

THE FOUNDING AND  
GOVERNING DOCUMENT  
OF THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

# A Proposal for the Fulfillment of Catholic Liberal Education



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1969

# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>I. The Crisis in the Catholic College .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>II. Can Faith Illumine Understanding?.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>III. Academic Freedom .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>IV. Freedom and Catholic Education.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>V. The Catholic Teacher .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>VI. What Is Liberal Education? .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>VII. Liberal Education, its Parts and the Order Among Them .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>VIII. Liberal Education and the Christian Faith.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>IX. The Present Need for Genuine Liberal Education....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>X. The Curriculum.....</b>	<b>49</b>

## Introduction

This document was first published in 1969 as a proposal for Thomas Aquinas College. In the years since its founding, and thanks to God's infinite generosity, the College has reached its full enrollment of 350 students



and nearly completed its campus in Santa Paula, Calif. More important is the fact that the College has remained completely faithful to the vision of genuine Catholic liberal education outlined in this proposal and, God willing, will do so as long as it continues to exist.

In one of its most important parts, the proposal speaks of faith as a light which illumines understanding and serves as an indispensable guide in the intellectual life. "Contrary to what is often assumed," it explains, "liberal education does not take place in spite of or even apart from the Christian faith. Rather, the Christian student, because of his faith, can be liberally educated in the most perfect and complete way."

Catholic liberal education is best characterized as *faith seeking understanding*. Both the teacher and learner believe the fullness of the Christian message and desire to understand it more perfectly... to see, as much as is possible, what is first believed. At Thomas Aquinas College, we pursue this understanding guided by our patron, St. Thomas Aquinas, as has been encouraged by the Church for many centuries, up to and including the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Pope Leo XIII said that St. Thomas' theology was a "definitive exposition of the Christian faith;" the first Vatican Coun-

cil elevated St. Thomas to the pre-eminent status of “teacher of the Church;” and in *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II said “the Church has been justified in consistently proposing St. Thomas as a master of thought and a model of the right way to pursue theology.”

St. Thomas is so important because his principles, methods, and chief doctrines — as well as those of Aristotle, on whom the work of St. Thomas securely rests — are true in their own right. They are sure ways to a deeper understanding of our Catholic faith and to a deeper appropriation of the life-giving mysteries revealed in the Scriptures, in the tradition of the Church, and in the world God has created.

Students at Thomas Aquinas College are greatly aided in their pursuit of wisdom by their study of the other principal disciplines — language, logic, literature, music, mathematics, and natural science — which themselves are sources of knowledge, and by which, in the words of Hugh of St. Victor, “the lively soul enters into the secrets of philosophy.” Because these disciplines are ordered to the study of philosophy and theology, the College’s unified and coherent curriculum enables our students to see the unity of all truth and the harmony between faith and reason.

Those who pursue this curriculum are aided as well by reading the greatest books, the books which best enable us to address the difficult questions we all must confront, the books which speak to our deepest yearnings, touch our most profound tribulations, and celebrate our greatest joys.

Finally, classes at Thomas Aquinas College typically involve lively conversation and serious engagement with the thoughts of others, helping students acquire the intellectual and moral virtues, increasing their knowledge and love of God, and fitting them for lives of service to Church, country, and community, no matter what vocations or professions they choose to pursue.

The proposal expounded on these pages was drafted in the spring of 1968 by Ronald P. McArthur and the late Marcus Berquist and was later revised with the help of John W. Neumayr. Dr. McArthur subsequently served as the president of Thomas Aquinas College for its first twenty years and is still a member of the College’s faculty, as is Dr. Neumayr. The discussion of wonder as the proper motive for

leading the intellectual life was contributed by Edmund Dolan, F.S.C., late professor of philosophy at St. Mary’s College of California.

Thomas Aquinas College continues to attract students and faculty of exemplary character and noble aspirations who pursue its educational program energetically and with great joy. As the College continues in its work, we pray that God will continue to bless its efforts as He has so abundantly in the past.



Michael F. McLean, *President*

Thomas Aquinas College, July 2011

## I. The Crisis in the Catholic College



American Catholics are becoming increasingly aware of the growing tendency of Catholic colleges to secularize themselves — that is, to loosen their connection with the teaching Church and to diminish deliberately their Catholic character. Catholic parents in particular are becoming alarmed at the effects that this secularization has or threatens to have on the intellectual and moral formation of their children. The colleges themselves display a growing inability to define themselves in such a way as to justify their continued existence as Catholic institutions.

At first glance, the cause of this tendency appears to be economic. A growing number of administrators and controlling boards are trusting to the strategy that by secularizing their institutions they will enhance their eligibility to receive monies from educational foundations and from the government. It is questionable, however, whether the strategy has been thought through, for it is far from clear that Catholic parents will send their children to an institution that calls itself a Catholic college but that appears indistinguishable, except in cost of attending, from the nearest tuition-free state college.

And if Catholic parents should find themselves unable to distinguish between the Catholic college and the secular institution, their confusion would not be without basis in the actual character of the emerging Catholic college itself. For, fundamentally, the explanation of the growing secularization of American Catholic higher education is doctrinal rather than economic. The willingness of a college to secularize itself in the hope of monetary gain presupposes that it already views its Catholicity as something that is subject to negotiation, which in turn presupposes that it has rejected the traditional doctrine that the essential purpose of a Catholic college is to educate under the light of the Faith. We find, in fact, that the most outspoken proponents of the secularization of the Catholic colleges are not

arguing about economic considerations but are attacking the very idea of a college that educates under the light of the Faith. We find, further, that Catholic college graduates, students and professors are, by and large, unable and unwilling to resist these attacks. Indeed, the most virulent attacks now being made on Catholic education — as well as on the Church itself — emanate from some of these graduates, students, and professors. That this should happen points to a grave deficiency in Catholic education; institutions whose essential purpose is to combine Catholic wisdom and secular learning have given birth to a generation of teachers and learners who in large part reject such a purpose as irrelevant or contradictory. Inescapable is the realization that the Catholic college has not been true to its purpose. Yet this realization, somber as it may be, should not be surprising, for a brief look at the American Catholic college as we have known it in the past reveals fundamental flaws which, given time to bear their fruit, have made the present crisis inevitable.

There was a time when the Catholic college justified its existence by saying that it gave its students, almost all of them Catholics, an education which had as some of its components courses in Catholic philosophy and religion. This meant that all its students took mandatory courses in these disciplines, whose truths, it was hoped, would permeate them and shape their lives. The rest of the curriculum was put together in imitation of the pattern of courses existing in secular schools and was assumed to achieve the same purposes as were achieved by secular education. Hence it was the boast of the Catholic college that it had all that secular education had and more; it was Catholic without ceasing to be secular, and in fact it was thought to prepare its students even better than other schools for this world because it gave them a philosophical formation which would sustain them in whatever state of life they chose.

But there were certain anomalies: a) While the college was boasting that its curriculum was up-to-date, that it had courses in the latest disciplines such as sociology and modern psychology, whose paradigm is Newtonian mechanics, it was also proposing philosophy courses based upon a general conception of reality opposed to the philosophical presuppositions of sociology and modern psychology. Similarly, its courses in physics and chemistry presupposed, without question, a philosophical view about the nature of matter and motion

which contradicted what was taught in the philosophy courses. b) But even within the philosophy curriculum itself anomalies existed. The philosophical formation of the students was essentially faulty in that faculties themselves were fundamentally divided on the question of whether there is philosophy or merely philosophies. The effect of this division was to propose to the students that philosophical education would at once lead to a certain understanding of reality, which understanding was at the same time relative basically to the changes of time and place. This opposition was in effect between those who claim something can be known and those who are skeptics — and the resultant effect on the students, who quite naturally attempted to integrate both positions, was skepticism. Skepticism, of course, defeats the purpose of the intellectual life by denying the possibility of knowing anything. c) The proponents of perennial philosophy sought to be true to the nature of Catholic education as traditionally understood by the Church and, more particularly, as repeatedly emphasized by the papal encyclicals since Leo XIII, but even here the American Catholic college has been troubled by yet another failing. Where the papal encyclicals made it plain that the perennial wisdom was to be studied through the works of the great masters themselves, and above all through the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, it has been more often the case that students have rather become acquainted with this wisdom through textbook versions. In this attempt to proportion such wisdom to the modern student's mind so as to minimize its intrinsic difficulties, the proper character of this wisdom was distorted and misrepresented in various ways. In part this misrepresentation was due to the impossibility of simplifying these difficulties and in part the result of attempting



*St. Thomas Aquinas*

to restate traditional doctrines through the thoughts and language of contemporary philosophies which in fact understand reality in ways incompatible with this wisdom. In the measure that this was true, the perennial philosophy was lost. d) Even more seriously, the religion courses were isolated, and in no way performed a sapiential function with respect to the rest of the curriculum, contenting themselves with a superficial restatement of the truths of Catholicism. No attempt was made to acquaint students with the greatest Fathers and Doctors of the Church, or to deepen their understanding of the richness of the Catholic heritage. Theology was not treated as the science it is, and

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as a means to the intellectual, as well as to the moral growth of the student. The possible penetration he might have had into the highest truths was little realized. Yet, all the while, the religion courses claimed to be the important part of Catholic education.

A critique of Catholic education would seriously fall short of accomplishing its objective if it overlooked the purely educational weaknesses that Catholic education shares with all American colleges in the area of liberal education. The American college has long ago abandoned genuine liberal education. In its place it has in part substituted vocational education for what once was an education for man simply as man. And in another part where it has preserved certain studies that do not lead to some practical application it has done so only because they lead the student to a greater appreciation of the “learning” and “culture” of his civilization. The second part goes by the name of *humanism* so as to designate its subjects precisely to be those things that are from man as distinguished from those things that come from nature. These two parts make up an indiscriminate whole and are both called education univocally. This profound confusion which is now bearing its unhappy fruit in the irrational academic uprisings and revolutions, with their endless and aimless proposals

for reform, has for a long time been adopted, somewhat unwittingly, by the Catholic colleges themselves.

In a more particular way this general debility of the American secular college, which served as the model for the Catholic college in areas other than philosophy and theology, has these effects. The secular college does retain vestigial requirements in some areas of liberal education, but it was settled long ago that the main function of the college was to train students for the professions by meeting the demands of professional and graduate schools. The student had to begin specialization early in his college career lest he fall behind in the race toward professional success. Educators were not always happy with the growing trend toward specialization, but it was realistic to assume that this was what most students wanted. Educators could find solace in the dogma of instrumentalist pedagogy that successful education occurs in direct proportion to its compliance with the interests of the student — an interest which is assumed to be antecedent to enrollment and already fully determinate. Finally, since few educators were prepared to defend the proposition that one course of instruction might be of itself more educative than another (or the proposition that there is a discoverable order among the existing disciplines), no one was able to resist the deluge of course proliferation which created the modern college catalogue. Indeed, few spoke out against it, and there were those who maintained that the student’s academic freedom had, in a significant sense, been enhanced by the multiplication of options set before him. Until the anarchic events of the late nineteen sixties, few seemed to realize the potentially disastrous consequences of the principle that the student himself is the best judge of which studies are most relevant to his intellectual development. Nor was it noticed how undergraduate dialogue would be restricted by full specialization of interests on the part of both faculty and student body. The professor in his specialty becomes more and more insular and removed from both his students and his fellow educators. He meets his students in the lecture hall, and he meets his colleagues in learned journals and at conventions, and while these functions do not altogether exhaust his responsibilities, they are certainly the functions which define his role. The very excellence of specialization itself multiplies and widens the divisions of academia.

The Catholic colleges had hoped to overcome the adverse ef-



fects of the elective system and of premature specialization by casting philosophy and theology in the role of sapiential or integrating disciplines. To some extent this project was successful, but the overall effect was less than what had been hoped for. The philosophy and theology departments were victims of their own specialization, and not fully prepared to engage other disciplines in dialogue. Moreover, with the general decay of the liberal arts because of the elective system, philosophy and theology could not often be taught with sufficient emphasis on their inner structure *qua* intellectual disciplines. As a result they often assumed a needless and unbecoming authoritarian stance, which not rarely made them unpopular. Pressures now exist within the student bodies of most Catholic colleges, if not in most of the faculties, to abandon the traditional requirements in philosophy and theology. Most colleges have already reduced the number of hours required.

It is not surprising, therefore, that under the pressure of ever widening vocationalism and humanism, Catholic education, immersed in this tide, is capsizing. Blurred in its vision, it cannot well distinguish and justify true liberal education apart from vocational and professional training, in a time when technical and technological progress seem to be everything that is commonly regarded as worthwhile. Correlated with man's hope in technology is his despair in knowing the truth about reality, which desperation gave rise originally to humanism. Even against the humanistic part of modern "liberal education," wherein man turns back upon himself for the meaning of all things, which view always favors the "world" against God, and man against his Creator, the benighted Catholic college has found itself defenseless. This capitulation shows on the one hand the general lassitude and dullness to which we are all heir, but on the other hand it shows more importantly what was noted above: the Catholic college has never really understood itself, has never, that is, thought out the exigencies of a liberal education which is undertaken in subordination to the teaching of the Church, and which has as its aim an intellectual perfection which is possible and proper to the Catholic alone. Such an education demands that all the parts of the curriculum not ordered to technical concerns should be conducted with a view to understanding the Catholic faith, and that the Faith itself should be the light under which the curriculum is conducted.

## II. Can Faith Illumine Understanding?

The first and most pressing duty, therefore, if there is to be Catholic education, calls for reestablishing in our minds the central role the teaching Church should play in the intellectual life of Catholic teachers and students. Since the Faith liberates the believer from error in his submission to its teachings, it both guides and strengthens his intelligence in the performance of those activities which constitute his very life as a thinker; and man, since he is distinguished by rationality, lives above all through the living activity of thinking. We should not be surprised, therefore, that we are promised such help by Our Lord Himself when He says, "I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)

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The following examples show, by way of illustration, how an adherence to Christian doctrine helps the believer as he thinks about the most serious and difficult questions: **1)** One of the most persistent questions which has occupied the time and prompted the labors of the greatest thinkers concerns the origin and cause of moral rectitude. It is not surprising, therefore, that Socrates, one of the greatest and most influential thinkers, should have given so much of his attention to it. He examines, in the *Protagoras*, the common opinion



that man can, even when he knows the good, be mastered by pleasure, and that he can as a consequence act against his knowledge and commit an evil act. But upon examining the basis of the opinion, he rejects it, and holds rather that all wrong doing is the result of an ignorance of the knowledge of weights and measures as it applies to the various pleasures and pains. If, therefore, we were taught which are the greater pleasures and which are the lesser, and which pains are to be endured in the light of future pleasures, we would, according to him, possess the sufficient requirements for moral rectitude. This means, when we sum it up, that virtue is knowledge and that it can be taught — a view which has become one of the most persistent and far-reaching positions about ethics in our civilization.

No reader, if he follows the *Protagoras* closely, can escape the perplexity which Socrates' arguments arouse in him; he will, as a consequence, begin to formulate the fundamental questions about the moral life in the light of Socrates' discussion. But suppose the reader is a Catholic, and that he both adheres to his Faith and has an appropriate understanding of it; he will believe Ezekiel and St. Paul when they teach him that moral goodness and the good acts which follow upon it are the result of graces which not only illumine the mind, but which touch the heart as well. God, in speaking to Ezekiel, tells him:

I will gather you together from the peoples, I will bring you all back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. They will come and will purge it of all the horrors and the filthy practices. I will give them a single heart, and I will put new spirit in them; I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh instead, so that they will keep my laws and repeat my observances and put them into practice. Then they shall be my people and I will be their God.

(Ezekiel 11:17-21)

And St. Paul teaches:

We would have been justified by the Law if the Law we were given had been capable of giving life, but it is

not: scripture makes no exception when it says that sin is master everywhere. In this way the promise can only be given through faith in Jesus Christ and can only be given to those who have faith.

(Galatians 3:21-22)

We are taught here that in order to obey God, He Himself must remove “the heart of stone” from our bodies and give us a “heart of flesh.” Hence God tells Ezekiel, “I will give them a single heart, and I will put a new spirit in them; I will remove the heart of stone from their bodies and give them a heart of flesh instead, so that they will keep my laws. . .” St. Paul extends this doctrine further when he teaches that the knowledge of the Law condemns us and that it leads us to grasp our own incapacity to fulfill it. If, therefore, we are to act rightly, we must be given the graces which change us from desiring evil to desiring good, and which help us to pursue our legitimate desires.

On the one hand, therefore, we have the Socratic position that the knowledge of the right order amongst the goods we seek will render us impeccable, while on the other hand we are taught by our inspired teachers that such knowledge of itself does nothing but condemn us. Resting, therefore, in the truth of his Faith, our reader will believe that Socrates must be wrong, whether he himself can see the error or not. But should he, as a serious thinker, pursue the question, he would be aided greatly by his adherence to the truth, for that very adherence would aid him to search for the roots of the Socratic error. Should he so pursue the question he could be led to distinguish the various kinds of ignorance, and to see as a consequence that Socrates has advanced the discussion by teaching that every sin involves ignorance, but that he is fundamentally wrong in thinking it to be an ignorance of the general knowledge of morals. Our reader could, in other words, follow the procedure which led Aristotle to both learn from Socrates and to reject the position while saving all the truth it possesses; in this way he is aided by the Faith to come even to those truths which reason can discover. Christian faith, therefore, enables us to see better the partial truth of Socrates’ position from a vantage point which saves us from adopting his errors, an achievement which, though possible to reason, is hardly possible to any but the greatest thinkers after arduous labor.

St. Augustine shows us the stance of the believer as he faces these same questions. He says that grace is given “not only that we discover what ought to be done, but also that we do what we have discovered — not only that we believe what ought to be loved, but also that we love what we have believed,” and he says further:

If this grace is to be called a ‘teaching,’ let it at any rate be so called in such wise that God may be believed to infuse it, along with an ineffable sweetness, more deeply and more internally, not only by *their* agency who plant and water from without, but likewise by His own too who ministers in secret His own increase — in such way, that He not only exhibits truth, but likewise imparts love. For it is thus that God teaches those who have been called according to His purpose, giving them simultaneously both to know what they ought to do, and to do what they know.

(*On the Grace of Christ*, cc. 13 & 14)

2) One of our indubitable experiences is of the recurring opposition of our higher aspirations and our lower passions. So much is this opposition a part of our lives, a part which is absent from the lives of the brutes, that it has affected the formulation of various views of human nature. Socrates teaches, in several of the dialogues, that the individual man is a soul, and that the body is attached to it in this life as a punishment for the misdeeds of a previous existence. In order to escape further punishment and gain the happiness of which it is capable, the soul must, by living a philosophic life, turn its attention to eternal things, so that it may prepare itself to exist forever



St. Augustine

without the body, which existence is its final beatitude. So plausible is this view, based as it is upon our internal experience of the conflict within us, that many Christians have thought that their own lives were bifurcated into a lower or animal existence which is concerned with this world, and a spiritual life of the soul alone which is begun here, but which is real only in the after-life.

If we reflect, nevertheless, on the teachings of the Christian Faith, we can see that this position cannot be true; St. Paul insists on our believing in the resurrection of Christ as well as in our own which is to take place in imitation of His. So important does he think it is to believe in the resurrection that he says that if Christ be not resurrected, our whole Faith is vain, for it is through our resurrection that death, the punishment for sin, is conquered, whereby we become human persons again. Accordingly, Christians believe that the Blessed Virgin, by her assumption, exists as a human person with Christ, while the other saints await their final state. The Socratic position, on the other hand, would rob death of its sting, for it would mean the actual separation of two already separate things, and not the cleavage which divides the human soul from the body it had informed to make a man.

As in the previous example, Socrates' position arises from the consideration of important truths, and he does explore with remarkable intensity the life lived for the sake of the truth as compared with the life of passion and animal appetite, and shows their incompatibility — which suggests to him that the body and the soul are conjoined



as opposites which war with each other. The Christian, however, by the doctrine of original sin as well as by the other doctrines of his Faith, can both see how Socrates could hold such a position, and yet understand in a way closed to him the cause of that seemingly essential opposition which leads him to deny the substantial unity of soul and body, and finally to deny the importance of the body except as a punishment for sin.

3) Both theologians and philosophers have always wondered whether or how Divine foreknowledge is consistent with free choice. Most of those who have considered this matter have concluded that they are logically incompatible, and have either upheld Divine foreknowledge at the expense of free choice or maintained free choice by denying Divine foreknowledge. Martin Luther, for example, in his *Bondage of the Will*, argues that since everything in God is necessary His foreknowledge must be necessary, and since (he says) necessary knowledge must be of necessary things, the human actions which God foreknows are as a consequence necessary and not free. Spinoza argues a similar position in Part I of his *Ethics*. Cicero, on the other hand, in his *Nature of the Gods*, holding to freedom of choice as a fact of experience, feels constrained to deny that God foreknows all things, despite the evident impiety of such a view.

By contrast, St. Augustine in *The City of God* and in *On Grace and Free Will* shows unmistakably that Sacred Scripture teaches both the infallible foreknowledge of God and the freedom of the will. This indicates to St. Augustine and to his Christian readers that the contra-



diction is only apparent, and that their understanding of both Divine foreknowledge and the nature of the human will is inadequate. Thus, in Book V of *The City of God*, he says that “against the sacrilegious and impious darings of reason, we assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it.” He then proceeds to consider the arguments of Cicero and others in detail, and begins to develop a more profound doctrine of Divine foreknowledge and human freedom, a doctrine which is completed and perfected by St. Thomas Aquinas. Instructed by faith, then, St. Augustine is aware of his ignorance where many wrongly presume their knowledge, is encouraged to undertake a difficult inquiry by knowing beforehand that a solution is possible, and is guided throughout by a knowledge of where his investigation is heading.

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These few examples illustrate, as could many more, that the Catholic Faith is a guide in the intellectual life as well as in the moral life for those who subject themselves to it, and that the understanding is crippled radically when it refuses to stand in the higher light which is given it. The acceptance, however, of that higher light as a guide demands that one restate and clarify in principle the whole of Catholic education, and show it to be fundamentally superior to and different from any education which is deprived, or which deprives itself, of the strength conferred upon it by the teaching Church. This view demands that the intellectual life be conformed to the teachings of the Christian Faith, which stand as the beginning of one’s endeavors because they guide the intelligence in its activities, and as the end (which we will see later) because those endeavors are undertaken so that the Divine teachings themselves may be more profoundly understood.

### III. Academic Freedom

This conception of the intellectual life, which is the orthodox Catholic position, seems contrary to the prevailing view of modern society and of those Catholics who are becoming increasingly secularized in their thoughts and their actions. The prevailing view holds as a principle that the uncritical acceptance of religious doctrine not only inhibits, but even destroys the life of intelligence. The statement of this principle takes many forms, but they are finally reducible to the single contention that the believing Christian, since he refuses to submit his belief to rational examination and hence to the possibility of rejecting it, has traded the freedom of his mind for the blind security of unquestioned authority. The consequence is that Christian schools, in so far as they are subject to Christian Doctrine, are thought to be less free, and the education they offer is thought to be necessarily inferior. It is well, therefore, since this is the root objection, to consider it in some detail.

Since the Christian faith involves undoubting belief in certain assertions for which there is no natural evidence, but which are nevertheless taken as the ruling principles of thought and action, the intellectual life of a Christian is generally assumed to be less free. This is because intellectual freedom is customarily defined by the mentality of free inquiry, the mentality which sees itself as not enslaved to any fixed conception but free to subject every doctrine to critical examination and possible rejection. Academic freedom is supposed to be the protection and promotion of this intellectual freedom by institutions of learning. Accordingly, schools whose academic policies are based on religious doctrine limit academic freedom and thereby depress the intellectual life of the scholarly community. Such a view, for example, has been expressed by the American Association of University Professors:

Freedom of conscience in teaching and research is essential to maintain academic integrity and fulfill the basic purposes of higher education; consequently, any restriction on academic freedom raises grave issues of professional concern.

(Statement on Academic Freedom in Church-Related Colleges and Universities; *A.A.U.P. Bulletin*, Winter, 67)

It is clear that they hold religious doctrine to be a restriction on academic freedom, for later in the same statement, the conditions upon which a religious school insists when it appoints a teacher are described as “institutional limitations on his academic freedom.”

Now inasmuch as this conception of intellectual and academic freedom is based on the principle of free inquiry — i.e. the position that every doctrine is subject to critical examination and possible rejection — it is suitable (and hardly unfair) to examine critically the general principle itself. If it claims to be a dogma, the only dogma immune to criticism, by what right does it claim its exemption from the general principle? Or, on the other hand, if it too is open to question, by what principle are we to justify our examination of it? Not by the principle of free inquiry, for it is presently under judgment and therefore in suspense.

To proceed further, free inquiry is usually justified by its effect in the pursuit of truth. More truths will be discovered, and more surely held, it is said, if all beliefs are subject to question and possible reversal. But such an assertion, if it is not a “dogma,” must be grounded on the actual examination of the issues upon which men have disagreed, a judgment where the truth lies in each case, and *then* a determination of whether and how much the principle of free inquiry was an advantage. It would then follow that the resolution of *those* issues — the test cases of intellectual progress — would be immune to criticism under the principle of free inquiry, since the value of the principle is predicated on their resolution.

A further difficulty is that the principle of free inquiry would be nullified by the achievement of its stated purpose. As long as a man is ignorant, it is consistent with his condition to remain open to both the affirmative and negative answers to the issue in question. But when and if he comes to know (which is the purpose of his investiga-

tion) the matter ceases to be doubtful to him, and his mind closes to the possibility that the opposite might be true. He is no longer free to doubt, except willfully. Thus by the assumed definition ignorance makes free, while knowledge enslaves. A reply to this objection might assume that knowledge is simply unattainable, inasmuch as all things are in all respects always changing, or inasmuch as our minds, not being omniscient, cannot reach the cer-

tain truth about anything. But this, as before, would base the principle of free inquiry on particular and controversial philosophical theories, which as a consequence would be immune to criticism under the principle.

Also, every criticism, unless it be simply an expression of the will to criticize, must finally be based on premises not subject to criticism. For if the premises of some criticism are themselves to be criticized, and the premises of this second criticism are in turn to be criticized, and so on, then either the process must rest in premises not subject to criticism, or all criticism is a game which begins anywhere and ends nowhere, advancing not a step towards the truth. Not even logical consistency can be established, for presumably the principles of logic are subject to criticism as is everything else.

Since academic freedom is thought to derive from and be justified by the principle of free inquiry, and since in turn considerations of academic tenure are supposed to be governed by the principles of academic freedom, the college professor comes to be judged by stan-



*The sunburst, symbol of St. Thomas Aquinas*

dards which have no relation to the purposes of his life as a scholar and a teacher. For it is usually maintained that the academic standing of a scholar should be determined by his “competence,” while at the same time academic freedom requires that competence be judged in abstraction from what is true and what is false in the area of his competence. But since knowledge of the truth is the end of all study and teaching, to judge a scholar in this way is comparable to judging a doctor while abstracting from all consideration of health and disease, or to judging a cook without tasting what he cooks.

*Knowledge of the truth is the end of all study and teaching.*

As a result, when scholars must determine the professional standing of one of their colleagues, they must find some definition of competence which prescind from the very purpose of competence; thus, they are compelled to fall back upon “accepted standards” of competence, standards which are either based on what is altogether secondary, or so vaguely and generally described as to be nearly useless as directives, or which even carry *in disguise* definite views of the true and the false in the various disciplines. But what is worse, the standards are thought to be standards precisely insofar as they are accepted; in other words, the *accepted* rather than the *true* is the standard not only in fact (because of human fallibility) but also by intent. Thus the consistent application of academic freedom becomes by definition the very tyranny which it is supposed to prevent.

Indeed, it would seem that the government of any institution by rules which prescind (or pretend to prescind) from all differences of belief, or which negate in principle the possibility of governing by the truth, must of necessity be tyrannical. For concrete and particular decisions must be made, about the curriculum, student life, hiring and firing, promotion and so forth, but cannot be directed by rules which by their abstract and negative character in effect deny that there are any rules. Thus, no individual decision can be really justified or condemned out of principle, leaving an infinite latitude in practice to the men who actually make the decisions, who thus rule by their own absolute discretion.

## IV. Freedom and Catholic Education

The Christian Faith and the theological tradition of the Church present a view of freedom which is altogether opposed to the foregoing notions. Rather than supposing that men can attain the truth by the exercise of freedom, they teach that men become free by finding, or being found by, the truth and abiding in it. For the Christian believes that Christ Himself is the Truth, and believes Him when He says, “If you make my words your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32) Indeed, Christian belief considers the attempt to gain knowledge by the assertion of freedom as the original cause of human enslavement, for it brought sin into the world, which is at once the worst slavery and the cause of every other slavery.

Divine Revelation therefore frees the faithful Christian from those specious and yet absurd notions of freedom which, because they are false and subvert the life of reason, deceitfully enslave all



who believe in them. In particular, it teaches that self-rule is not the same as independence, but rather that the assertion of complete independence destroys the capacity for self-rule. For to say that a man governs himself is to say that he has within him the principle which governs him. But when a man seeks to achieve total independence by subjecting every belief to criticism, and puts his intellectual life outside of every principle given to him (either from his experience which is formed by and thus dependent on nature, or from faith), he loses by this act every possible source of rational direction, and is in fact proposing the nothingness of total ignorance as a principle. Thus, it happens that will and appetite, no longer subordinate to reason, give life whatever definite form it has, since reason, in the indeterminacy of the critical attitude, can no longer direct itself or anything else. And so the human mind, refusing to submit to any rule, becomes subject to its natural inferiors.

This paradoxical self-enslavement is clearly taught by the Christian tradition, in the history of our first parents, whose disobedience to God was immediately followed by a loss of self-control, and in the teaching of St. Paul, who speaks at once of the fact of human bondage and of deliverance from it by faith and obedience:

I can see that my body follows a different law that battles against the law that my reason dictates. This is what makes me a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, Our Lord!

(Romans 7:22-25)

The Christian tradition also teaches that true freedom does not essentially consist in the removal of whatever stands against and limits the human will, nor in the creative expressions of that will, but rather in the inward re-birth and transformation of ourselves by the grace of God.

Yes, even today, whenever Moses is read, the veil is over their minds. It will not be removed until they turn to the Lord. Now this Lord is the Spirit, and where the

Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.

(II Cor. 3:15-18)

Though St. Paul is speaking here of supernatural freedom, his doctrine serves to reform the notion of freedom in general. Men do not become free by leaving behind or stepping outside of all that they have received, but rather by receiving, keeping what they receive, and growing into it. No doubt they leave behind ignorance, falsehood and vice, but in so doing they relinquish precisely that alone which enslaves them. Ignorance, falsehood and vice consist in man's measuring all things from his own authority alone, leaving him enslaved by error. "Everyone who speaks from himself is a liar." Thus, no one becomes a man by outgrowing childish things, but outgrows childish things by growing into the things of a man. Only accidentally is true freedom *from*; essentially it is the formation of the inward man by the true principles of thought and action.

The Christian tradition, insisting on the primacy of revealed truth, distinguishes it from the truth which is discoverable by human reason. Because it maintains, however, that grace presupposes and perfects nature, it has always defended the natural power of human reason from its skeptical critics. The fundamental competence of the human mind, even for discovering profound truths, has always been upheld, in modern times by the first Vatican Council, but also at the very beginning by the apostle Paul:



St. Paul



The anger of God is being revealed from heaven against all the impiety and depravity of men who keep truth imprisoned in their wickedness. For what can be known about God is perfectly plain to them since God Himself has made it plain. Ever since God created the world His everlasting power and deity — however invisible — have been there for the mind to see in the things He has made.

(Romans 1:18-20)

Accordingly, to speak in summary, the Christian intelligence is formed by an acceptance of certain fundamental distinctions and a recognition of the order among the objects of thought: some are of faith, others of reason; some certain, others doubtful; some self-evident, others not; some demonstrable, others not; some subject to criticism, others not. This awareness of the distinction between the primary and the secondary in human knowledge makes true freedom of inquiry possible, for only the recognition of the difference between the unquestionable foundations of criticism and doubtful matters subject to criticism can give reasonable direction to inquiry. Or to speak generally, to live in freedom is to live by the truth.



*Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom*

## V. The Catholic Teacher

It follows that a school which defines itself by ignoring such distinctions will be at best a number of professors pursuing disparate or contrary purposes in the context of uneasy co-existence. Individual teachers may accomplish something with their students, and administrators of good character may supply their personal principles for the lack of institutional order, but they will do so in spite of the rationale of their school, which of itself tends to nihilism and tyranny.

On the other hand, it does not follow that a school which does define itself in the context of those distinctions will be successful in realizing its true purposes. The condition is necessary but not sufficient. For even given that the importance of distinguishing the primary from the secondary — in all the ways mentioned above — is a matter of conviction, and given that the distinctions are actually seen in many cases, there still remain many ambiguities whose attempted resolution may ultimately defeat the intended



*St. Albert the Great*

purpose of the school. The cause of these ambiguities is that the principles which guide thought and action, whether they are received from experience or by faith, are understood somewhat indistinctly at first, even when their truth is certain. Hence it remains a primary necessity throughout the intellectual life to clarify the principles. But here arises the possibility of serious mistake, for an attempted clarification may depart from the original principle; thus, though secondary or even false, the seeming re-statement will take on the authority



of the original, with the most destructive results. And if such failures arise concerning the principles, how much more must they arise concerning what is demonstrable or probable, the proper object of teaching and learning?

So it is that from the beginning men have sought teachers — other men who share the same principles but see them more clearly as

*The believer embraces at once Christ as the supreme teacher and the successors of St. Peter and the Apostles as altogether truthful and divinely appointed interpreters of His teachings.*

well as seeing the order which results from them. Thus, among men, the relation of teacher and learner presupposes shared principles and yet an inequality in the understanding of those principles. But the need for a teacher at the same time poses a problem: how is the inferior to recognize the superior, since his inferiority consists precisely in the lack of that which would enable him to judge? Because this problem is unavoidable as well as difficult, sophists have always abounded and prospered.

The only secure resolution of this problem is that the shared principles themselves should unmistakably indicate the teacher. Now nature, insofar as it shapes our experience, is the guiding principle of the life of reason, but it fails to distinguish reliably between the teacher and the sophist. For nature instructs us through the external features of things, which often fail to correspond to what is internal. Divine Revelation, on the other hand, not only communicates the truth but also designates teachers to clarify, define and explain it. Thus, Our Lord told His apostles, “Anyone who listens to you listens to me” (Luke 10:16) and commissioned them to teach, promising to remain with them forever. On this account, the believer embraces at once Christ as the supreme teacher and the successors of St. Peter and the

Apostles as altogether truthful and divinely appointed interpreters of His teachings. And further, insofar as many doctrines which pertain to human wisdom are of crucial importance for the Christian life, the teaching authority of the Apostles extends to them also; indeed, nearly every central philosophical issue is relevant in some way to divinely revealed truth. Thus it follows that the Catholic, in the very act of his belief, has also found the teachers who will define and explain what he believes, show him its consequences, and rectify his whole intellectual life as well. Here then grace perfects nature even with respect to what is strictly natural.

The Catholic school, therefore, if it is to be faithful to the teaching of Christ, will differ from its secular counterpart in two essential respects. First, it will not define itself by academic freedom, but by the divinely revealed truth, and second, that truth will be the chief object of study as well as the governing principle of the whole institution, giving order and purpose even to the teaching and learning of the secular disciplines.

## VI. What Is Liberal Education?

Earlier in this work reference was made to the almost universal abandonment of genuine liberal education in the American colleges. It was observed that liberal education, which in the past was the soul of higher education, has been largely replaced by professional and technological curricula. What remains under the name of liberal education is a collection of courses which purports to acquaint the students with various facets of “culture” and “learning.”

This version of liberal education is fittingly called humanism because its concern is with the works of man. Man’s scientific and literary accomplishments are thought worthy of falling within this collection of things to be studied because they are brilliant human achievements. Humanism, which in the Renaissance began to preempt all other contenders as the *Weltanschauung* of higher education,



seems chiefly to have come about as a justification for education, when men came increasingly to doubt the power of reason to know reality. The modern doctrine of academic freedom, in the main accepted by contemporary schools, officially makes this same skepticism the fundamental tenet of education. Holding as it does that every dogma (save itself) is of its nature open to free inquiry, academic freedom implies that nothing which the human intelligence claims to know is really known, but only dubitable. This is to say that absolute skepticism is the abiding condition in education and that reality everlastingly and in every way eludes man in his efforts to know it. The fact that contemporary "liberal arts" are so thoroughly historical and humanistic is explained in that the value of man's intellectual achievements is not grounded in the truth of his accumulated wisdom, but in the fact that wisdom is a human creation, a glorious product in which to rejoice. Liberal education then is not seen at bottom as something good *for* man, but as something worth studying and preserving for the simple reason that it is *from* man.

Against the popular inclination to identify liberal education as humanistic, is another view of longer standing that urges itself upon us by its intrinsic merits. That man uses his leisure to become acquainted with the ideas of the greatest thinkers in his tradition and to steep himself in an understanding of the intellectual culture that produced him may be a good thing, but it appears false that such should



be the sole or even primary intellectual interest that occupies his leisure. Though one might intend to confine his study to the learned achievements of men, the very subject he studies will show the vanity of such a limited end, for these learned achievements, preserved in what are often called the Great Books, are themselves efforts to bring the student or reader to some understanding of reality itself.

*One cannot read these cherished  
Great Books of western  
civilization as simply of historical  
and humanistic interest without  
betraying their authors.*

One cannot read these cherished Great Books of western civilization as simply of historical and humanistic interest without betraying their authors, whose principal purposes, by and large, were through their writings to speak not historically, but rather scientifically and philosophically, proposing universal truths, abstracting from the here and now. Education is recognized almost universally by these great authors to be not about ideas, as if they were important simply in themselves, but about things. The great ideas that humanism regards as outstanding instances of human creativeness were thought to be worthy by the minds that produced them, not because they were creative or novel, but because they were inventive of nature's truth.

Unless this basic orientation to truth be recognized and retained, education and intelligence quickly become meaningless. The older position on liberal education and the common sense conception of knowledge both see the life of the intelligence defined by reality as its object and justified by truth about that reality as its end. Philosophy begins in wonder so that it might end in wisdom. And unless man, even when he first wonders about reality, apprehends it in some fundamental way, albeit imperfectly and confusedly, his wonder is meaningless and his hope to know the truth is vain. In fact man since time immemorial has had a non-reflective confidence that he does understand reality from his first experience with it, and that he is already a

knower of the world “out there” as he begins reflectively to consider its meaning, to clarify its nature in his understanding, and to pursue its secrets. Reality is possessed through knowledge by *all* men in a general and indistinct but eminently certain way.

That there is a pre-reflexive, common consciousness of reality is patent in the fact that men are able to communicate with each other at all. If all men did not in some way form like ideas of the world “out there,” there could be no meeting of their minds through speech and conversation. At least the basic ideas of reality must be in men’s minds, and indeed what is first meant by *reality* would be that which these primary concepts represent. The assumption of a common experience and of common conceptions about it belongs not only to men living in the same era but also to all men in all ages, as is shown by the very writing and reading of the aforementioned Great Books. When men come to reflect upon their knowledge of reality they are already possessors of it, and their reflective and methodical elaborations of it do not destroy this possession, unless these efforts in effect deny the reality and the truth of these common and fundamental concepts, and unless they fail to build their science upon them. Such a denial would reject the primary experience that makes all else meaningful. But the science that establishes and builds itself faithfully upon common experience constitutes that wisdom called the perennial philosophy, and it is this which is the substance of our intellectual patrimony and which alone makes true liberal education possible.

## VII. Liberal Education, its Parts and the Order Among Them

It remains to consider in detail the nature of liberal education, its essential parts and the order among them, in the light of the understanding of Christian education presented above. Everyone seems to agree that liberal education is the best education. Discussions about liberal education usually begin with a sort of agreement, but as they proceed, almost inevitably reveal profound differences in the light of which the original agreement seems superficial and even illusory. But when we consider the root meaning of “liberal” we are not surprised. Common to all theories of liberal education is the notion of *freedom*, and while all men recognize and value freedom, they do not all agree about what it really is. Thus, it is hardly strange that, involved as they are in more basic disagreements, men fail to reach agreement about the nature of liberal education. A fruitful discussion of liberal education will have to be based, therefore, on a true understanding of freedom.

Liberal education aims to benefit the learner in a specifically human way. This is implied even by its name which means “the education of a free man.” For no animal except man is capable of freedom. But more precisely, it is the education of a free man insofar as it helps him to achieve freedom. Yet it does not try to help him through any and all means, but specifically through knowledge. Accordingly, we must ask what kind of knowledge suits the free man so that he becomes free in the acquiring of it.

We must therefore first understand the essential character of the free man. Perhaps it will help to contrast him with his opposite, the slave. The slave is characterized by living for another — he is, as Aristotle says, “not his own but another’s man,” “a living possession.” Thus it follows that the free man lives for his own sake; he is his own

man. Does this mean that the free man is selfish? It would be strange indeed to say that a man loses his freedom when he lives for the sake of the community. Rather, since the good of a community exists *in* its members, even though he does not pursue a private advantage, he is yet pursuing a good which he himself shares. By contrast, the slave, insofar as he is a slave, is ordered to an end which he does not share. Therefore, the life of the free man properly consists of such activities as are in themselves worthwhile.

*Human understanding cannot be perfected by knowledge of an order which it has itself produced.*

Now there are in general two kinds of knowledge. Such knowledge as medicine or jurisprudence, for example, is *practical*: it is desirable exclusively or at least chiefly for the sake of action. But another kind, theology or natural science, for example, is *theoretical*: it is desirable in itself. Therefore, if the free man is properly concerned with what has intrinsic value, his education must concentrate upon theoretical knowledge.

Knowledge does not become theoretical simply because someone does in fact desire it, but is or is not theoretical because of its own intrinsic character. We can see that this is so by considering how one desires theoretical knowledge. When knowledge is desired from a theoretical motive, it is desired for the sake of the knower as such, that is, for the perfecting of his understanding. But human understanding cannot be perfected by knowledge of an order which it has itself produced as, for example, the order in an artifact or in a constitution. Such an order, since it is the effect of human intelligence, is to that extent inferior to man; but nothing is perfected by reflecting within itself that which is inferior to it. Thus, the natural objects of theoretical interest are the things better than man, so that whoever intends to become a free man will be chiefly concerned with the study of God and divine things. This means that his proper concern will be the study of theology, which has God as its subject, and proceeds in the light of faith.

But, as theology itself teaches, there is a knowledge of God and

divine things which proceeds in the natural light of human reason. This knowledge, traditionally named metaphysics, or first philosophy, is also an essential part of liberal education, because it is necessary for the full development of theology.

It does not follow, however, that liberal education will omit the study of man himself or of other natural beings. Aristotle gives the reason:

Having already treated of the celestial world, as far as our conjectures could reach, we proceed to treat of animals, without omitting, to the best of our ability, any member of the kingdom, however ignoble. For if some have no graces to charm the sense, yet even these, by disclosing to intellectual perception the artistic spirit that designed them, give immense pleasure to all who can trace links of causation, and are inclined to philosophy.

*(Parts of Animals, Bk. I, Ch. 5)*

If nature were not the work of an intelligence superior to ours, the effect of a divine art, we would not become more perfect just in



understanding it. Our relation to nature would be only practical, and we would confront nature as the potter confronts his clay. Marx is thus consistent with his atheism when he says that “the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.” Further, the study of the fundamental properties of nature, such as change and contingency, provides basic notions which are necessary for all the sciences, and gives an entrance into metaphysics, since it leads to the discovery of an intelligible order which transcends nature. Therefore, the education of a free man must include the study of nature.

*The study of the fundamental properties of nature, such as change and contingency, provides basic notions which are necessary for all the sciences, and gives an entrance into metaphysics.*

There is yet another intelligible order which human reason does not originate but can discover and understand. The order found in quantity, that is, in number and in magnitude, though it does not so profoundly reflect its divine origin, is nevertheless uniquely accessible to our minds. Further, since nature exhibits a quantitative order, it cannot be adequately understood without the aid of arithmetic and geometry, the sciences which consider that kind of order. Therefore, both in itself, as study of a divinely established order, and in its contributions to higher sciences, mathematics must be part of the education of a free man.

We have been arguing that the education of a free man will concentrate upon theoretical knowledge. Does this mean that it will be exclusively theoretical, or will some kind of practical knowledge also be necessary? The productive arts, whether servile or fine, are clearly no essential part of a free man’s education. Of course, he should be able to recognize and appreciate the various kinds of artifacts, but his

knowledge will be that of a judge rather than a producer. Because he seeks the kind of life which is intrinsically worthwhile, he will be a good man rather than a good carpenter or musician. Even medicine, although it concerns the well-being of man himself, is no essential part, for a man is no healthier by being himself a doctor. Thus, we may conclude that any practical knowledge concerned with production, or with a good which can be possessed equally by those who know and those who do not know how to procure it, is no essential part of a free man’s education. It seems to remain, then, that the sort of practical knowledge appropriate to a free man is that which studies the end of human life, the knowledge traditionally called ethics and political philosophy. And as we reflect further on the character of the free man, this becomes more probable. We distinguish the free man from the slave and the child alike by the fact that he rules himself. Now the arts of production and acquisition cannot adequately rule, for they only provide the instruments for a good life, but do not direct their use. However, such direction is necessary, for good things used badly do the most harm. It follows that no man can rule himself unless he understands the end of human life with some clarity, and knows the right use of every sub-ordinate object in view of that end. Thus, the education of a free man must include ethics and political philosophy.

*To seek freedom, rightly understood, is to seek virtue.*

All this implies that the free man and the good man are one and the same. The good man is characterized by right desire and good habits, and no man can rule himself unless he intends the right end and habitually pursues the appropriate means. For the end to be achieved is the principle of every rule, and contrary desires and disorderly habits prevent even well-intentioned men from successfully governing themselves. Furthermore, the very notion of the bad man is that he lives a bad life, while the free man is characterized by the intrinsic worth of his life. Accordingly, to seek freedom, rightly understood, is to seek virtue.

From the foregoing, one might get the impression that the primary requisite for living a good life is knowledge, and that a man becomes good by studying ethics. But this would be contrary to common experience and to the explicit teaching of the greatest masters. (It would also be contrary to what was said in the first part of this paper.) The good life is primarily a matter of right desire and good habits. Aristotle, speaking of those who live “as passion directs,” remarks that “to such persons, as to the incontinent, knowledge brings no profit” and that “any one who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just and, generally, about the subjects of political science, must have been brought up in good habits.” Not only is ethics useless to a man badly disposed, but he cannot even rightly understand it.

Accordingly, we must recall and clarify what we stated at the outset. Liberal education does not try to help the student achieve freedom through any and all means, but specifically through knowledge. The professional educator is surely a fool if he supposes he can lead a student to freedom regardless of whatever habitual formation that student has received and is receiving besides his scholastic instruction. The factor most crucial, of course, and (humanly speaking) irreplaceable, is the family life from which the student comes; next, perhaps, come the friends whose company he enjoys and who inevitably influence his attitudes for better or worse. A school devoted to liberal education is effectively concerned with only part of the necessary means to freedom, and insofar as matters of conduct are concerned, a secondary part. Thus it is evident that parent and educator naturally form a community, for each supplies an essential part of the object which they both intend — a rightly ordered life for the student. Ethical knowledge is no good without right desire and good habits; nevertheless (in Aristotle’s words), “to those who desire and act in accordance with a rational principle knowledge about such matters will be of great benefit.” Thus we concede that ethical knowledge is not the decisive influence on the moral health of the student, while upholding the argument given above that, given a well-ordered soul, a man is greatly profited by a detailed and explicit knowledge of the good life.

Nevertheless, there is a way in which a good school directly encourages the formation of good habits. The whole of an appropriate

curriculum but especially its theoretical parts, if rightly conducted, will habituate the student to the life of reason. The preparatory sciences, such as mathematics, are most important here, for in a manner proportioned to the student’s age and experience, they lead him to respect reasonable argument, while giving him confidence in his own ability to proceed reasonably both by himself and



in company with others. Now the basic ethical problem, most simply stated, is to conform one’s will and appetites to right reason, that is, to live according to reason. Accordingly, when the student comes to consider the rational ordering of life as a whole, as he must when he studies ethics and politics, the enterprise will seem natural to him, as simply extending a principle whose power he already feels in his day-to-day work as a scholar. Thus, the habituation to study and rational reflection, though ineffective without other kinds of habituation as well, not only perfects the understanding, but also tends to rectify will and appetite.

With respect to this habituation, the teachers are even more important than the structure of the curriculum. How can they help, while remaining within the limits of their competence as teachers? Sometimes teachers try to think for their students, even though they know better, when they become discouraged by passivity and inertia. At other times, provoked by hostility, they become drill masters. At the best of times, they lead attentive and friendly students from what



they know to what they don't know, showing them the unsuspected implications of the knowledge they already have. But in these cases, the teacher leads more by example than direction, in conformity with the essential character of his vocation. For the teacher desires the students to share in a good which he already possesses, at least more fully than they do, something not required for an ulterior purpose, but desirable in itself. Whatever suggests force or necessity is alien to teaching; the teacher must draw from in front, rather than push from behind. Thus, the common-sense observation that one man influences another more effectively by example than by any other means is borne out in the intellectual life as well.

*It is because we at once know something and at the same time do not know everything that we find ourselves wondering.*

The view of liberal education which we have been arguing might be well summarized by a brief discussion of *wonder*, the proper human motive for higher education. Wonder involves two things simultaneously: ignorance and knowledge. It is because we at once know something and at the same time do not know everything that we find ourselves wondering. It should be carefully distinguished from mere curiosity, for it implies knowledge of a fact or group of facts, and it bears directly upon the explanation of those facts; it involves an acceptance, a certain delight and joy, a sort of fascination with the way things are, and a confidence in their ultimate intelligibility. Indeed, it is because he is so taken with the facts that a man who wonders lives in heightened expectancy of encountering the manner of their arrangement.

Mere curiosity, on the other hand, is not so much interested in the question "why," but in the question "how." It is more concerned to see how certain generalizations work or how they apply to varying circumstances. As opposed to wonder, it assumes the validity of a principle, in order to see how effectively it will exploit a given

situation. This is not to say that the methods of verification in experimental science may not very well be an instrument of wonder of high order, but when those instruments are employed not in order to explain, but in order to expand experience, curiosity and not wonder is the immediate motive.

The proper satisfaction of wonder is knowledge of the causes. But causes are of two sorts: a cause may simply be primary within some particular order, or it may be primary without qualification, a cause of causes. Knowledge of the latter is called wisdom; the science which treats of the first causes in the light of the natural capacity of human reason is metaphysics, which may be called wisdom only with the qualification 'human'; the science which studies God in the light of what He has revealed about Himself is wisdom without qualification. Thus, theology is the principal satisfaction of wonder on this side of the grave, though it hardly appears to be such, since the answers it gives, though they take us far beyond any human science, make us increasingly aware of our ignorance of God. (Accordingly, the study of theology would be unbearable without hope of eternal life.) Here, of course, we speak only of such wisdom as is properly pursued by scholastic study and instruction.

The sciences which pertain to liberal education are a community of unequals. Wisdom, divine and human, is primary, the rest are subordinate. But all are in harmony, as a consideration of their mutual relations has already indicated. The inferior sciences prepare the learner for the superior, while the superior sciences strengthen and illuminate the inferior. Yet the value of the inferior sciences is not exclusively (even though chiefly) in contributing to the learning of the superior; they have in themselves a likeness to the first Truth which, though secondary, is not contained without deficiency in the superior. Thus, for example, even if metaphysics could be learned without natural science, the latter would still be worthy of study.

Now if it be possible for man to have wisdom, at least in some measure, it will be only at the end of very arduous efforts, and perhaps only at the end of a lifetime. But the whole of his life and the special disciplines he pursues will rightly be named *philosophy* — the love of wisdom — for he undertakes every study for the sake of wisdom. And insofar as he lives for wisdom, his whole life is devoted to that which in itself makes life worth living; thus, he is not a slave but

a free man. Accordingly, only the kind of education which introduces a man to the philosophic life is properly named *liberal*.

*Liberal arts ... are "certain ways by which the lively soul enters into the secrets of philosophy."*

Some puzzlement may be occasioned by the fact that we have nowhere spoken of the liberal arts. Are they what we have been discussing all along? To be sure, in modern times, liberal education is usually identified with the liberal arts, but traditionally they are distinguished. *Liberal education* names the whole procedure of the philosophic life, including the study of wisdom itself; *liberal arts*, on the other hand, properly names seven introductory disciplines which though intrinsically of lesser philosophic interest are "certain ways by which the lively soul enters into the secrets of philosophy." (Hugh of St. Victor) These arts are twofold: some concern the proper method of discourse, such as grammar, rhetoric, and logic (the *trivium*), while others treat of quantity and the quantitative, such as geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music (the *quadrivium*). (The introductory studies of the stars and of music consider only the quantitative aspects of their subjects.) The former are clearly instrumental in purpose, being concerned exclusively (though in quite different ways) with common *methods*; the latter study kinds of order which though less profound are more intelligible to the beginner, and inescapably provoke wonder about the more difficult and important issues of philosophy proper. Thus, it is clear that the *quadrivium* (the mathematical disciplines) have already been included in our survey. The *trivium* must here be added. Taking logic as the principal part of the *trivium*, we are thus left with a threefold division of doctrine, into theoretical, practical, and logical. We are encouraged to rest in this division by recalling that it is the one given by St. Augustine as a likeness of the Blessed Trinity. (*City of God*, Bk. XI, ch. 25)

## VIII. Liberal Education and the Christian Faith

Whether we consider liberal education as achieving freedom, or as satisfying wonder, we see that theology is its principal part. Contrary to what is often assumed, liberal education does not take place in spite of or even apart from the Christian faith. Rather, the Christian student, because of his faith, can be liberally educated in the most perfect and complete way. For the sciences which are the object of such an education form an ordered whole. By its own essential character, theology completes and perfects the intellectual life

*Through wisdom based on faith the student's natural appetite for the truth can be perfectly satisfied.*

of a free man, for it has in a pre-eminent way that which is desired in all of them. Liberal education undertaken by Christians and ordered to theology turns out to be liberal education in its fullness. The religious college quite properly can claim to be the liberal educator *par excellence*, because through wisdom based on faith the student's natural appetite for the truth can be perfectly satisfied. He might see "through a glass darkly," those highest things which the non-believer will not see at all.

Liberal education, then, begins in wonder and aims at wisdom. It involves parts of greater and lesser worth and greater and lesser difficulty, united by their common order to wisdom. In keeping with

the immeasurable value of its end, and the discouraging remoteness of that end, it does not disdain the study of those humbler disciplines which are the indispensable first steps on a long road. Thus it begins with the liberal arts, proceeds to the particular philosophical disciplines, and terminates in wisdom.



## IX. The Present Need for Genuine Liberal Education

Though the relevance of liberal education for human nature is profound, few men appear to be aware of its importance, and those who are aware seem only to be imperfectly conscious of it. Yet despite our overwhelming preoccupation with practical matters, the desire to know does not altogether escape any of us. Hence Aristotle can say, at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*, that “men are by nature philosophers, lovers of wisdom.”

It is true, further, that men cannot remain ignorant of the need to educate themselves about philosophical matters without consequences. To remain in such a state is to live in a way that is less than human. Socrates had this in mind when he judged that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” To deny philosophy on the other hand is impossible. “You say,” writes Aristotle in a celebrated dilemma, “one must philosophize. Then you must philosophize. You say one should not philosophize. Then (to prove your contention) you must philosophize. In any case you must philosophize.”

The questions pursued by liberal education are inescapable. So long as man exists these questions will emerge, and if they are not answerable truthfully, then man lives enslaved in darkness or in error. And when a doctrine such as that of academic freedom rules over all efforts to pursue these questions, as is the case in our times, we become like those silly women of whom the Apostle says that they are “always learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (II Tim. 3:7) We remain slaves.



## X. The Curriculum

We propose the founding of a four-year Catholic college concerned exclusively with liberal education as defined and explained above. This college will explicitly define itself by the Christian Faith and the tradition of the Catholic Church. Thus theology will be both the governing principle of the whole school and that for the sake of which everything is studied. And since the school will aim at the kind of education which is best in itself, every student will pursue the same sequence of courses, which will be designed to introduce him to every essential part of the intellectual life. Further, since the teachers will aim to introduce the student to the fullness of the intellectual life, each of them will have to be living that kind of life himself; this means each will study and learn every part of the curriculum and become able to teach any part of it. The curriculum itself will be structured in detail, basing itself upon the natural order of learning and taking as examples and guides the work of the best minds in each of the disciplines; this means that, with few exceptions, no textbooks will be used but rather the original works of the greatest scholars.

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The curriculum of this college introduces the student to a comprehensive study of theology, philosophy, mathematics, language and experimental science through reading and closely discussing the greatest scholarly works in these fields. The classes, which are not to exceed twenty students, will be tutorials and seminars, not lectures.

Tutorials and seminars proceed by way of rigorous discussions of the readings; they require a more active participation on the part of the student than do lectures. The tutorial, in contrast with the seminar, treats its subject in greater detail and its procedure is more determinate, requiring greater direction from the teacher.

Though this curriculum is demanding it is so necessarily. One cannot become educated in any strict sense unless he acquires for himself a competency in the various disciplines, so that he understands from within them rather than somehow from without. In this way he possesses them and the order among them as his own intellectual virtues. There is no other way of attaining this intellectual perfection save through the arduous work of doing these sciences and disciplines as the scientist himself does them.

However, liberal education, though difficult, is not an impossible task, for education admits of a distinction into two different kinds: that of the specialist and that of the educated man simply said. A reference from Aristotle spells out the meaning of this distinction:

Every systematic science, the humblest and the noblest alike, seems to admit of two different kinds of proficiency; one of which may be properly called scientific knowledge of the subject, while the other is a kind of educational acquaintance with it. For an educated man should be able to form a fair off-hand judgment as to the goodness or badness of the method used by a professor in his exposition. To be educated is in fact to be able to do this; and even the man of universal education we deem to be such in virtue of his having this ability. It will, however, of course, be understood that we only ascribe universal education to one who in his own individual person is thus critical in all or nearly all branches of knowledge, and not to one who has a like ability merely in some special subject. For it is possible for a man to have this competence in some one branch of knowledge without having it in all.

*(I De Partibus Animalium, c. 1)*

We aim through this curriculum to produce “the man of universal

education,” that is, the one who is “critical in all or nearly all branches of knowledge.” Thus we propose an education appropriate to man and one most suitable as the foundation for any specialization.

### *Theology Tutorial*

The theology tutorial will be devoted principally to the study of the Bible and of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, chiefly St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. The order of study will be primarily doctrinal rather than historical, that is, based on the natural order of learning and on the differences among the various theological topics. Theology will be studied every semester and the order of the courses will be so designed as to lead up in the later years to a study of the central mysteries of the Christian Faith.

### *Philosophy Tutorial*

Philosophy, under the Christian dispensation, is seen not only as worthy of pursuit for its own sake, but as a handmaid to theology. The philosophy tutorial, therefore, will be conceived in this light, and those philosophers will be principally studied whose doctrines are most helpful to theological understanding. Accordingly, philosophy will not be conceived as a particular science among sciences, but rather as the whole order of human sciences as they tend toward wisdom; for the philosopher, as originally understood, is a “lover of wisdom” and thus preeminently concerned with fundamental questions in every discipline. This also means, following the teaching of the Church, that the philosophical studies in this school will be governed by the method and doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas.

### *Mathematics Tutorial*

The mathematical sciences will be studied in great detail throughout each of the four years. The study will include both pure mathematics (principally arithmetic, geometry, algebra, analytic geometry, and the calculus) and those natural sciences which are strictly mathematical, such as astronomy and mechanics. The reason

why so much time will be devoted to such studies, given that they are not the highest, is that they provide discipline which is especially proportioned to the young and inexperienced, and prepare them for more exacting disciplines, while giving them confidence in their powers to pursue them. The object will not be to familiarize the students with the latest advances in science, but rather, by getting them to work through some of the finest examples of scientific procedure, to help them understand the fundamental conceptions as well as the essential character and method of mathematical science. Such older authors as Galileo, Newton and Huygens will be among the principal authors studied, even though their doctrines have in some cases been superseded.

### *Language Tutorial*

The language tutorial will continue through the first two years, and will be devoted to the study of Greek or Latin. Its primary purpose will be to introduce the students to the liberal art of grammar. Because they are highly inflected, Latin and Greek are singularly appropriate for illustrating the nature of grammar; further by their very strangeness they lead the student to compare and contrast them with his own language and of how one differs from the other. Also the learning of Latin and Greek gives direct access to the greatest teachers. And finally, because many English words have Latin and Greek roots, knowledge of these roots leads the student to see much of his own language in its origins.

### *The Laboratory*

All natural science is based upon experience; but this experience is of two kinds. There is a spontaneous inescapable experience of nature which all men have, and which gives rise to a somewhat indistinct and general knowledge of nature. But this common experience does not reveal very many of the differences among natural things, so that in order to understand nature in detail there is need of more particular experience. To experiment is to seek out deliberately and even contrive such experience, especially when this involves altering the object studied in order to reveal certain of its features more clearly.

Experiment is scientific when a reasonable account is given of the procedure followed; this involves an account of what is being sought, of why the method of the experiment contributes to the search, and of the reasons for conclusions drawn from the experiment. The laboratory, therefore, will be devoted to the investigation of nature through experiment.

### *The Seminar*

The courses described above are all concerned with the perfection of the intellect as such, and most of the later courses already presuppose considerable intellectual discipline. But there are several other approaches which, though intrinsically less valuable, are more proportioned to the soul of the learner, and irreplaceably assist and complement the intellectual life. The greatest works of literature, insofar as they appeal to the imagination and move the affections, are peculiarly accessible to the young, while at the same time they present or imply profoundly important views of human life and of reality as a whole. Further, the great works of history, dealing as they do with men and events of more universal significance, supply the student with a wealth of moral experience which is not accessible to him in his own life, and give him some conception of the life of human society as a whole. Since it is necessary that even a beginner have



an awareness of the greatest issues in their totality, and since he does not yet have the experience and discipline needed to pursue them in a strictly intellectual way, the students will be gathered together once or twice a week in small seminar discussions, each directed by a teacher, in order to consider and discuss some of the greatest literary and historical works.

Also, there are many philosophical and theological works which are not essential to the curriculum as such, but which are of great historical importance or serve to supplement the works which are the basis of the tutorials. The seminar will also be concerned with the study of such works and will consider them at such times and in such an order as will serve to correlate them suitably with the work in the tutorials.

The procedure in the seminar, in keeping with the intellectually less rigorous character of most of the works read, will usually be less determinate than that in the tutorials, giving wider scope to the initiative of the students in the discussions. But when more difficult works are studied, the procedure will be like that of the tutorials.

The following scheme is designed to give a more concrete understanding of the curriculum of the College. No attempt is made either to present a complete reading list or to show in particular how each reading is treated. The works are obviously not of equal value. [Note: More information on the curriculum is to be found in the Bulletin of Thomas Aquinas College.]

### First Year

subject	hours	texts
Theology	3	Sacred Scripture
Philosophy	3	Platonic Dialogues; sections of Aristotle's <i>Organon</i>
Language	3	Latin textbook
Mathematics	4	Euclid's <i>Elements</i> ; Ptolemy's <i>Almagest</i> ; Plato's <i>Timaeus</i>
Seminar	2	Works of the following authors are read: Homer, Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Herodotus, Aristotle,

Laboratory	4	Aristophanes, Plutarch, Euripides, Thucydides, Virgil Natural history: Henri Fabre's <i>Studies of Insects</i> , etc. Experiments in fundamental types of measurement.
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### Second Year

subject	hours	texts
Theology	3	St. Augustine's <i>City of God</i> and other treatises; St. Athanasius' <i>On the Incarnation</i> ; St. Anselm's <i>Cur Deus Homo</i> ; texts of other Fathers and Doctors
Philosophy	3	The Pre-Socratics; the <i>Physics</i> and <i>De Anima</i> of Aristotle; selections from St. Thomas' <i>Commentaries</i> , and from modern authors concerning the philosophy of nature
Language	3	<i>Grammatica Speculativa</i> ; selections from St. Thomas on grammar; Latin prose composition textbook
Mathematics	4	Ptolemy's <i>Almagest</i> ; Copernicus' <i>On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres</i> ; Apollonius' <i>Conics</i>
Seminar	2	Works of the following authors are read: Cicero, Plutarch, Lucretius, Tacitus, St. Augustine, Boethius, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Galen, Harvey, St. Thomas
Laboratory	4	Experiments in Chemistry

### Third Year

subject	hours	texts
Theology	3	Texts of Augustine on grace and free will; parallel texts of St. Thomas

Philosophy	3	Aristotle's <i>Ethics</i> and <i>Politics</i>
Mathematics	4	Galileo's <i>Two New Sciences</i> ; Descartes' <i>Geometry</i> ; Newton's <i>Principia</i>
Seminar	4	Works of the following authors are read: Cervantes, Shakespeare, Milton, Montaigne, Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Pascal, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Smith, Swift, etc.
Laboratory	4	Experiments in Mechanics and Optics; Huygen's <i>Treatise on Light</i>

### *Fourth Year*

subject	hours	texts
Theology	3	Texts of St. Thomas Aquinas, especially concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation; parallel readings in other Doctors, especially St. Augustine's <i>De Trinitate</i>
Philosophy	3	Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> , with relevant readings in other philosophers
Mathematics	4	Non-Euclidian geometry; Einstein's <i>Theory of Relativity</i>
Seminar	4	Works of the following authors are read: Tolstoi, Dostoevski, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Darwin, Kierkegaard, James, Freud, Jung, Heidegger; <i>Federalist Papers</i> , Tocqueville, and other writers on the American Republic, etc.
Laboratory	4	Atomic theory and Relativity Theory





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