

What Is Role of the Catholic College in Modern Times?

Student-administration disputes over policy and direction have struck comparatively few Catholic campuses this year. But the Catholic colleges are being forced by the times to examine their purposes and to question their goals.

The COURIER-JOURNAL asked Professor Clarence G. Heininger, of the St. John Fisher College faculty, to state his views on the present and future of the U.S. Catholic college.

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To foretell the future—that which was once left to the superstitious and the fakers has become the practical necessity of every man in our western world. We call it planning, and it is a particularly serious business in Catholic education.

The Catholic college faces two serious problems: a shortage of money and the question of their real purpose. These are also the principal problems confronting all private colleges. But the question of purpose has more dimensions on the Catholic campus than on the secular. Why does the Catholic college exist?

Some Catholic colleges were founded in order to extend beyond the high school level the separate, protective system of Catholic education begun in America in the nineteenth century. Along with the parochial and private Catholic elementary and high schools, the Catholic press, the Sunday sermons and parish missions, they were an important part of our intellectual ghetto.

Other colleges were founded so that each religious order could have, within its own community, a complete system of education, kindergarten to baccalaureate for its own members. The sound formation of these religious-in-training was thought to be more certain if they could live and work with

in their own community. And, with a complete educational system, the religious community could offer a wide range of teaching apostolates to prospective priests, brothers or sisters.

Another compelling force in the founding of many Catholic colleges was certainly the desire to serve a local community need. For about fifteen years after its opening in 1851, St. John Fisher College was the only college of liberal arts and science in Monroe County that was generally open to young men. (The University of Rochester, with its national restrictions, had to restrict local enrollment. The Rochester Institute of Technology was and is principally a technical institute.)

All fifty states are now energetically entering into higher education. In the Rochester community, we now have the four-year state colleges of liberal arts and science at Brockport and at Genesee and the two-year Monroe and Finger Lakes Community Colleges.

And so we must ask, what is the raison d'être of the Catholic College in 1970?

It of course shares certain characteristics with all private colleges. One can argue that private state control, can and do experiment and innovate. They should be less subject to outside interference and so should offer a truer academic freedom to their degree offerings, and the character of their student bodies than can the public colleges.

But to consider the future of the Catholic College requires that we be concerned with its Catholic nature.

We do not know what makes a college Catholic. We do recognize some outward signs that are commonly associated with Catholic colleges.

Among those characteristics that have largely disappeared

are the completely religious administration, the required study of the Catholic religion, the attempt to protect students from "profane" ideas, and the required participation in Catholic liturgical services. (The religious faculties became predominantly lay faculties in all but the smallest colleges over twenty years ago.)

Other signs of Catholicity continue to exist. Through its catalog, the college describes itself as being within the Catholic community. The majority of students, faculty, and administrators are Catholics and the others generally respect the Catholic faith. A number of religious continue to work on the campus. The Mass is offered daily. Crucifixes, shrines, and statues of the saints can be found about the campus. Catholic theology is a visible part of the curriculum.

One wonders if there are other distinguishing marks of a Catholic college. There should be some that would cause these colleges to stand as visible evidence of Christ's presence in today's world.

All of the Catholic college community would never forget that each student, each administrator, each teacher is a human being made in the image of God and so deserving of constant respect, assistance, and encouragement from all members of that community. An informed, intelligent understanding of the human person would be continually growing in each student, teacher, and administrator. There would be a constant striving for spiritual and professional development so that each one can fulfill the trust that God has placed in him.

Because of the very real limitations imposed by human weakness, these virtues do not shine as a beacon from the Catholic campus. But they are there, and both consciously and unconsciously we try to make them a part of us.

Small, imprecise details can combine to give a true picture of a person or of an institution. In these we might find the best description of the Catholic College today. What are some of these details?

1—Real control is generally vested in religious even if the legal structure shows a lay governing board or if certain administrative offices are held by laymen.

2—Some faculty and administrators will still consider character formation and the development of good mothers and fathers to be the most important college responsibility; true scholarship will be considered unnecessary and even undesirable.

3—The professional training and development of religious faculty remains subject to the religious community and sometimes follows directions that a layman would not choose.

4—A "father knows best" attitude can produce overnight curriculum requirements.

5—The most influential faculty and administrators will have grown up in the Catholic system and may be unaware of the systems adopted by the secular institutions. This, in fact, is the key—we are the product of our personal histories and we only change slowly. And so we find traces of our heritage in our colleges.

6—The principal academic characteristic of the Catholic College is probably its strong bent for the liberal arts. There are some Catholic engineering schools, but these are outside the mainstream of Catholic higher education; their host institutions may not be, but the particular engineering departments are considered to be somewhat "non-Catholic." Science can be and often is strong, but it must continually defend its presence in a center of "pure" education. In any case the student will expect to gain both a technical and a liberal arts education.

7—Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of the Catholic College is a renewed determination to become a true center of scholarship. This has been the contribution of post-World-War-II society to Catholic education. Today neither student applicants, financial backers, nor teaching faculty will accept less than good academic performances, and we are moving toward more centers of real scholarship.

(This is not to say that we do not have poor colleges or poor courses or poor students or poor teachers, but they will die or change as financial support, students, faculty, and administrators leave or demand improvement, as the particular case warrants.)

We can see today in the Catholic College an institution that has grown out of and away from an institutional existence, that is now accepted as an equal

intellectual center by the other American colleges, and that does not want to lose sight of its Catholic origins or of Catholic principles. What can we see of its future?

If the origin of the Catholic College lay in a desire to serve, either a city or a Catholic community or a religious order and through it a larger community, then we can look for it to serve in the future.

This can be done by serving the students who come to it. Or it can be done by serving the outside community in untraditional ways. It can do both, but it must be careful to do only good work. This will be the key to its future existence.

Should the Catholic College attack social ills? Should it go into the saving of lives and souls? Could it if it wanted to?

We have always accepted that Catholic institutions should serve mankind. And with the clear demand for help in our society, we expect the Catholic community to help.

The source of our manpower has been the religious orders. But we find them busy with teaching. We also find many of them willing to put the teaching and the scholarship aside to work in the community. We see work for them to do that no one else is ready to do. It is reasonable to expect the Catholic college to respond to community needs.

The more serious question arises. Would this be a retreat from scholarship and a return to something much like the protection of the faith that used to be a principal function of the Catholic College?

It is here most important to distinguish between the College and those individuals who are now in it and who are directing, as teachers or administrators, its academic work. It is also important to recognize the religious commitment of the teach-

ing priests, brothers, and sisters as distinct from their teaching commitments.

There are religious who prefer to be professors of physics or English or philosophy. These will and should continue to educate physicists or bring our cultural heritage to the men and women who come to the colleges. They will have no significant time to give to service off the campus.

There are other religious who have carefully prepared themselves and earned the highest degrees in order to teach. But they have not done this as much for the discipline as to gain an entrée for service to the human person and the human soul.

We will not be surprised if they decide that they serve God better by bringing food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and hope to the abandoned than by developing the laws of Mendel or tracing the wars of Garibaldi.

When the professor abandons scholarship and teaching for social work, it is not the college that is abandoning scholarship. But the college must find a new man for the academic work. In the short run, such social involvement will decrease the number of teaching religious because their replacements will normally be laymen.

But if the College should put certain kinds of social service under its administrative control, however loosely, there will be added a new and important dimension to the Catholic College. It will have immediate contact in the world. It can develop combination service and learning programs to involve both students and faculty.

We see, then, that the Catholic College could focus on a broader objective than scholarship and academic excellence. But one individual cannot do this. The college will have to grow so that it retains the proper number of people for the work in the community.

The alternatives are not appealing—the college could turn its back on the community or it could accept minimal academic work from individuals who are divided between two full-time vocations. Either of these directions will, in the

long run, weaken the college. Only growth with the world can insure the significance of any institution.

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New officers and three members-at-large have been elected to the parish council at Immaculate Conception, Ithaca. Shown, from the left, are Edward Moy, a member; Charles Dvorak, vice president; John C. Clynes, member; Peter DeWysocki, president; and John Barrett, member. Margaret McCann was elected secretary. The council has five divisions: family, school, religious education, parish and community and public relations. The chairman and vice chairman of each are voting members of the council.

Fond Farewell For 20 Sisters

Twenty Sisters of St. Joseph who taught at Most Precious Blood School during 13 years will be feted by parishioners at a reception in the school from 3 to 5 p.m. Sunday, May 18. The reception will be a "farewell" to the St. Joseph nuns, who, because of other commitments and demands throughout the diocese, will not be staffing the school beyond June.

The school, with 165 pupils in eight grades, now has three Sisters, three fulltime and three parttime lay teachers, and the assistance of parish volunteers. Sponsoring Sunday's reception is the Parents' Club, which has invited the more than 200 alumni of the school to attend.

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