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March 1966

THE FUTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

Milo A. Rediger

In the April 5, 1966, issue of Look Magazine, an article appeared under the title "The Time Bomb in Catholic Education". It is a press statement on the recent problems between faculty and administration in the Roman Catholic university St. John's of New York. It depicts the educational phase of Catholicism's new crisis in authority.

We all know about the 31 faculty members who were fired at Christmas time and about the teach-ins, strikes, etc. since that time. We recognize the attempt of unionism to establish itself on a major American university campus. We recognize all of the arguments against wrong methods and procedures for the accomplishment of academic freedom and faculty benefits.

However, the issues are deeper than the mechanics of the St. John's fiasco. They are even deeper than the question about whether or not Catholic colleges should exist at all. They are deep enough to give pause to any program of higher education that describes itself as Christian and attempts to project its image accordingly.

Here are two quotes from the article: "The practicability and even desirability of an open, yet distinctively Christian, college are being questioned" and "The call for a Christian community of love, distinguished not by what is taught or studied there, but by the way Christians love there, is in turn rejected by others as anti-intellectual and unecumenical".

I am not sounding an alarm bell. I believe, however, that awareness is a part of our strength. We should be alert to the stance of the "outside world", and to the fact that not everybody will applaud even if we succeed in doing what is so difficult to achieve; namely, the creation and maintenance of a strong Christian university. Since we are a private college, we can decide what we want to be and can chart our own course. However, we need a certain degree of public acceptance in order to succeed at all. We do not, and cannot, live and move in a vacuum.

I suggest we ask ourselves the question, will we become vulnerable when the rest of the world decides that a distinctively Christian college is not only impracticable but even undesirable? Or will we stand up and stand out as the exception that proves the rule? Let us not think that associations are not quickly made between religious colleges of the Catholic type and other Christian colleges. Already the students of Wheaton College have, through their campus paper, compared the dictatorial actions of the trustees and other administrators of Wheaton with the administration of St. John's, and the offended faculty members at Wheaton with the 31 fired St. John's teachers. This kind of thing catches on faster than we like to admit, and I am confident that the unalert, the uninformed, and the unaware will be in the biggest trouble. Perhaps we can put our heads as well as our prayers together to insure the best preparation for the future as we proceed with the expansion and development of "an effective Christian college".