

July 19, 1971

## NEWS OF THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

### INITIAL FINANCIAL GOAL ACHIEVED

#### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am pleased to inform you that Thomas Aquinas College has met its initial financial goal. On behalf of the staff and Governors of the College, I extend sincere thanks to all who have helped in this effort.

For our part we pledge to provide the highest kind of genuine Catholic liberal education. We pledge that all our efforts will be directed to developing those young people who have placed themselves in our charge.

Having received the support needed to make a responsible beginning, we hope in Divine Providence and in the prayers, work and generosity of all of you to insure the development and growth of the College.

Ronald P. McArthur  
President

### APPLICATIONS STILL BEING ACCEPTED

Students interested in entering Thomas Aquinas College as freshmen this year may still apply. It is helpful to us that information about the College be disseminated as widely as possible since many students who would appreciate and profit from the College's unique program are doubtless still unaware of its existence. In view of this, Dr. John Neumayr, Dean of the College, asks that friends of the College do whatever they can to spread the word during the coming weeks. Faculty members and officials of the College will be on campus to explain the program to interested students and parents. They will also be happy to speak at meetings and to groups in private homes.

Bulletins and application forms are available from the College upon request.



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## FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT NEEDED

The College will require a considerable amount of furniture and equipment for the opening on September 13. These items can be donated with the donor taking a tax deduction equal to the market value of the item.

Furniture needs include several large conference tables, capable of seating 15 to 20 persons, together with chairs, office furniture, couches, tables and other lounge furniture, drapes, and small tables and chairs for use in the student recreation hall.

Anyone willing to donate furniture or equipment should contact Peter DeLuca at the College

## AUXILIARY TO HOLD LUAU

A luau benefiting Thomas Aquinas College will be held Saturday, July 31, under the sponsorship of the Thomas Aquinas College Auxiliary.

The event will take place in the garden of Mr. and Mrs. Parker Smith, 1707 Westridge Road, Brentwood. It starts at 7 p.m. with cocktails followed by dinner at 8:30. All Southern California friends of the College are invited to attend. The donation is \$7.50 per person. Reservations can be made by calling Mrs. Carlos Orellana at 474-6479 or Mrs. Charles Frank at 986-1439.

## NEWSLETTER TO BE PUBLISHED BY-MONTHLY

The College will publish a regular by-monthly newsletter beginning with this issue. The purpose is to inform friends of the College about our progress and about special events which may be of interest to them.

In addition to the news section, articles by members of the College faculty on timely academic issues will often be included. The first such article appears in this issue.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM: A DOCTRINE OF DESPAIR

"Man can truly be called a true teacher in as much as he teaches the truth and enlightens the mind."

St. Thomas Aquinas

The policy of academic freedom has been accepted universally by higher education. This policy assures professors that they enjoy freedom of inquiry and freedom to teach whatever in conscience they believe to be true. It holds that all matters in education are subject to critical examination and possible rejection. Professors, therefore, are not confined by pre-established doctrines in any area and are, consequently, free to teach whatever conclusions they may hold. Since every matter is by definition subject to doubt, no teaching need be more than opinion.

Many have come to suspect a connection between this policy and the disarray on the campuses. Free-wheeling teachers under the dispensation of academic freedom are often found at the source of student disorder and rebellion. Something unwholesome seems to be at work inside as well as outside of the classroom; responsibility has yielded to license on all levels.

With good reason, many ask about the position of Thomas Aquinas College on this question. The College is openly dedicated to truth and order. If academic anarchy follows academic freedom, this doctrine is incompatible with the objectives of the College.

### A DISORIENTATION

Academic freedom has the appearance of an enlightened policy respecting conscience and providing a healthy openness to progress. It has the aspect both of a wholesome respect for the difficulty of attaining the truth and an optimism about reaching it. The very name suggests a liberation from dogmatism and an unfettered readiness to pursue the truth wherever it may lead. It is regarded as the glory of contemporary education.

We believe, nonetheless, that this view of education is disoriented. Not because freedom may be abused simply, but because under this policy freedom cannot properly be used. It embodies neither safeguards against error nor a basis for optimism in the quest of wisdom.

The fault lies primarily in this: the policy of academic freedom makes the opinions of teachers the measure of teaching. The truth as each professor sees it becomes the ultimate concern of the academic

process. The school by this principle restricts its interest to what men think. The better position, we believe, is that of St. Thomas Aquinas: "The study of philosophy is not for the purpose of knowing what men have thought, but for the purpose of knowing what is the truth of things."

This is not a niggling distinction. If the true teacher is to teach the truth, he must never teach his own conscience. "The truth of things" must always be the measure of good teaching and not the authority of professors. "He who speaks from his own authority lies," Christ tells us (St. John).

### A TENET OF SKEPTICISM

Man is not born a skeptic; he has native certitude about reality. His practical life depends on it. Yet, when he tries to go beyond his unreflective experience of ordinary life to discover the principles and causes of things he meets great difficulties. St. Augustine remarked, for example, that he had no trouble understanding what time was until he attempted to define it. The requirements of truth are stern and the human propensity to err is great. From the beginning of philosophy men have been beset by the temptation to skepticism, to doubt the possibility of knowing at all.

It should be noted, however, that the movement of learning is from the known to the unknown; what is known first and best is the reality of ordinary life about which men have native certitude. Traditional learning always begins in the immediate world and, no matter how abstract and sophisticated speculation becomes, it always returns to that world. Paul Valery describes traditional philosophy this way: "Everyman knows a prodigious amount of things, of which he does not know that he knows them. To know all that we know? This search alone exhausts philosophy."

Modern thought is distinct in its impatience with the vague, though certain, understanding of common experience. Thinking "progress" more important than truth, it has given up the struggle to reconcile scientific abstraction with the ordinary world. Francis Bacon defines knowledge as power. Modern thought, taken with this view, has elected to make the world fit man's mind (so he might dominate it) rather than open man's mind to the world (that he might know it). Bertrand Russell, very much a modern thinker, testifies to the esoteric character of modern science: "The astronomer's sun, for instance, is very different from what we see, but it must have a definition derived from the ostensive definition of the word 'sun' which we learnt in childhood... ." He also testifies to the fault of ignoring the ordinary world: "The question of interpretation has been unduly neglected. So long as we remain in the region of mathematical formulae, everything appears precise, but when we seek to interpret them it turns out that the precision is partly illusory. Until this matter is cleared up we cannot tell with any exactitude what any given science is asserting."

The spirit of modern thought is caught perfectly in the 17th century philosopher Rene Descartes. Dissatisfied with our indistinct, prescientific knowledge as a point of departure for learning, he rejected it by putting all prior knowledge in doubt, and sought elsewhere for a certain beginning. This set a pattern for modern thought: to put what is first and best known in doubt. History, however has repeatedly proved that to begin with doubt is to end in doubt. This venture produced the skepticism and relativism that form the attitude of the contemporary college.

Academic freedom is a consequence. To hold, as it does, that all propositions are subject to critical examination and possible rejection enunciates the thesis of skepticism. Since the truth is never attained, we must be satisfied with the opinions of professors. Academic freedom goes beyond a healthy regard for the difficulties of truth; it is itself a philosophical position. Further, as judge and jury of all else in education, it is immune from indictment. Paradoxically, it is an assumption of a hypercritical philosophy which we are forbidden to criticize. Hence, its rule over education is unjustified and, therefore, coercive. This is, ironically, a flagrant case of dogmatism--the primary evil that academic freedom is supposed to prevent. But freedom without truth will always end in tyranny.

A sign that academic freedom is a mock liberty--an empty triumph--is that it arises from despair about the truth. Surely, the positive cannot come from the negative--victory is not the result of defeat.

### A PATHOLOGICAL CONDITION

Desire for the truth is one thing; fear of error is another. The latter by itself is a pathology. The thrust of "academic freedom" is not to gain the truth, but to prevent error at all costs. This is a morbid preoccupation. It supports an ultimately unhealthy view of man and the world.

"All men by nature desire to know." Every healthy instinct in man inclines him to desire "the truth of things" (not mere private opinions), yet by this doctrine he is held in bondage.

### THE TRUE TEACHER

The teacher is an instrument not an end. His opinions are not the term of his teaching; rather the term is "the truth of things." The measure in which he teaches the truth and enlightens the mind (and only truth can enlighten the mind) are of primary academic concern. He begins his work in the order of common experience, for it is here that men first experience the wonder that leads to learning, and he returns to this common experience to verify the truth and to answer that initial wonder. This process must be carefully attended to if education is to remain vital and relevant. He begins with the common truths accessible

to all, and he leads the student forth to see the truth of things for himself. Even those opinions which he teaches (and most of what men hold is but opinion) are worth teaching in the measure that they are reduced to principles known in common experience. A probable argument is only probable in the light of known truths. If everything is only probable, nothing is probable.

Wisdom does not come easily. "Experience proves that people easily deceive and delude themselves, whilst to come to true knowledge they must be taught," observed St. Thomas. Men need teachers to gain sure knowledge. Thus, education is essentially traditional, that is, handed down. But, "the true teacher teaches the truth." He is measured by reality and not the measure thereof, and he is respectful of the corpus of learning that comes down to him measured by the minds of many wise men in all ages.

### ACADEMIC ANARCHY

The truth is by its nature perennial--it is not conditioned by time and place. True academic progress deepens truth; it does not destroy it. The skeptical despair inherent in academic freedom, however, provides an excuse to invent brave new worlds bereft of truth. But it is the truth that makes men free. It is the wise man who can have order, the fool only chaos.

John W. Neumayr  
Dean  
Thomas Aquinas College