving God to whom we should be ready to confess our dependence can be adequately inculcated at mother's knee, that feelings of indebtedness and love count for more than sophisticated theorizing about God. But surely Newman was right in refusing to reduce religious convictions to sentiment,²³ right too in warning that the person who receives a college-level education in everything but theology will be hard pressed not to think of God-talk as somehow intellectually suspect, hardly meeting the requirements of an adult mind. He will come to disparage religious knowledge.²⁴

That instruction in religion itself should matter to any Church is obvious. But if all that mattered were our knowing Church doctrine, the history of Christian involvement in education from the very first centuries after Christ would be unintelligible. I am thinking of such early Christian apologists as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, of a Father of the Church like St. Basil—all of whom recognized that Christian wisdom must enter into dialogue with pagan wisdom. I am thinking of those Irish monasteries where in the darkest of the dark ages humble monks laboriously copied secular as well as sacred manuscripts in order that a precious heritage not be

²¹ Cf. Augustine, *City of God* II.21 and XIX.21–23; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae, q.81.

²² Cf. Josef Pieper, *Leisure: the Basis of Culture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 77.

²³ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Daniel M. O'Connell, S.J., ed. (New York: The America Press, 1941), Discourse 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Discourse 3.

lost. I am thinking of the role of Irish and English monks in the Carolingian renaissance. I am thinking of the first universities of the West, the work of bishops and their clergy. I am thinking of the role of St. Francis de Sales in establishing the first high schools. I am thinking of all those Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits, Basilians, Sisters of St. Joseph and Mercy, and others male and female, who out of religious inspiration have undertaken to teach not just theology and Christian philosophy but literature and history, mathematics, physical and social sciences, art. Theology may be the first interest of the Christian intellectual; it cannot be his only interest. While recognizing with Aristotle that the little that we can know of God is much more worthwhile than the abundance that we can know of terrestrial things,²⁵ we see all knowledge, even of the least created thing, as in principle revelatory of the Creator. We have a religious stake in secular learning.

It is difficult to emerge from a study of the middle ages in particular without seeing in the Catholic Church one of the greatest friends higher education has ever known. Of course, then and now the Church occasionally sins against education.²⁶ Still, that friendship with learning, based not on changing circumstance but on principle, the principle that *truth is in its Primary Instance divine and has revealed Himself not just in His handiwork to the person of reason but also in the history of the Jewish people and in Jesus Christ and the tradition of His Church to the person of faith*—such friendship, such devotion to learning cannot be allowed to wither just because Catholic colleges as we have known them are in trouble.

In all of this I am presuming, as Maritain and others have maintained,

²⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI.1 1026a 21–23; *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7 1177a 12–19.

²⁶ The treatment of Galileo and the Inquisition stand out as sorry episodes in the life of the Church. In recent times the denial to Father Charles Curran of the right to teach as a Catholic theologian in a Pontifical university was unfortunate public relations even if it was defensible control of the content of instruction at a school professing to teach Catholic doctrine. Of course, conflict between the official magisterium of the Church and individual theologians conscientiously seeking deeper understanding of God's revelation can be expected to recur in every age. Ideally such conflicts are resolved in some other way than by appeal to force. One thinks here of the turmoil in the thirteenth-century University of Paris when Latin Averroists were talking of one Agent Intellect for all men and Gerard d'Abbeville and Geraldini were denying the very right of mendicants to teach in the university. The Dominican response (to the latter issue, at any rate) was to pull their best man out of his work in the Roman province and rush him back to Paris in the middle of an academic year—that an intellectual quarrel might be resolved at the properly intellectual level. See James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 237–239.

that education at any level is concerned more with the making of a human being than with the making of a worker or a citizen *or a Christian*: that any educational institution should make its appeal principally to the intellect²⁷; that the perfection of the human person entails the acquisition of a whole panoply of virtues, moral as well as intellectual; that the college or university cannot be indifferent to the moral bent of its students even as it concentrates its efforts on chemistry, biology, mathematics, history, philosophy, theology and other such intellectual virtues.²⁸ I stand with Maritain also in affirming that merely human virtue is not enough: having a destiny beyond the natural we need the theological and moral virtues that "God works in us without us."²⁹ I stand with St. Thomas in affirming that even naturally knowable truths about God such as are the business of metaphysics, most people are not going to succeed in grasping, certainly not in a timely fashion or without many mistakes unless they are guided by God's *supernatural* revelation.³⁰ I thus stand with Gilson in my misgivings about young people's studying philosophy in an un-Christian or a-religious setting.³¹ I stand with Newman, and with Gerald B. Phelan in the essay which Maritain cites in *Education at the Crossroads*, in holding that theology should be central to the educational enterprise and that to ignore its insights is to embrace a distorted view of reality as a whole.³² Finally, I stand with churchmen from St. Thomas to Theodore Hesburgh in respect for the freedom of intellectual inquiry and thus insist that the Catholic college must have a certain autonomy vis-a-vis the bishops as well as the state and recognize that, once faculty members are given tenure, the mere fact that they come to harbor unpopular views is no reason for dismissing or otherwise punishing them—at least provided that these views are compatible with the

²⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1943), pp. 1–7; 9–10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–28; 93–97.

²⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* (New York: Scribner's, 1940); *Moral Philosophy* (London: Bles, 1964), pp. 71–91.

³⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 1, a. 1.

³¹ Etienne Gilson, "St. Thomas and Our Colleagues," in *The Gilson Reader* (New York: Doubleday-Image, 1957), pp. 278–297.

³² Gerald B. Phelan, "Theology in the Curriculum of Catholic Colleges and Universities," *Man and Modern Secularism* (New York: National Catholic Alumni Federation, 1940), pp. 138–142. In a recent article James Heft, S.M., Provost of the University of Dayton, sharply distinguishes theology from religious studies and argues that it is the former that is crucial to the Catholic identity of a college or university. See Heft, "Theology in a Catholic University," *Origins* 25 (28 September 1995).

stated purposes of the college as made plain to the faculty member at the time of his initial appointment.³³

Applications

The issue, then, concerns not whether education needs to make provision for faith but how it may best do so in the concrete circumstances in which we now find ourselves. A first point to note is that if the learning and teaching activities are not in some way Catholic, then the college simply is not Catholic. And because the classroom is the principal place for these activities, it is the classroom that pre-eminently needs religious influence. Wherever there is plausible hope of maintaining a college as distinctively Catholic, this means, at a minimum, that sympathy for religiously-inspired education generally and a Catholic approach in particular is normally a necessary condition for appointment to the faculty. Hence, even though departments can be expected to chafe sometimes at what they will perceive as administrative interference, presidents and academic deans must involve themselves in every faculty appointment, lest the overall purposes of the college be lost sight of in departmental enthusiasm for a candidate's special disciplinary expertise.

Whether the administrators of a college be Catholic, or at least deeply

³³ The Christian, especially the Christian intellectual, should have a passionate devotion to the truth. But one of the truths that he recognizes is that, because free choice is a mark of human dignity, he must respect the free ways in which others seek the truth. Efforts to force people to think one way rather than another are not only counterproductive, they are unjust. Cf. the proemium to the moral part of the *Summa Theologiae*, where St. Thomas makes freedom the keynote of all morality: it is precisely as intellectual beings who determine our own lives that we are in the image of God.

What Theodore Hesburgh says in the opening essay of *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University* about university autonomy and faculty freedom seems by and large correct, but the degree of autonomy from episcopal authority appropriate to a college or university that takes seriously its profession of being Catholic is difficult to formulate and more difficult to work out in practice. Catholics, after all, hold that it is through the Church that God's revelation is conveyed to them. The prospects of a college's remaining in any significant sense Catholic without a corporate link to the Church are slim indeed, as James T. Burtchaell argues in the essay cited in n.1. See especially Part II of Burtchaell's essay, *First Things* (May 1991), p. 35.

Also, something more needs to be said about the parameters within which the faculty exercise their freedom to teach as they see fit. Trustees, presidents, academic deans, academic departments have a role here. That the setting of parameters is legitimate Ralph McInerney makes abundantly clear in the Hesburgh volume (pp. 183-84).

familiar with and supportive of the Catholic educational project, matters enormously—for how can they husband faithfully a tradition that they little know or care for? Besides, presidents, academic deans, deans of students, and others can set a tone—to say nothing of a budget—that either supports or impedes the project of Christian education. And now that the governing boards ultimately responsible for appointing top administrators can no longer count on the availability of qualified members of the founding religious community, it becomes increasingly important that they too have a deep understanding of the Catholic educational project. Still, in another sense, whatever their legal status, administrators and trustees are essentially of secondary importance. Their purpose is to facilitate the effective coming together of faculty and students.

Similarly, insofar as the students' spiritual lives need feeding in the liturgy and insofar as the institution as such needs on certain occasions to mark liturgically its religious commitment, the role of a campus minister is unquestionably important (though the sacraments could be made available in a neighboring parish). Ideally, as in the past, chaplains at schools claiming to be in some way Catholic would be many, every priest-teacher regularly being seen at the altar, visibly symbolizing the harmony of reason and revelation. Today, however, not only are the priest-teachers fewer and fewer in number but the conduct of liturgies often falls to one or two non-teaching priests. The result is that students find it harder to see connections between their religious lives and their academic lives. Now and then from the pulpit they need to hear a word said for studiousness, ardor for knowledge, intellectual honesty; they deserve to be treated to deeply theological meditations on the Trinity, on Truth Himself, on creation—topics less likely to occur to the minister who is not actively engaged in the life of scholarship and teaching. In a word, because the campus minister's ministry is to the campus, it is campus life—a life centered on learning and teaching—that he should care to make or keep Christian.³⁴

Of course, much learning and teaching go on outside the classroom—in dormitory common rooms, on playing fields, in the cafeteria, through a

³⁴ The campus minister should probably take a leading role in organizing food drives for the hungry, money-raising projects to help people in physical or spiritual need, service programs for staffing houses of hospitality, abortion hotlines, etc. For students must not come to think that Catholicism is a matter of merely intellectual adherence without practical consequences. Nonetheless, it remains true, as *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* points out, that the college's basic way of serving society is at the intellectual level, seeking an ever deeper grasp of the truth and communicating it to others as effectively as possible.

wide variety of co-curricular activities. Setting an appropriate moral tone (according to which civility, friendship, respect for the free workings of human intelligence, truthfulness, and other virtues serve good learning) must be an institutional aim³⁵, though recent propagandistic excesses of the politically correct on our campuses stand as warning against heavy-handedness and the de-Christianizing of virtue.

Probably most of the colleges claiming to be in a Catholic tradition are already too diversified to be recalled to a coherently and concertedly Catholic education.³⁶ So we seek alternatives that may not be ideal but will keep the concerns of Christian faith in more prominent and clear focus than is the case on avowedly secular campuses. Imagination is called for. And we need to act now before we lose any more support for key votes in our faculty assemblies and boards of trustees.

Given that over the years the personnel of any college or university change completely, for any school to maintain its character it must tell its story again and again. The story is about those who founded the institution and why, about great professors, about outstanding students, about alumni. It is told to incoming freshmen; it is repeated on state occasions. The college seal, explained to each new group, will become a visible reminder of what the institution stands for. If the school is named for a person, all should know who that person was and why his name attaches to the school. For the still-more-or-less-Catholic colleges telling the story must involve reference also to the centuries-long intellectual tradition in which even the newest of them participates.

In the interest of telling the story to faculty, representatives of forty-five

³⁵ Probably every college recruits the academically strongest students that it can hope to attract, and probably no college wittingly accepts those whose level of civilization assures that they will be disruptive influences on campus. In a similar way every college serious about Catholic education must make special efforts to recruit Catholic students. For it is Catholics whom such institutions exist directly to serve. Cf. Burtchaell, "The Decline and Fall . . . II," *First Things* (May 1991): p. 38.

³⁶ Given the religious diversity of faculties and student bodies in today's Catholic college, any efforts that the school makes to return to its religious roots must take care to avoid injustice to its non-Catholic members, who in joining its ranks had perhaps little reason to think that the school's religious tradition would have at this late date any significant impact on the teaching or learning that went on there. Still, if over the years an institution continued saying, however vaguely, that it was in some way Catholic, efforts now to put substance into the words cannot come as a total surprise. And, after all, sensitivity to the feelings and the conscience of others should extend not just to non-Catholics but also to all those Catholics on campus who are understandably saddened, even angered, over policies that have eroded religious features of the college.

colleges—Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic—have for several years been meeting at Valparaiso University for a conference on religion and higher education sponsored by the Lilly Foundation. An offshoot of this group is the Collegium, based at Fairfield University, which holds summer seminars on Catholic education. The Jesuits of the Maryland province have been meeting annually for the same purpose. Faculty at Basilian schools have had one such meeting; others are contemplated. Many schools have held at least sporadic colloquia in which faculty members discuss among themselves the significance of the Catholic rhetoric of their mission statements.

As a tactic for salvaging something of the tradition some colleges have established programs or institutes that would gather together faculty and students who desire to focus their attention on the Christian patrimony and its lessons for today. Christ College at Valparaiso may be worth studying in this regard. So too the Christian Culture Program at St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto. The St. Ignatius Institute at The University of San Francisco probably has some lessons for us. And there must be other models. My chief misgiving about such programs or colleges-within-the-college is that they may aggravate the problem by further marginalizing religion. Those involved in them are too apt to be thought of by the majority of students, and perhaps faculty, as eccentric, not engaged in the same sort of serious scholarship as is the rest of the school. So a college-wide academic program is preferable. Maybe with the right personnel, planning, and college-wide support solid interdisciplinary concentrations in Christian culture could substitute for the traditional minor and for part of the core requirements in a student's academic program.

Scholarships in Catholic studies of one sort or another, though awarded to but a few outstanding students, might stimulate broader interest in things Catholic among many students. Thus my own college is seeking funding for what we propose to call the Jacques Maritain scholarships in Christian philosophy.

We also look to endow a chair to support a visiting professor of Catholic studies. Because it is the educational process as a whole that should be Catholic, this proposal is for a multidisciplinary chair. One semester the visitor might be a professor of literature looking for intimations of the divine in Dostoevski, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Georges Bernanos, Flannery O'Connor, and others. Another semester might bring an historian to examine interactions of Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages or a sociologist to probe the joint impact of the civil rights movement, Vatican II, and the Vietnam war on the American Catholic psyche. Another semester might feature an Avery Dulles helping students to understand more deeply what

faith and church are or a Charles Curran examining moral issues that arise in today's hospitals. Another semester a philosopher from Blackfriars, Oxford, might examine the possibility of knowledge that transcends sense experience; or somebody like Stanley Jaki might weigh the relevance of Stephen Hawking's physics to the Christian conviction that this world is created by God. The enthusiasm of first-rate scholars should be contagious. Our hope at St. John Fisher is that on a regular basis various departments would be thus stimulated to reflect on the significance of Christian faith for their disciplines.

There is no question here of the non-theologian's being expected to do amateur theology in the science or history or literature class. But perhaps we can still hope for English teachers who (even if not themselves particularly sympathetic to things Catholic) will in their passing comments invite students to wonder if the relativist critical theories deriving from Jacques Derrida are compatible with the Christian commitment to the sacredness of a particular Text; or for economists whose *obiter dicta* will alert students that rejection of the concept of illusory marketplace services³⁷ may entail rejection of the sort of objective morality basic to Christianity and recently reaffirmed in *Veritatis Splendor*, or for physicists whose asides will make clear that talk of a Big Bang has nothing to do with the issue of creation as Christian philosophers and theologians understand it. Only to the extent that teachers are aware of the tradition can they be expected not unwittingly to undermine it. Like the faculty conferences and seminars, the visiting professor idea is aimed at increasing awareness of and support for the tradition.

Conclusion

Almost no college today is Catholic in the pervasive way that many once were. It is easy to suppose that the slide to complete secularism is inexorable and that the Catholic public should now redirect its energies and resources to more promising projects. Still, almost none of colleges founded as Catholic is yet completely secularized either. Generally speaking, can something both academically and religiously worthwhile be salvaged? I am uncertain. But I hesitate to abandon the effort, lest I help to ensure the very outcome I seek to avoid.

³⁷ Yves R. Simon, *Work, Society, and Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1971), pp. 122ff.