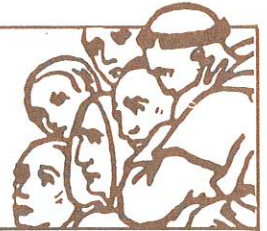




Thomas Aquinas College  
**NEWSLETTER**  
SUMMER-FALL 1980

10000 N. Ojai Rd., Santa Paula, California 93060



# Catholic Education and the Great Books



In this article, Tutor Marcus Berquist distinguishes Thomas Aquinas College from the so-called "Great Books Schools."

One of the most obvious features of a school is its curriculum, and within its curriculum, the lists of books read. Thus, when a school has a "Great Books" curriculum, it is almost inevitable that it should be characterized as *that kind* of school. In studying the nature and purpose of the school, one begins with this assumption, and tries to understand everything within its light. Accordingly, since Thomas Aquinas College has such a curriculum, it is frequently likened to other schools which make use of the same books, and its educational program is assumed to be essentially the same.

Such an assumption is reasonable, for not only is this reading list a true point of resemblance, but it is also based upon principles which are to a considerable extent held in common. In the first place, it is commonly held that the Great Books are intrinsically better than the multitude of textbooks which have replaced them in the curricula of colleges everywhere. These latter, indeed, have been introduced to make the former more accessible and to proportion them somehow to less able minds. They are the outgrowth of necessities imposed by universal education, and suffer from the dilution of content which inevitably characterizes such education. This is why a school which aims at the best will necessarily concentrate upon a study of the Great Books, and seek students with the ability and the dedication to learn from them.

Another reason why the Great Books are preferred to textbooks is that the latter, almost without exception, are "secondary sources" --that is, they are two steps removed from reality. They are, as it were, thoughts about thoughts. The Great Books, by contrast, are much closer to common experience in its fullness; they raise questions and pursue inquiries which arise directly from a wonder about things themselves. On this account, they are of the greatest importance to beginners, for they

begin where thought itself must begin if it is to bear any fruit.

A third reason for the study of the Great Books is that students are thereby allowed and encouraged to become directly familiar with the greatest minds. They are not limited to what passes through the minds of their instructors and the authors of textbooks, which can hardly be more than a diminished and perhaps distorted view of what exists more fully and more powerfully in the Great Books themselves. And when educators themselves have been educated in such a way, and for many generations, the original light can scarcely be seen. But with a study of the Great Books, students have a much better chance to encounter wisdom and to become wise themselves.

Lastly, the careful study of the Great Books, especially at the beginning of one's education, is the best defense against the unreflective historicism which so burdens the modern mind. By "historicism" here we mean the insistence that every human work must be studied within its historical context, as a "moment" in some historical process. The consequence of this historicism is that every work is in fact read, if at all, in bits and pieces, and within a framework peculiarly modern, imposed by contemporary assumptions which may be no more than fashions. This framework itself, because customary, is seldom noticed, and never examined. But when one has had independent access to the Great Books, this historicism becomes conspicuous, and is no longer assumed as a matter of course. One begins to read the books as they were written and consider issues on their own merits.

Reasons such as these are common ground for most schools with Great Books programs. However, it is possible to overestimate these resemblances, and to be impressed by likenesses which, though true and significant, are quite secondary. One may be misled by the maxim, plausible enough in itself, that what is held in common is what is most important. In the present case, the application of this maxim would be seriously mistaken, for it would confuse a community of means with a community of ends. It would be like asserting that the common network of roads we all make use of is more important than the various destinations we reach along these roads. Or like assuming that since we are all using the same roads, we are all going to the same place. For the books will be read, not just to be read, but for some further purpose, and it makes no small difference--rather it makes *all* the difference--what this purpose is. Distracted by obvious but secondary points of resemblance, one may not discern significant differences in ends.

When one finds a Catholic school with Great Books curriculum, one is inclined to

suppose that Catholic belief is incidental to its educational program, and that (at most) it modifies but does not determine that program. This inclination is encouraged by Catholic educators themselves, who have by and large reduced Catholicism in their schools to some indefinable and insignificant "presence." Catholicism, it seems, makes a difference, but not an *educational* difference. In this view, the end of a Great Books education, and perhaps of liberal education generally, would transcend such a difference. Yet since differences of this sort concern the greatest and most important truths, one might well wonder what this common end could be. If it does not arise from a common conviction concerning the highest matters, it must concern something inferior, perhaps trivial.

A similar difficulty arises about the Great Books themselves. By what standard are they judged great? Is it that they contain a true doctrine about the highest matters? Perhaps some of them do, but taken as a group they disagree radically among themselves about these very matters, not only in regard to the truth about them, but also in regard to the right method of pursuing that truth. They even disagree about what is worth studying and whether there are actually any "highest matters." If the end of liberal education is a kind of wisdom, however imperfectly achieved, most of these books must be judged failures.

Thus, when viewed as *defining* a certain kind of education, the Great Books cannot be regarded as teachers, nor their students as disciples. By their immense variety and mutual opposition they exclude discipleship. Of course it is possible that discipleship to a particular master may come out of such a curriculum--one might, for example, become a Cartesian through reading Descartes. But discipleship cannot be the intent of such a curriculum, nor can a school define itself by discipleship while still defining its educational program by the Great Books. Thus, for example, no school which defines its educational program in this way could honestly describe itself as a Catholic, since to be a Catholic is to be a disciple of a very particular kind.

The intellectual tradition of the Catholic Church contains a clear and detailed account of what education should be. Perhaps more than any other tradition, it insists that there *are* great books, but it goes much further than this. It explains why certain books are great, and it distinguishes among them as regards their excellence and their authority. But it does not regard the understanding of great books as an end in itself. Rather, it orders the study of all such books to an understanding of the truth about reality--a truth of which it speaks with confidence, from the work of God which it receives in faith.

## Class of 1979 Presents Sculpture by Father Ford



The Class of 1979 commissioned this nearly life-sized wood sculpture of St. Thomas Aquinas. The sculptor is the Reverend Nevin Ford, O.F.M., who also supervised the placement of the work in the main hallway of St. Joseph Commons. The work depicts St. Thomas at work on the Summa.

## Father Neilsen A Welcome Visitor

In the class of 1984, five students hail from British Columbia, Canada. Each year for the last four, the number of applicants from Vancouver has increased, and the 1980-81 recruiting year already appears to be following the pattern. While these students live in the Canadian city closest to Southern California, for many of them it is not their nearness to the College which attracts them to it but rather their nearness to Father Donald Neilsen. Father, a priest in the Immaculate Conception parish in Delta (a suburb of Vancouver), has been for several years a good friend of the College. He emphasizes that he makes no effort to solicit interest in Thomas Aquinas College from these young men and women. He is active with them in his parish work, however. Weekly Scripture studies for the youth group, a rich liturgical life, and close personal contact: all these encourage interest in the Faith and a desire for the truth. If any of his friends then indicate an interest in further education, Father Neilsen has unhesitatingly directed their attention to Thomas Aquinas College. Most of them have subsequently visited the College.

The College owes a special debt of thanks to Father Neilsen for his efforts on its behalf and on behalf of the Vancouver students. Undoubtedly there are many qualified young men and women whose character, intelligence, and good will would make them good candidates for Thomas Aquinas College, but who are unaware that its program is offered. The College is therefore committed to helping priests and sisters to introduce it to prospective students whom they might meet in their parish work. Since visiting the campus, as Father Neilsen did, is the best way to evaluate to College, an invitation to do so is extended to any priest, sister, or brother who might be interested.

## ALUMNI QUARTERLY

Announcing: the Didactic



*The Didactic*, a quarterly published by the Thomas Aquinas Alumni, is now being offered to all friends of the College. The purposes of the quarterly are to manifest and encourage learning in the liberal tradition, and to provide the alumni with a forum to continue a common pursuit of truth. The alumni have been asked to submit articles, typed single-spaced, approximately 700 words in length. The articles should deal with subjects familiar to any Thomas Aquinas College student. Articles for the most part should discuss or apply principles of grammar, math, music, science, physics, ethics, politics, philosophy, or theology. *The Didactic* will also present papers from the tutors and other friends.

We hope to benefit the learning community by stimulating the business of coming to a knowledge of the truth. All support is welcomed.

Subscriptions are \$5.00 for four issues. Subscribers and contributing writers should contact the editor. Write to:

THE DIDACTIC  
7719 Lansdowne  
St. Louis, MO 63119

## John W. Blewett, Vice President for Administration

President Ronald P. McArthur announces the appointment of John W. Blewett as Vice President for Administration. Mr. Blewett assumes the new post in October.

A liberal arts graduate of Seattle University in 1951, Mr. Blewett did graduate studies in business at the University of Washington. Pursuing an interest in journalism, he first was a sports writer for the Seattle Times; but later he turned to the area of personnel and industrial relations.

Since 1963 he has worked as manager of Industrial Relations for Kaiser Gypsum Company; Group Manager for Metal, Paper, and Gypsum Specialty Products of Kaiser Industries; and Manager of Employee Relations for Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program.

He has had company-wide responsibility for labor relations, personnel, employment, wage and salary administration, employee benefits, training and management development.

At Thomas Aquinas College he will have primary responsibility for office administration, staff utilization and planning, and supervision of site development at the College's new campus. He will also be involved in public contact and fund raising for the College's Independence Fund.

Mr. Blewett and his wife Barbara now live in Santa Paula. They have four sons and three daughters, two of whom attend Thomas Aquinas College. Several family members are active in Catholic organizations. In 1974 Mr. Blewett was Executive Chairman of the California and Western Regional Pro-Life Conference.

## FRESHMAN CLASS DATA, IMPRESSIONS

Recruitment in 1979-80 was successful in several respects whether viewed statistically or personally. A record number of requests for information, campus visitors, and applications resulted in a large and promising freshman class.

The class numbers forty-one men and women from sixteen states, Canada, Ghana, Australia, and West Germany. They range in age from seventeen to thirty-two, with SAT scores averaging about 1120. Twelve have attended other colleges including two with college degrees (one in nursing, and one with a Master's degree in German literature).

Sixteen are related to past or current students. All are resident students. Twenty-three had visited the campus before enrolling this fall.

On the personal side, many were willing to share their impressions of the first two weeks at the College. Laura Halbmaier of Orofino, Idaho, had visited the campus a year ago and was impressed with "classes in which students do more talking than the tutors."

Mike Gloudeman from Orange County, California says of this discussion method of learning, "It helps me think clearly and express myself better." "The students'

infectious enthusiasm for knowledge," adds Catherine Manion of Portland, Oregon, "even makes meals lively with discussions of Socrates and dialectic."

On the same theme, Diane Parsons of Rochester, Minnesota comments, "the formal education I left five years ago did not satisfy that enthusiasm for true knowledge. Education should provide a method and direction to continue learning."

Asked for a general impression of the first two weeks at the college, Mike said, "Everything is as good as I had heard and expected." Laura found it difficult "adjusting to such concentrated reading and studying, but the upper classmen are very friendly and a big help." Catherine is "impressed with the genuine Christian attitude and the many opportunities to increase my spiritual life in both prayer and apostolic work."

Director of Admissions Thomas Susanka plans to visit as many prospective students and their families as possible this year, particularly those unable to make a visit to the campus themselves. Interested parents and students should call (805) 525-4417 to make arrangements for a visit.

## COLLEGE, COMMUNITY MEET FOR CONCERT

A special concert by the Philharmonia Trio, members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, highlights the fall lecture series. Dr. Steven Custer (cello), Richard Leshin (violin), and Albert Falkove (viola) prepared a concert of works by Bach, Ravel, Françoise, and Dohnanyi.

Members of the Santa Paula Philharmonic Society were guests of the College at a formal dinner in St. Joseph's Commons and a reception at the President's House.

Each piece was introduced with a brief description of the key melodic and harmonic elements. A short discussion period followed the performance.



Dr. Steven Custer demonstrated the range and historical development of the cello for the Junior Year music classes last spring.

## Dr. Niedercorn on Econometric Models

Dr. John Niedercorn, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Southern California spoke on "Mathematical Models in Economics" Friday, September 26th as part of the fall lecture series of Thomas Aquinas College.

His talk discussed the methods, advantages, and limitations of using mathematical formulas to quantify and forecast economic realities.

Dr. Niedercorn is a leader in the field of econometrics, especially as related to urban regional planning. While somewhat technical, discussing the Weber-Fechner Law and utility theory, his lecture also demonstrated mathematical models using verbal methods.

In summary, he stated that "mathematical models must be conceived as aids to rational human judgement in the process of economic decision-making, but not as a *deus ex machina* or oracle capable of giving infallible advice in a highly complex and uncertain world."

## TUTORS COMPLETE DOCTORAL WORK

While the policy of the College is to have no professional ranks among the Tutors, the Faculty is highly qualified. Of the thirteen faculty members who teach full course schedules in the Thomas Aquinas College program, twelve hold a Ph.D. or are Ph.D. candidates. Three of those with candidate status are in the final revision or defense of their dissertations.

Mr. Richard Ferrier, now Dr. Ferrier, appeared before the Dissertation Committee of the graduate school of the University of Indiana at the end of September. His thesis, prepared under the direction of Newtonian scholar Dr. Richard S. Westfall is entitled "Two Exegetical Treatises of François Viète, Translated, Annotated, and Explained." It

Third-year tutor, Michael McLean, a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, completed the first draft of his dissertation this summer. Entitled "St. Thomas Aquinas on Faith and Reason," his dissertation carefully explains St. Thomas' position on the question, and then defends that position against a number of major objections that have been directed against it.

Norman DeSilva, a 1975 graduate of Thomas Aquinas College, began his doctoral work in philosophy at Laval University, Quebec, in the winter of 1977. Soon after completing the course work and other requirements for the degree in early 1979, he began work on his dissertation, entitled "Art and Science." Its general aim is to show the extent to which mathematical physics is artistic--taking "art" in the traditional sense.

## "Religious Faith and the Liberal Arts"

The tenth annual lecture series of Thomas Aquinas College began in the traditional manner with a senior member of the faculty speaking on liberal education.

This year Dr. Richard George, a tutor at the College since 1974, spoke on "Religious Faith and the Liberal Arts." Directed primarily at the incoming freshmen, the lecture began with citations from the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis raising questions about the propriety of intellectual pursuits compared to spiritual devotions.

Why should freshmen study Euclidean geometry rather than higher disciplines? Or for that matter, why study even theology itself rather than practicing spiritual exercises?

To approach the question, Dr. George described and demonstrated the use of dialectic, examining commonly held opinions as a starting point for discussion. He included expert "commonly-held" opinions by St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Aristotle: "All men by nature desire to know."

The discussion period established the compatibility of the intellectual and spiritual life, as well as the proper order of learning ("the importance of the inferior disciplines" in Mr. Berquist's phrase). Not surprisingly, both the compatibility and order are evident in the program of the College.

## SEMESTER EVENTS CALENDAR FALL 1980 - 81

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| October 9, Thursday<br>4:30 p.m.               | New York Meeting of President's Council<br>New York Yacht Club                                    |
| October 10, Friday<br>8:00 p.m.                | Lecture: Rev. Charles R. Hess, O.P.<br>"Thomas Aquinas' Organic Synthesis of Plato and Aristotle" |
| October 15, Wednesday<br>7:00 p.m.             | Discussion: Dr. Margaret White<br>"World Affairs - Abortion"                                      |
| October 15, Wednesday<br>7:00 p.m.             | Chicago meeting of President's Council<br>Cliff Dweller's Club                                    |
| October 23, Thursday<br>4:00 p.m.              | Los Angeles meeting of President's Council<br>Jonathan Club                                       |
| October 24, Friday<br>8:00 p.m.                | Lecture: Christopher Derrick<br>"C.S. Lewis: A Literary Approach"                                 |
| November 7, Friday<br>8:00 p.m.                | Concert: Donald Wittig, lyric baritone<br>"Songs of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms"                  |
| November 21, Friday<br>8:00 p.m.               | Lecture: Dr. Russell Kirk<br>"The Supernatural in Literature"                                     |
| November 22, Saturday<br>9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. | Campus Blood Drive  |
| December 8, Monday                             | Procession: Feast of the Immaculate Conception  |
| December 12, Friday<br>8:00 p.m.               | Lecture: Patrick James Kirby<br>"The Forty English and Welsh Martyrs"                             |
| January 16, Friday<br>8:00 p.m.                | Lecture: Eva Brann, St. John's College<br>"Plato"   |
| January 17, Saturday<br>10:00 a.m.             | Discussion: Eva Brann's<br><i>Paradoxes of Education in a Republic</i>                            |
| January 30, Friday                             | Semester Examinations end   |

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This newsletter is evidence again that the College continues to pursue its legitimate activities with vigor and dispatch - that there are many good and interested people who continue to help us with our efforts.

Those efforts, as you know, are directed towards reading and studying the great original texts which constitute, partially, the roots of our civilization and our learning. They merit all the time and study we can give them, for they engender, for those who take them seriously, the disciplined mind. Only the man whose mind is disciplined can live according to his nature; only he can discharge the duties of the citizen, and the duties of the parent, and the duties of the friend. It is he, further, who can give the just witness to the Christian truth.

Our college looks not only to the happiness of its students, but to their participation in the common good of the Church and the country, without which they could not bring their education here to completion.

So long as we, all of us, continue to do our very best to educate the young, we will promote a noble end in a world increasingly hostile to civilized order, and end the absence of which ineluctably means the death of many of the things which make our lives worth the living.

Ronald P. McArthur  
President



Sophomore Dave Cools of Colbert, Washington discusses classwork with Freshman Isabelle Cammarota of Sacramento, California. Much farther from home, Freshman Joseph Attakora of Ghana, commented on the mutual support of the students: "Nothing impresses me more than the warmth and cordiality that greets any new person on campus. You are immediately absorbed into the Thomas Aquinas College family."



Mrs. Viltis Jatulis, Librarian, talks with Sister M. Hilary, S.C.R.H. and Sister M. Ruth, I.H.M. of St. John's Seminary College, Camarillo. Both visited in August to contribute books and see the recent progress of the library, which Sister Ruth has aided from the founding of the College.

## PATRICK JAMES KIRBY NAMED PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

Patrick James Kirby, a Pasadena attorney in private practice since 1937, has been appointed National Chairman of the President's Council of Thomas Aquinas College. His official installation takes place Thursday, October 23rd at 4:00 p.m. at the Jonathan Club in Los Angeles.

As a member of the College's Board of Visitors and Board of Governors, Mr. Kirby has been closely associated with the College since its founding. As chairman of the President's Council, he will work with the College in expanding its base of support in those areas where the college has attracted most of its students--Southern California, the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, and the Northeast. Members of President's Council chapters in each of these areas pledge annual gifts of at least \$1,000 and aid the College in publicizing its work.

Mr. Kirby and his wife have been active in numerous charitable and civic activities including the Metropolitan Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Catholic Welfare Bureau, and the Girls Club of Pasadena.

A member of American Legion Post 13 in Pasadena, Mr. Kirby served in the Military Intelligence Service in World War II. He has worked on Committees of the Los Angeles, Pasadena, and California State Bar Association. He is currently a member of the National Advisory Council of the Americanism Educational League.

Mr. Kirby has also been directly associated with the students of the College as a lecturer. Two years ago, he drew on his legal expertise to discuss "The Courts Re-define Religion." This year he will report on his on-site investigation into the history of the recently canonized "Forty English and Welsh Martyrs."

## President's Council Meetings Feature Christopher Derrick

### NEW YORK

The New York Yacht Club is the scene of the October 9 meeting of the President's Council. Hosted by College Governor Chauncey D. Stillman, the 4:30 p.m. reception features Christopher Derrick on the first leg of a cross-country series of speeches sponsored by the President's Council.

Mr. Derrick's remarks will touch on the prominent themes of *Escape from Scepticism: Liberal Education as if Truth Mattered* and his latest work *C. S. Lewis and the Church of Rome*. He has first-hand familiarity with both subjects, having made an extensive visit to Thomas Aquinas College and being himself a student of C.S. Lewis.

Appropriately, members of the President's Council will receive Lewis' critique of contemporary social education, *The Abolition of Man* in appreciation of their participation this year.

The New York meeting will welcome some forty guests who will also hear a report by College President Ronald P. McArthur on the progress of the College as it enters its tenth year of providing a uniquely ordered program of Catholic higher education.

### CHICAGO

Approaching the first anniversary of its organizational dinner featuring M. Stanton Evans, the Chicago chapter of the President's Council has made significant gains in membership and activity on behalf of the College.

Co-Chairmen Francis J. Milligan and William J. Isaacson report that seventy guests are expected for this year's dinner to be held 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, October 15, at the Cliff Dweller's Club in downtown Chicago.

As at the New York meeting, Thomas Aquinas College alumni in the area will also attend to meet with guests and discuss the College from their particularly qualified point of view. It was during the studies of many of these alumni that Christopher Derrick researched *Escape from Scepticism*; some were undoubtedly the ones he describes in the book carrying on those extended scholarly discussions typical of the College.

### LOS ANGELES

The installation of Mr. Patrick Kirby as National Chairman of the President's Council culminates the fall series of council gatherings. Thomas P. Sullivan, Chairman of the Board of Governors will present citations of appreciation to Mr. Alan Teague and Mr. Daniel Murray, founding co-chairmen of the Council.

Los Angeles attorney and member of the Board Richard L. Noble will host the four o'clock reception and meeting.

## SCHOLARSHIP GRANT

The Louisa Watson Trust of Los Angeles has just announced a grant of \$40,000 to Thomas Aquinas College for Scholarships. Dr. McArthur lauded the Louise Watson trust and its President, Mr. William R. Huston, "For unfailing support of the individual scholars who have elected to pursue this course of studies through the most challenging works, in the light of the Catholic Faith."