

Schools and Religion

Two weeks ago Sister Jacqueline Grennan, president of Webster Colege, announced that the school previously operated by the Sisters of Loretto would be turned over to a Board of Trustees and operated as a secular institution. She also received dispensation from her vows and would remain as President of the College. Both these actions received the approval of Cardinal Ritter. Miss Grennan's statements that a Catholic college is by that very fact in opposition to academic freedom and if sponsored by a religious congregation is necessarily subject to a conflict of interest, have provided discussion and response from many quarters.

Apart from the discussion of the feasibility of "secular" or Catholic institutions of higher learning; there is the clear trend of the laity assuming greater control of Catholic Colleges — as news items on these pages testify.

Last week in these pages Bishop James Malone stated that, "... in the secular university the ideal situation is one in which the department of religion is under university sponsorship . . . The university's object is knowledge and the Newman Apostolate seeks personal commitment." This separation of roles, involving the distinction between Faith and knowledge, between learning and sanctity, perhaps is the key to the national problem of religion in the schools. The impossibility of having "every Catholic student in a Catholic school" and the totally irresponsible notion that the Catholic school system, educating over eight million students, should be abandoned, poses a dilemma that can be solved by recognizing that there is an intellectual and objective content to religion that a neutral State could support.

The mutual trust which the Ecumenical movement has engendered among men of all Churches has made it possible to give consideration to ideas that were repugnant as little as five years ago. A course on the History of the Reformation often reflected more the denominational allegiance of the professor than the objective historical facts. The recent "Life of Martin Luther" by the Catholic biographer John Todd, indicates how a sympathetic approach can radically change the presentation of history. No Lutheran would object to the Father Martin of Todd's book and most Catholics would accept the failings of the Church which provoked the Reformation.

Not only history but also Scripture and Theological studies can be shared by students of different denominations. Scripture scholars of all Churches share in seminars and produce Bible studies and translations acceptable to all. The quality of scholarship rather than denominational allegiance and approval is the mark of recognition in the Biblical field.

The North Carolina Baptist State Convention is having difficulties in agreeing on proper areas of responsibility with the administration of Wake Forest College. Professors at the College say they are handicapped because the Convention insists the new president be a Baptist. The questions which the transfer of Webster College and the return of Sister Jacqueline to secular life have raised are evident in the discussion about the control of Wake Forest College. These mutual problems may help the Baptists and Catholics to explore together in a sympathetic manner the whole question of religion in the schools. It is time we recognized this is a problem which concerns every citizen and will be solved only when we agree to reach a solution that is good for the Church and the nation.

President of Trinity College Replies To Miss Grennan

Washington, D.C., January 12 — As the President of Trinity College, a Catholic liberal arts college for women, I should like to take issue with the statement that a Catholic college is by that very fact in opposition to the principle of academic freedom; that it is of necessity subject to episcopal approval; that it is, if sponsored by a religious congregation, necessarily subject to a conflict of interest.

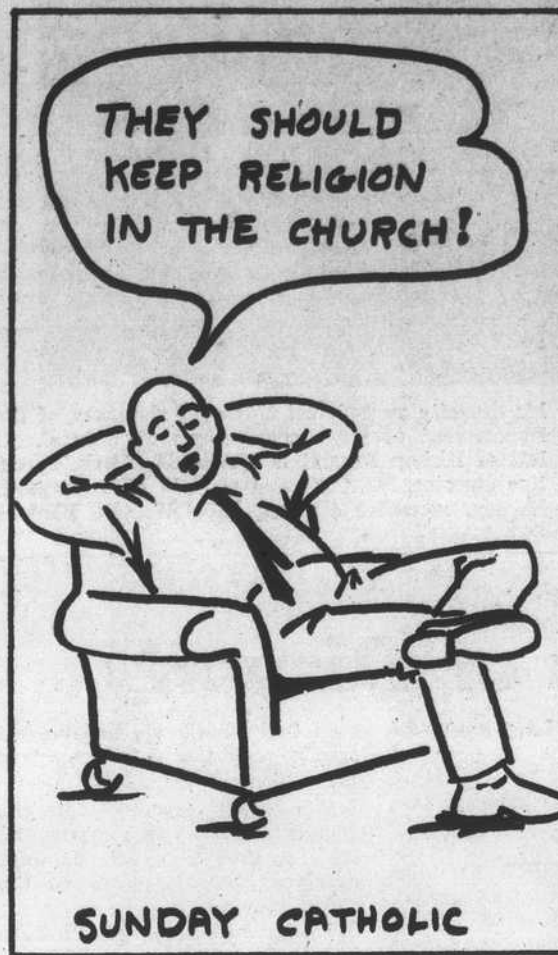
As an institution of higher education, our primary commitment is to the pursuit of knowledge. We choose to focus our commitment on liberal education, for women, and primarily for Catholic women. This focus affects the objectives of the college, but this does not mean that the college is controlled by either the Catholic hierarchy or by the religious order.

The faculty decide upon curriculum, course offerings, admissions entrance policy. The faculty is completely responsible for the academic quality of the education offered, a responsibility delegated to them by the Board of Trustees through the President as Chairman of the faculty.

The news that "a Catholic college (is) becoming secular" sets up in some minds a dichotomy. Is a Catholic college, therefore, "sacred"? In my opinion Trinity is a secular institution, one of the many private institutions in the U.S. We are a secular institution with a commitment to the belief that Catholic young women must have the opportunity to study theology at the same level of depth as, for example, chemistry, English and mathematics. Every academic institution has a certain basic commitment — the nature of ours to Catholic women is not unlike M.I.T.'s to science and technology. These commitments do not put limits on our primary commitment to the search for truth.

Facing up to one's commitments is the responsibility of every educated individual, and yet it is something today from which people shrink. It is far easier to maintain a position of relativism. Colleges such as Trinity seek to provide opportunity for individuals to search out the grounds for and the responsibilities involved in a given commitment. Such colleges recognize the doubts, the agonies, the crises that making a real commitment entails. Such colleges do not seek to force any student to a given commitment, but rather to provide opportunity to make such commitment from knowledge, debate, search.

The route taken by one Catholic women's college in the mid-west to attain academic freedom is one considered necessary by that particular institution. It might well be considered a necessity by others. It is not considered necessary by Trinity College.



New Divinity School—Theology An Intellectual Discipline

By Sally Thrane

ST. LOUIS — (NC) — Establishment of a school of divinity at St. Louis University here will mark a totally new theological development for U.S. Catholicism according to the university's academic vice president, Father Robert J. Henle, S.J.

The new divinity school which will replace the Jesuit house of theological studies for the Missouri province at St. Mary's Kansas should not be confused with a department of theology, he stressed.

To compare a divinity school with departments of theology "is something like comparing a medical school with a department of biology," Father Henle said.

A complete school of divinity, with its own faculty, programs and degrees, can offer much greater opportunity for diversity, research and creativity than is possible for a theology or religion department, he explained.

Father Henle further stressed that the St. Louis University divinity school will have a different character than the theological school at the Catholic University of America.

"At Catholic University, the undergraduate level has mainly remained groups of seminarians," Father Henle said. "At the graduate level there has been a good deal of cooperation, but there is still basically a group of schools," he said.

"Also, the non-theological and non-religious side of Catholic University has not been adequately developed," he said. "The divinity school here will be exist-

ing alongside strong departments such as psychology and philosophy and there will be a good deal of give and take between them."

The university has already taken steps to insure that their schools and colleges will not take on a completely clerical character, he added.

It is hoped that only a small percentage of the school's undergraduate students will be seminarians, Father Henle said. "We want to offer exchange and scholarship between various groups and types of people; we don't want to cater to just one group," he explained.

Nevertheless, the school of divinity will open in the fall with a predominant enrollment of seminarians, he said. "But more and more lay people are becoming interested in, and qualified for, graduate work in theology. We'll recruit them. We want them."

The divinity school doors will also be open to Protestant and non-Christian scholars, both as students and as faculty members.

"When these students begin talking with each other when they are young," he noted, "it should spell great things for the ecumenical movement."

Jewish scholarship and thought is an especially important need, Father Henle said. A Jewish lectureship established in the philosophy department last year "probably" will be transferred to the school of divinity, he said. He noted that the course, offered as an elective, drew close to 70 students, "an indication of real interest."

"I'd like to see us reach the

point where we can offer a certificate in Jewish studies," he said. "In the St. Louis community there is not the intellectual focal point for Jewish thought that there is for Christian scholarship."

Certificate for laity and religious in Scripture and theology are other possible areas which the divinity school will encompass.

"Theology belongs on a university campus," he said. "It needs to confront the modern world and the world needs to view theology as an intellectual discipline."

"Look at some of the problems today with medical experimentation, legal questions, and so many other areas. These questions are being asked and developed at university levels; the men asking them want to take theology into consideration, and theology, in turn, must confront these problems."

Within areas of strict Church interest, the school of divinity will offer seminarians of different orders and lay students an opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions and engage in study in common.

"It almost goes without saying that it took the Second Vatican Council to make this type of preparation for the priesthood a widespread desire," Father Henle said.

Father Henle referred to a survey he took of all Religious superiors last year, telling them of plans for the divinity school and asking about their interest.

"One-third of them answered and all of them had good things to say," he said. "Let's face it—that just couldn't have happened 10 years ago."

Ecumenical Research Center At St. John's

COLLEGEVILLE, Minn. — (NC) — St. John's Abbey and University has established an Institute for Ecumenical Research on its campus here, the first center of this kind in the United States.

The planned institute will be a residential center where 10 Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish scholars will live with their families to form a community of scholars engaged in research, theological dialogue with one another and with the university faculty and the Benedictine Fathers of St. John's Abbey, according to Abbot Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B.

Commenting on the institute's significance for the academic community, Father Colman Barry, O.S.B., president of the university, said:

"The realization of this dream of an ecumenical study institute at St. John's will bring a new dimension to interreligious life in America. Serious study and research is the immediate need in ecumenical contacts. Our generous donors and supporters will enable competent students to begin the pressing task of healing wounds handed on by misinformation, lack of understanding, and the break in scholarly contact between the separated people of God."

The institute will be supported by grants from various foundations, associations, and individuals. To date, \$320,500 has been received for the new project.

Father Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., executive secretary of the national Presbyterian-Catholic di-

alogue and a member of the Ecumenical Institute of Spirituality, has been named director of the new institute. A 45-year-old author and scholar, Father McDonnell studied Protestant theology at the Universities of Tubigen, Muenster and Heidelberg in Germany.

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