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## Faith and Learning at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

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# *Faith and Learning at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University*

Emmanuel Renner, O.S.B.,  
and Hilary Thimmesh, O.S.B.

*Saint John's University and the College of Saint Benedict are located five miles apart in central Minnesota. Saint John's was founded by monks of the Benedictine order and chartered under frontier conditions in 1857. Initially Saint John's probably resembled a rudimentary German gymnasium more than an American college. The first catalog was published and the first bachelors degrees conferred in 1870. The College of Saint Benedict was founded in 1913 by the Convent of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota, as a college for women. In the last thirty years the colleges have gradually combined their academic programs and many administrative and support services, but they continue as separate corporations in a coordinate relationship which maintains Saint John's as a men's college, Saint Benedict's as a women's college, each appointing its own faculty and conferring its own degrees.*

## **Saint John's University to 1968**

Saint John's University dates its founding to 1857 when the Territorial Legislature of Minnesota granted the Order of Saint Benedict a charter to establish Saint John's Seminary. "Seminary" was used as a general term and the charter expressly provided that "no student shall be required to attend the religious worship of any particular denomination." In the minds of the founders, how-

ever, Saint John's was part of a frontier missionary effort to meet the needs of German-speaking Catholics immigrating to Minnesota, and in the following decades Saint John's was undoubtedly influential, along with the Benedictine sisters in nearby St. Joseph, in attracting a preponderantly Catholic population to the surrounding area. To this day finding a church of any other denomination in many of the villages and hamlets that dot the region comes as a mild surprise.

Classes commenced for five local boys at "Saint John's Seminary" in November 1857, but the next nine years were precarious for the fledgling school as the founders moved from one pioneer dwelling to another and finally carved out a place for themselves and their students in the forest a dozen miles west of Sauk Rapids, the northernmost stop for riverboats on the Mississippi. In 1866 Saint John's College, as it was popularly known, settled in its present location, a six-piece band was formed, and the school began to take on its permanent shape. A three-year theological seminary, distinct from the collegiate classical course and the preparatory course for high school students, was organized in 1868. The following year the state legislature authorized Saint John's to confer such degrees and diplomas "as are usual in colleges and universities." In 1872 the college introduced a commercial course which offered the equivalent of business college training augmented by courses in religion. This commercial program supplied many neighboring communities with pioneer bankers and businessmen in the years to come, while the classical course leading to the bachelors degree prepared young men for the seminary and the professions.

This organization of the college continued for fifty years. In 1922 the commercial course was discontinued and the college became exclusively a four-year liberal arts institution offering bachelor of arts and bachelor of science degrees.<sup>1</sup> Latin and Greek became electives except in the pre-divinity program, but a two-credit course in religion continued to be required each semester as well as a three-credit course in ethics in the senior year. In addition, sixteen credits in philosophy were required in the junior and senior years, four hours a week for two years.

That this curriculum of some seventy-odd years ago was heavily religious is apparent. That it was academically distinguished is not so clear. In 1922 the college was very small and shared faculty and premises with students in the

1. Until 1922 Saint John's University, so named by amendment of the charter in 1883, functioned under a rector appointed by the president to oversee all levels of instruction. These were called "courses" as in *cursus theologiae* or *cursus classicus*, or in English, "a course of study." A European notion of university structure was evident. In 1922 the new president, Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, abolished the office of rector and Saint John's particular use of the term "course" by appointing deans of the seminary, the college, and the preparatory school.

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newly-named preparatory school. Several of the 22 members of the faculty taught prep classes as well as college classes, yet the catalog listed 132 college courses in 25 disciplines ranging from astronomy to speech education. Even though students typically registered for six courses a semester, classes must have been very small and the professors greatly extended if all or even most of the advertised offerings were actually taught, but the college was now on track for its surprising development in the next decade.

In 1933 Father Virgil Michel was appointed dean of the college by Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, head of the Benedictine community since 1921 and president of the college. Abbot Deutsch held a doctorate in theology and took a keen interest in the college. With his encouragement several Benedictine monks pursued advanced studies in theology and philosophy at European universities and became familiar with new directions in European Catholicism stemming from revitalized understanding of liturgical worship. Virgil Michel was part of this group, having completed a doctorate in English at Catholic University; he was a thinker and a writer who saw the social and economic implications of the liturgical movement. It was through his influence that persons with interests as diverse as racial justice, the cooperative movement, and the Catholic Worker became interested in Saint John's in the 1930s. He entered into serious correspondence with Robert Hutchins about adopting the Chicago Great Books program, and he was responsible for a range of intellectually stimulating developments at Saint John's which continued after his untimely death in 1938.<sup>2</sup> On the eve of American entry into World War II college enrollment had grown to 450 and the faculty to 55, including ten laymen. Saint John's had become an exciting place to work and study.

Did academic development come at the expense of religious emphasis? Not if one can judge by the curriculum and by parietal rules. A two-credit course in religion each semester continued to be a bedrock requirement. Twelve credits were required in philosophy. Catholic emphasis was evident in other courses: Newman and the Catholic Literary Revival; Catholic Backgrounds and Current Social Theory. This was a time when thinkers like Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, historians like Christopher Dawson, novelists like Graham Greene, Georges Bernanos and François Mauriac were giving a new luster to Catholic learning and letters, and a new cachet to piety. A crucifix hung above the blackboard in every classroom and classes began with prayer. Outside of class

2. See Abigail McCarthy, *Private Faces/Public Places* (New York: Doubleday, 1972) for an assessment of Virgil Michel's impact at Saint John's and the broad significance of the liturgical movement: "Virgil Michel, like other Christian thinkers, looked on a twentieth century where men lived in despair and upheaval and where pessimism prevailed. . . . His answer was the re-Christianization of society, a reordering, a re-creation of the [social and economic] interdependence of the 'age of faith.'" Pp. 70-71.

religious discipline channeled student life: required daily attendance at mass by all students (despite the charter), an annual three-day closed retreat between semesters, highly restrictive rules about leaving campus or receiving visitors, and prescribed evening study hours and evening prayer — a simplified form of monastic compline — in the dorm corridors before bedtime.

The rationale for this approach to college education was stated in every catalog from 1922 to 1945. Saint John's aimed to produce

personalities fully imbued with the ideals of American life and of Christianity, whose impact on society will help in the creation of a better social order. . . . The discipline is mild but firm and aims to produce men of character and high-minded citizens. . . . Discipline is enforced rather by appealing to the students' sense of honor, to moral and religious motives than by the use of severe methods.

This was the explicitly religious context in which young men "of good moral character" were accepted as students and lived out their college career at pre-war Saint John's.

For purposes of this study, the close of the post-war period at Saint John's can conveniently be dated to July 1968, when Saint John's University and the College of Saint Benedict formally considered and rejected a recommendation that they merge after jointly adopting a 4-1-4 calendar and a sweeping curriculum revision in the preceding year.<sup>3</sup> This period of twenty-three years saw major changes and developments in the college within a pattern of overall continuity.

The most obvious change was growth in enrollment. In 1945 college enrollment stood at 434 students, half of whom were freshmen. In 1968 college enrollment was 1443. After the wave of ex-GIs in 1945 and 1946 doubled enrollment in two years, the college grew slowly but steadily. The increase in enrollment had two effects on the religious climate of the campus. One was that Saint John's began to have a significant number of non-Catholic students. The other was that the number of off-campus students increased. As a result of these two developments, taking a course in religion each semester was now described as obligatory only for Catholics — others could take a Saint John's degree without any study of religion — and attending mass daily became optional, although recommended, for students who did not live on campus.

The faculty grew as enrollment grew, and this too gradually affected the

3. The recommendation resulted from a co-institutional study chaired by Lewis B. Mayhew, whose report said in part: "to delay more than two years would so irreparably damage either or both institutions that ultimate merger or cooperation would no longer be possible." The colleges gave this dire warning serious thought but decided that intensified cooperation while retaining their separate identity was the wiser course.

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religious climate. In 1945 the faculty numbered 52: 44 monks (i.e., members of Saint John's Abbey) and eight laymen. In 1968 the faculty numbered 133: 73 monks, 57 laymen, one laywoman, one sister from the College of Saint Benedict, and one diocesan priest. Most of the lay faculty were Catholic, some of them particularly committed Catholics who sought out Saint John's for its leadership in some areas of Catholic thought. Still the gradual shift to a sizable presence of lay people on the faculty meant a certain secularization of the campus. Personal ties and professional contacts with other colleges, most of them not Catholic, many of them not church-affiliated, became more common. Faculty meetings were devoted less to regulating student life; concern about how the students lived became detached from the educational program per se. Catholic devotional practices waned. Religious clubs like the St. John Berchmans Society, the Catholic Youth Organization, and the Knights of Columbus gradually assumed a lower profile in student life. Professors who had taught elsewhere or were fresh from graduate school were not accustomed to saying a prayer before class and no one insisted they should. Old classrooms were refurbished, new ones carved out of existing space, a new library and a new science building went up, and crucifixes were omitted. Thus in a variety of ways the college was becoming less explicitly religious, less exclusively Catholic.

This gradual change is discernible in official statements from that era. In 1946 the catalogue forthrightly proclaimed that "the University has for its chief aim a liberal education for a way of life guided by Catholic truth." Ten years later this statement had been modified to say that "Saint John's University seeks to impart a broad liberal culture permeated with Christian ideals and a Christian sense of values." By 1964 this gave way to the stated aim of preparing students for roles of leadership in contemporary society, which "the University believes . . . can best be done by aiding the student to inquire into the Christian conception of man and into the expanding frontiers of knowledge and human accomplishment." The shift from *truth* to *values* to *inquiry* as educational goals suggests how the attitude of the institution itself had changed.

This shift in emphasis is apparent in the replacement of religion courses by theology courses between 1953 and 1961. A two-credit religion course each semester had been a standing requirement since the college began. The purpose of the requirement was frankly catechetical as the aim of the department of religion, reprinted year by year in the course bulletin, made clear:

The Department of Religion seeks to present the divine plan of redemption and the part which the members of the Church are privileged to play in the unfolding of that plan. Courses are designed to deepen the student's understanding of the truths of faith and to motivate him to conscious participation in the life of the Mystical Body through personal sanctification and through alertness to social obligations in home, parish and community.

Under this rubric were offered such courses as "Survey of the Christian Life," "Bible Study," and "Life Problems and Marriage." Academic quality varied with the qualifications of the teachers, some of them theologians or Scripture scholars, while others in a given year might come from fields as disparate as English, history, classical languages, political science, and archaeology. What they had in common was four years of seminary training and ordination to the priesthood, which was in practice the primary qualification.

It is against this background that the shift to a requirement in theology must be understood. In 1946 a list of three-credit theology courses for undergraduates appeared in the course bulletin in response, as the bulletin said, to "the growing need on the part of the laity for a deeper grasp of Catholic truth." All of these courses were taught by theologians and met the same academic standards as courses in other disciplines. In 1953 it became permissible for upperclassmen to substitute theology courses for the religion courses obligatory for Catholic students each semester. In 1961 courses in religion disappeared from departmental listings and the religion requirement was changed to one theology course each year, thus 12 credits in four years — four credits less than the old religion requirement — and there it stayed until the curriculum revision of 1967.

In a further development of theology on campus, it was during this period that the Benedictine Institute in Sacred Theology came into being. Its aim was to offer graduate theological education for women in Catholic religious orders at a time when few Catholic schools of theology admitted women. Initiated in 1957 by the College of Saint Benedict, this program was moved to Saint John's to take advantage of the resources of the School of Theology and accredited as a masters program in 1963. It was eventually incorporated into the School of Theology.

Among other things the change from religion to theology in the college requirements recognized the higher intellectual reach of students. Under pressure of growing enrollment, admissions standards became more selective in this period, and it is paradigmatic for this study that by 1960 Saint John's had become more demanding academically and less demanding — or at least less prescriptive — about religious values and practices. Under "Student Life" the catalogue still declared that:

Saint John's University endeavors to make the study of religion and the spiritual formation of the student the heart of its entire educational program.

To newcomers and visitors Saint John's must still have seemed a pervasively Catholic campus with a new church large enough to accommodate the entire student body and with a faculty two-thirds of whom wore the Benedictine

habit. But relative to its past the college was now both more permissive about student life and religious practice and more professional about teaching and the conduct of its affairs.

The trend toward greater professionalism is evident in administrative initiatives of the period. From 1875 until 1958, Saint John's University operated under the abbot as president. In that year Abbot Baldwin Dworshak appointed Father Arno Gustin, O.S.B., as president, creating the title of chancellor for the abbot. One of the new president's first acts was to form a Board of Lay Trustees, essentially advisory in character, which nonetheless brought lay persons into the councils of the monastic sponsors of the school for the first time, and under successive presidents was to develop into the Board of Regents established in 1982.

Father Colman Barry, O.S.B., president from 1964 to 1971, advanced Saint John's on several fronts. Father Barry was a historian with a strong ecumenical — some would also say entrepreneurial — bent, whose talents matched the expansionist mood of higher education in the 1960s. He is best known for three flourishing enterprises inaugurated during his administration: the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research; the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library; and Minnesota Educational Radio, eventually spun off from Saint John's as Minnesota Public Radio. None of these was directly linked to the academic program but each in its own way broadened the scope of the institution. Less noted among Colman Barry's achievements but more central to the vitality of the academic enterprise was his introduction of tenure, a standard budgeting procedure, and a quantum leap in faculty salaries to meet AAUP standards. Toward the end his administration was shaken by Saint John's version of the student uprisings of the late 1960s. These tumultuous years, during which an alumnus, Eugene McCarthy, became a student hero, paradoxically demonstrated the vitality of the institution and the disappearance of the Catholic ghetto once and for all. In retrospect the post-war period seems a time of healthy balance between a clear-cut Christian identity and a well-integrated intellectual climate.

### The College of Saint Benedict to 1968

The College of Saint Benedict (CSB) grew out of Saint Benedict's academy, a Catholic boarding school for girls founded in 1880 by Benedictine sisters who came to Minnesota in 1857. As early as 1905 the Benedictine community began to plan for the establishment of a college, to educate the sisters in their own fast-growing community and Catholic girls.

The college opened in 1913 with six students in a lower division program. In 1918 it offered its first bachelors degrees. By 1932 the bulletin listed an



impressive number of courses in the departments of religion, philosophy, history and the social sciences, English language and literature, psychology and education, Latin, French, and German, biology, chemistry and physics, mathematics, and music. That year, with 166 students and 40 faculty, the college applied to North Central Association for accreditation and received it. The NCA report praised Saint Benedict's for its standards of scholarship and its atmosphere of culture and refinement.

Because the Benedictine community sponsored the college, it assumed the responsibility for articulating and preserving the mission of the college and for ensuring its financial viability. Until 1932 the annual bulletin noted that the college was under the patronage of the bishop of Saint Cloud, but there is no evidence of regular involvement by the bishop or diocesan priests in the administration or in overseeing the curriculum. Since the beginning the college has generally enjoyed a good relationship with the bishop, but that is not to say that there haven't been letters or telephone calls between the bishop and the president from time to time about such issues as controversial campus speakers.

Sister Claire Lynch, the academic dean from 1932-1940, established a Board of Lay Advisors in 1934 which continued until 1961, when the college was separately incorporated under a predominantly lay Board of Trustees. In addition, she was influential in founding, in 1940, an Omega Chapter of Delta Epsilon Sigma, a national scholastic honor society for students of Catholic colleges, established at a time when Phi Beta Kappa excluded Catholic colleges from membership.

The faculty understood the educational importance of nonacademic experiences and encouraged students to become active in campus clubs, including the Minnesota League of Women Voters and the International Relations Club, through which students cooperated with those clubs on other Minnesota campuses. Regular convocations included such nationally-known speakers as Mortimer Adler, Carl Sandberg, Dorothy Day, Helen C. White, and Christopher Hollis.

As members of a Catholic college, the faculty accepted the responsibility of providing instruction in religion to enable students to obtain a thorough knowledge of Christian doctrine and develop intelligent Catholic leadership. All Catholic students were obliged to take religion courses every semester. By 1935 the bulletin listed the following religion courses: Liturgical Worship, Catholic Moral Ideal of Life, Dogmas and Life-Motives, Grace and the Sacraments, The Church of Christ, Church History, and Sacred Scripture.

The college also made use of noncurricular means to carry out its religious mission. The Benedictine sisters, who comprised the large majority of the faculty, encouraged students to attend morning mass in chapel and to pray compline, a liturgical form of evening prayer, together in the dormitories in

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the evenings. Many students also participated in the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Until 1931 students of all denominations were required to be present at public religious exercises for the sake of uniformity and preservation of discipline.

Faculty also encouraged students to become actively involved in social justice issues and volunteer services. At first they assisted poor families and taught catechism in rural parishes in central Minnesota and in the Indian missions where the Benedictine sisters staffed grade schools. In the 1930s two convocation speakers, Dorothy Day and Baroness Catherine de Hueck, inspired the young women to volunteer at Catholic Worker House and at Friendship House. While participating in this enriching experience in New York in 1938, some CSB students recruited two black students, and thus the College of Saint Benedict became one of the first Catholic women's colleges to accept African-American students. When a few alumnae objected to accepting "colored" students, Sister Claire Lynch reminded them in a letter that the college had a policy of accepting students of any race, and the college already had Chinese, American Indian, and Filipino students. Sister Claire then reminded the alumnae of the college's responsibility "to inculcate and live the teachings of the Church, which condemn racial discrimination as unjust, immoral, and unChristian."<sup>4</sup>

When CSB refers to its mission as a Benedictine college, the emphasis has often been on the Benedictine values of respect for thorough scholarship, a spirit of moderation, and a sense of community. In 1935, Saint Benedict's began producing an annual initiation pageant, "So Let Your Light Shine," celebrating the spiritual and cultural achievement of Benedictines since the sixth century. The whole student body was involved in this ritual celebration through choral reading, song, and interpretive dance. At the culmination of the pageant, ranks of first-year students, wearing cap and gown, marched across the dark campus to receive flaming torches of learning from Benedictine saints of the past fourteen centuries and to accept their responsibility to pass on learning to others in the future. While the pageant romanticized the role played by Benedictines in the civilization of Europe, the ritual nevertheless played an important formative role by presenting the Benedictine heritage and inspiring students to value both learning and culture. In the late 1960s joint classes with Saint John's University no longer allowed the shortening of classes for rehearsal at the beginning of the fall semester and the pageant was discontinued. Since then a variety of means have been used to promote Benedictine values.

From the beginning the college has remained faithful to its mission as a college for women, although the way in which it has understood how to fulfill

4. Lynch correspondence, September 27, 1938, Convent of Saint Benedict Archives.

that mission has changed since the women's movement in the 1960s. For years CSB stated that one of its functions was to prepare its students for motherhood and homemaking, service to their community, and a career. The 1934 Bulletin spelled out the qualities of such an ideal Catholic graduate:

[She] has a reasonable faith — that is, she knows Bible history, Church history, philosophy, and ethics well enough to make her religious practice really intelligent. She has a strong moral fibre. She has the intellectual culture that comes with the best that a liberal arts college can offer. As a social leader she contributes to the happiness and advancement of the community in which she lives. Christian home-building is to her not only a most desirable vocation but also an art deserving the fullest attention of a cultured woman. To it she brings intelligent planning, clear sighted appreciation of its beauty and difficulties, enthusiasm, and a gracious spirit. . . . Her philosophy of life is based upon the blessedness of giving and helping.<sup>5</sup>

As this passage suggests, while the faculty promoted the value of homemaking, they also hoped to instill the value of leadership and responsibility in the larger community. In addition, the faculty understood the practical need for careers other than homemaking and offered courses in home economics, education, and social work. Later, with the full tide of the women's movement, the college added majors for careers in professions that had been traditionally male-dominated. It also ceased to assume that motherhood and homemaking were the immediate goals of its alumnae. As the relationship with SJU continued to develop the college intentionally sought to preserve the advantages of a women's college in having women faculty as role models of leadership and scholarship and in offering numerous opportunities for students to practice leadership in service.

These excerpts from historical records affirm the college's intention to solidify its purpose as a Catholic, Benedictine liberal arts college for women. It was like other Catholic colleges of the 1930s and 1940s in its commitment to liberal education and to the spiritual development of its students. Catholic identity was manifested by scholastic philosophy and theology, which served an integrating function, courses on marriage and the family, and literature courses on contemporary Catholic authors. Faculty, still predominantly members of the Benedictine community, joined the several national Catholic scholarly societies. In addition, by the 1940s students were actively involved in the National Federation of Catholic Colleges as well as in organizations that emphasized Catholic action.

Philip Gleason's essay, "American Catholic Higher Education, 1940-1990:

5. 1934 Bulletin, 18-19.

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The Ideological Context,"<sup>6</sup> presents a clear description of the evolution of Catholic colleges from this "Catholic Renaissance" subculture of the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1950s, he points out, Protestants and secular liberals challenged what they called the cultural ghetto of the Catholic Church, and they were soon joined by Catholic intellectuals who were more interested in Catholics becoming part of mainstream America than in promoting a separate Catholic culture. This growing criticism, combined with the effects of Vatican Council II, encouraged Catholic colleges to rethink how they might best fulfill their mission. Other societal influences promoted further change. For most colleges the GI Bill at the end of World War II drastically increased the student population. Although only a few women veterans enrolled at CSB, the college was affected indirectly by the influx of GIs at Saint John's. Their unwillingness to accept authoritarian student rules proved contagious. Predictably, CSB students who related socially with SJU students gradually began to demand greater freedom from restrictive regulations.

Saint Benedict's did not experience significant curricular changes until 1967, when it changed its graduation requirements. Philosophy and theology were no longer required as separate courses each year but were integrated into nine four-credit interdisciplinary core courses using the theme "The Search for Meaning." This general education program continued until 1988, when the two colleges instituted a new core curriculum.

The CSB student population did not increase significantly until the college, with the help of low-interest government loans, was able to build several new dormitories, beginning in 1956. The greatest growth occurred in the decade of the 1970s. In 1969-1970 the student population was 782, with 94 percent of students Catholic; that year 35 out of 52 faculty were Benedictine sisters. By 1979-80 there were 1635 full-time students, with an estimated 91 percent of them Catholic, and 33 out of 123 faculty were Benedictine sisters. There is a certain irony in the fact that in 1971 the college reaffirmed its intention to remain small — not over 1000 students — in order to fulfill its purpose as a Benedictine college.<sup>7</sup> Within eight years it was no longer small and its proportion of Benedictines had decreased considerably.

This rapid growth created other serious growing pains: more faculty had to be hired and more classrooms, a new library, science building and sports facilities were needed. It took years to meet the physical plant needs, but one distinct advantage at the present time is that the campus buildings are relatively new and require minimal repair and replacement.

Dr. Stanley Idzerda, the first lay president of the college from 1968-1974,

6. In George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

7. *Directions for the Future*, 1970-1971.

made several significant improvements. During his presidency, a faculty handbook was developed, faculty became more involved in governance, and a comprehensive planning process was established to improve decision-making. In addition, the college began its first study abroad program in cooperation with five other colleges. Several academic programs were established including the nursing department and the continuing education program. Dr. Idzerda was also very active in working with SJU to build on the relationship between the two colleges.

While cooperation between the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University began as early as 1953 in some teacher exchanges, it evolved in the 1960s and 1970s with more formal but piecemeal changes. This cooperative venture occurred at a time when numerous men's colleges were becoming co-ed or were merging with women's colleges, often to the detriment of the women's education. The CSB/SJU partnership has resisted such a development, a fact which has had a profound impact on both colleges.

### **The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University Since 1968**

In 1968 the College of Saint Benedict installed its first lay president, Dr. Stanley Idzerda, and the two colleges set about systematically drawing their programs and operations closer together in accordance with the Mayhew report noted above. Dr. Sylvester Theisen, professor of sociology, was named to chair a joint faculty committee on cooperation and given the function of coordinator of cooperation. He was an excellent choice — respected on both campuses, experienced, resourceful, and incorrigibly optimistic. Four years into the job, he described cooperation between the colleges as a process of "coordination without corporate merger."<sup>8</sup> He reported:

The growth of cooperation between CSB and SJU has been a series of responses to needs arising from experience, rather than a fulfillment of an ideology imposed from above. This pragmatic approach, staying close to our experience, seems very slow to some persons and highly ambiguous to many, but we believe that it is organic and healthy.<sup>9</sup>

This pragmatic approach to cooperation has continued to the present. Each college continues to operate under its own governing board, at CSB the Board of Trustees referred to earlier, at SJU the Board of Regents established in 1982, which functions within limits set by the monastic chapter and includes the

8. Report to the Board of Trustees, College of Saint Benedict, January 6, 1972.

9. Report of the Joint Faculty Committee on Cooperation, February 10, 1972.

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three officers of the monastic corporation and eight representatives of the chapter among its 44 members. Systematic collaboration over the past quarter century has integrated the academic life of the two campuses. Today their 325 faculty members teach in combined departments, share the same facilities, and guide a combined enrollment of about 3400 undergraduates — now slightly more women than men — through the same curricula. By the usual criteria — faculty credentials, admissions standards, learning resources, placement of graduates — CSB/SJU offers a good liberal arts education across the board. Each college has had a Rhodes scholar since collaboration began. Some sixty graduating seniors have received Fulbright awards. The faculty ranks teaching as its most important role, according to the survey conducted for this study, but it also engages in extensive scholarly research.

The faculty continues to be predominantly Christian and enrollment predominantly Catholic, but has academic quality been achieved at the cost of watering down the religious character of the two colleges? On a quick reading one might say so, for many of the historic evidences of religion on campus have disappeared. One would look in vain for references to “Catholic leadership” or “Christian homemaking” or “a liberal education for a way of life guided by Catholic truth” in the publications of either college today. Most faculty members are lay and their religious commitments, as distinct from their moral and ethical principles, are frequently unknown. No religious observance is required of students. Graduation requirements include a single four-credit course in theology and a cross-disciplinary course in the Judeo-Christian heritage. Aside from the impressive chapels on both campuses and occasional displays of sacred art in the campus galleries, there are few public symbols of religion. Even Benedictine religious garb is less common than it used to be since Benedictines on both campuses often prefer to dress like their lay colleagues.

But inquiry into the present condition of religion on the campuses needs to go deeper than merely noting how religious observance differs from that in the past. To assess the vitality of religion on campus today one must look to the shape of contemporary religious thought and practice in society at large. David O'Brien is surely right when he points to one of the major documents of Vatican Council II, *The Church in the Modern World* (1965), as a magna carta for Catholic colleges, affirming as it does the study of human sciences, the worth of secular culture, the importance of dialogue with those beyond the church, and the Christian dimension of service to society.<sup>10</sup> This authoritative document summarized and sanctioned movements already afoot on Catholic campuses as the American church moved out of its immigrant status

10. David O'Brien, *From the Heart of the American Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), p. 49.

to full participation in a pluralist society. More important, it pointed to the possibility that secularization could very well mean sacramentalization to those who recognized the presence of God in the world.

In this view the world is a sacrament of God's presence in the sense that the divine reaches us through the finite. Many authors could be cited on this point. Richard McBrien speaks of a Catholic vision which sees God in and through all things — people, events, places, the world at large.<sup>11</sup> Alexander Schmemmann describes the sacramental approach as a basic intuition that the world is an epiphany of God, a means of God's revelation, presence, and power.<sup>12</sup> Andrew Greeley draws out the implications of an imagination that views creatures as metaphors for God, as hints of what God is like, and therefore takes a positive view of human potential and social change.<sup>13</sup> In the sacramental view Christianity is established in the world in order to come to fulfillment there, and the role of the church is not to maintain a separate domain of the sacred but to discover and realize God's grace in the secular milieu, where "God continues to speak to us and summon us to respond for the sake of the Kingdom, which is the reign of God's love and justice throughout the whole of creation."<sup>14</sup>

This of course is not an exclusively Catholic perspective as applied to higher education,<sup>15</sup> nor is it an orientation unknown before 1965, but its reaffirmation and development in contemporary Catholic thought has led to a profound reassessment of the role of the church in higher education. To act on this refreshingly positive view Catholic colleges needed to shed their old defensiveness, their sense of ministering to an embattled minority in a Protestant culture, and to address the minds and hearts of young adults who were already thoroughly acculturated to the modern world. Merely catechizing them along neoscholastic lines would not do. Nor, for that matter, would the study of theology alone be sufficient, although it is noteworthy that writers as diverse

11. Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), p. 1180.

12. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 120.

13. Andrew Greeley, "Sacraments Keep Catholics High on the Church," *National Catholic Reporter* (April 12, 1991): 12-13.

14. McBrien, *Catholicism*, p. 97.

15. See for example Harry Smith, *Secularization and the University* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968). Smith distinguishes between *secularization* and *secularism*. Citing Friedrich Gogarten and Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the mode of God's presence in the world, he says: "The development of secularization in higher education is not to be deplored, therefore, but welcomed as an integral part of the process in which modern man has 'come of age'. Christians are called to full participation in the life of the secular university not because they want to infiltrate, restore, or dominate it, but because it is part of the created world, the inheritance turned over to them." P. 134.

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as Pope John Paul II<sup>16</sup> and Robert T. Sandin<sup>17</sup> have argued for the centrality of theology as an integrating discipline.

In the aftermath of Vatican II, in fact, modern psychology, generally kept at arms length by the church until then, suddenly seemed a more potent religious force than theology as Catholics discovered that psychoanalytical theory and psychotherapy were not incompatible with religious belief. At Saint John's the alliance between these previously hostile forces was symbolized for twenty years, 1953-1973, by the Mental Health Institute, an ecumenical summer program which included some of the most distinguished psychiatrists and psychotherapists in the country. Men like Dana Farnsworth and Gregory Zilboorg, Francis Braceland and Howard Rome, addressed the pastoral needs of ministers of all faiths, and they made it impossible to think of Christian life and practice as if Freud, Jung, and the like had never existed. Their effect over two decades of friendship with many members of the Benedictine community and the faculty was gradual but profound, and has yet to be adequately analyzed.

To preface the description of present religious emphasis and attitudes at CSB/SJU with these observations is not to imply that at some moment in the late 1960s or early 1970s the two colleges understood and adopted a radically revised notion of what it means to be Catholic in contemporary society, but it is to suggest that a revitalized theology has led them to view the life of faith as altogether broader and more entwined in the diversity of experience than an earlier generation assumed. Neither is it to claim entire satisfaction with the present state of religious emphasis on the two campuses. Rather it is to make the more modest claim that education at Saint Benedict's and Saint John's retains a distinctly religious and indeed Christian character.

To begin with official statements, the introduction to the current course catalogue advises students:

16. See "Ex Ecclesiae Corde," Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, 1990. John Paul II sees an important role for theology in the synthesis of knowledge, but also sees a gain for theology in its interaction with other disciplines (Par. 19). This important document, strongly positive in tone, addresses universities properly so called, but its general principles are equally applicable to undergraduate institutions. Recognition of the role of non-Catholics in Catholic institutions and emphasis on formation of "an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ" (Par. 21) are particularly noteworthy.

17. See Robert T. Sandin, *The Search for Excellence* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982), p. 118: "The foundation of a unified program of Christian higher education is a theological understanding which permits the integration of Christian faith with advanced scholarship, the permeation of the educational process by a Christian interpretation, and the penetration of the life of the campus by the central ethical and theological convictions of the Christian church."



The liberal arts education provided by the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University is rooted in Catholic and Christian tradition and guided by the Benedictine principles of the colleges' founders and sponsoring religious communities.

Extended commentary refers repeatedly to the Benedictine influence on both campuses and the resulting emphasis on human concern, social justice, community values, and commitment to service.

Admissions materials reflect this emphasis. The current flyer sent as a first response to potential applicants highlights the partnership of the colleges and describes CSB/SJU as "Catholic, Benedictine colleges where scholarship and spirituality flourish." It adds that

the Benedictine men who live at Saint John's University and the Benedictine women who live at the College of Saint Benedict embody the centuries-old traditions of *community* [and] the Benedictine focus on the balance of mind, body, and spirit.

Saying it doesn't make it so, of course, but emphasis on living in community as a time-tested Benedictine formula for mutual sharing and service echoes through the admissions materials and carries over into descriptions of residential life. Thus the guide for student life at the College of Saint Benedict says:

The goal of CSB residence life is to make the residence area a home . . . where you learn to build interpersonal relationships: sharing, working and playing together. It's a place to be challenged and make mistakes, yet be supported and accepted as you change and grow. It's a place to discover who you are in relationship to others . . . [and] can become a community of people who support and value one another as unique and worthwhile individuals.

Similar language is used in SJU documents to describe the effect of the residential philosophy at Saint John's, where more than twenty Benedictine members of the faculty and staff live with the students, continuing a practice that dates from the school's founding. It is perhaps particularly in the residential setting that the language of the admissions flyer comes to life.

This [Benedictine] approach to living is never preached but, rather, uniquely conveyed through quiet and powerful examples.

All of this is summed up in the recently adopted "Coordinate Mission and Values," which commits CSB/SJU to provide "an experience of Benedictine values which fosters attentive listening to the voice of God, awareness of the

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meaning of one's existence, and the formation of community built on respect for individual persons."<sup>18</sup>

These references to the Benedictine way of life perhaps need some explanation. Historically, Benedictines have deep roots in European culture. They derive their inspiration from the *Rule of Benedict*, a sixth-century guide for religious life in community, which for nearly a thousand years provided the dominant model for monasteries of men and women from the Mediterranean to the Baltic and has blossomed out into a worldwide religious family in modern times. The Benedictines were not a centralized order but formed autonomous communities defined as Benedictine by adherence to the *Rule*. Their purpose was simply to seek God in obedience to a spiritual teacher, an abbot or an abbess, chosen by them from among their ranks. Their commitment was to a disciplined way of life, austere but not starkly ascetical, steeped in Sacred Scripture and supported by mutual charity. Since sacred reading claimed much of their time, Benedictines were necessarily advocates of literacy, and they frequently conducted schools for their own aspirants and other local youth. Since they aimed to be self-sufficient they also farmed or engaged in crafts from which they could earn a living; the *Rule* cautioned them to esteem manual labor. It also cautioned them to receive each guest as Christ himself and to practice hospitality accordingly. Modern Benedictine communities continue to be guided by the *Rule of Benedict*. This short summary may suggest what is meant by Benedictine values and why people of different religious backgrounds — Christian and non-Christian — can find common ground in them. It perhaps also explains why faculty response to the survey conducted for this study indicated wider acceptance of Benedictine values than of Catholic belief and practice.<sup>19</sup>

Religious practice by the students is of course an important indicator of the religious character of the colleges today. A summary can only indicate kinds of activity. Both colleges have an active campus ministry with students involved in planning and carrying out liturgies for Sunday and other special occasions. Small group retreats off campus are scheduled periodically during the year. Students are invited to join Bible study groups and to take part in

18. The full statement, adopted by both boards in May 1995, refers in addition to the liberal arts curriculum, the learning environment, the significance of gender in personal development, and service to the common good.

19. Respondents were asked to indicate their judgment about whether greater emphasis on Catholic belief and practice or greater emphasis on Benedictine values would have an inhibiting effect on achieving academic distinction. Half of the respondents (50.8 percent) saw no problem with greater Catholic emphasis; the proportion rose to three-fifths (59.9 percent) when "Benedictine" was substituted for "Catholic." On the negative side, about twice as many (29 percent to 15.6 percent) questioned greater Catholic emphasis as questioned greater Benedictine emphasis.

Lenten prayer services. The chaplains provide spiritual counsel for individual students. In all, the range of opportunities for religious practice is extensive and includes a standing invitation from the Benedictine communities to join in their daily hours of prayer and Eucharist.

To get a full view of the religious character of the colleges, however, one must look beyond formal religious activities to the corollaries of faith lived out in community. For example, nearly a thousand students each year participate in VISTO (Volunteers in Service to Others) by engaging in local service to the needy, the elderly, and children, and by going further afield during vacations to join in service to the urban homeless, migrant workers, and impoverished people in Appalachia and Central America. Sponsoring such service is one of the functions of campus ministry on both campuses. This sort of social action has antecedents. Along with Saint John's and most other college campuses in the early 1970s, many of Saint Benedict's students and faculty protested the Vietnam War. The protests were moderate, avoiding classroom disruption and focusing on educational experience. Chaplains in campus ministry played a predominant role in encouraging student activism in social justice issues. For example, several students and faculty participated in the boycotts organized by Cesar Chavez, and some students spent January and the summer months working with Chavez in California.

Students today also enlist in programs of service to other students such as the Peer Resource Program, whose members do everything from running the challenge course in the woods at Saint John's to presenting January Term seminars on drug and alcohol abuse for the freshman class, and the Career Advisors, students who assist their peers with career exploration and choice. The orientation to service implied in such programs flows quite naturally from the religious values advocated by the colleges, but it has not come about accidentally. Professionally trained staff have been involved in planning ways to call students to personal responsibility for their actions and to reflect on their nonacademic experiences as part of the process of encouraging moral development. Some students build a portfolio which includes written reflection on their personal growth. Faculty, student development staff, and students are working together in a collaborative leadership project which has as one of its focuses examination of behaviors on campus which nurture ethical commitment to service and behaviors which act as obstacles to such commitment. One of the goals is to seek ways to shape the environment so as to enable everyone to become an ethical leader engaged in service to others.

Attention to community building leads to a spiritual outlook on the natural environment as well. The colleges are located in a relatively unspoiled small town, rural setting. Saint John's lies in a large tract of woods and lakes. The academic program in environmental studies grows out of the Christian belief that God is the ultimate creative energy in the universe and out of the Bene-

dictine ethos of responsible stewardship. Again, integration of academic and religious components is the guiding principle. Biology and chemistry, modeling in mathematics and computer science, politics and economics, theological and ethical reflection all have a part. As one faculty member remarks, "As searchers for God, we strive to hand on a lively sense of the presence of God in nature to our students."

Beyond the campuses the two colleges have made a commitment with others in the greater St. Cloud area to collaborate in building a multicultural community. Through a joint Office of Cultural Enrichment, the two colleges have played a role in establishing multicultural summits whose purpose is to promote community transformation through multiculturalism. Three multicultural summits have been held, the most recent in April 1995. In between these conferences, several working groups meet to draft action plans as agenda items for the summits. This process of partnerships building community is not perceived as a fad but rather as part of the colleges' continuing commitment to social justice, based on the principle of respect for every person.

In a separate area which also has implications for community, the colleges have faced the challenge of ensuring equal education for women in the coeducational classrooms that have resulted from the collaborative relationship. The women's movement has influenced many of the faculty from both colleges to study the role of women in history and culture. A minor in Gender and Women's Studies has been introduced to provide an inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary framework within which to explore the social construction of gender and sexuality. In addition to the study of gender, the coordinate faculty and student development staff are currently developing a multicultural framework for providing a study of the cultures of our nation and world.

Under the heading of community one can also look at the religious profile of the faculty as a whole. It has frequently been asserted that a Christian college can only retain its religious character by assuring that the majority of the faculty share the same religious commitment. As the colleges have increased in size, the proportion of Benedictines on the faculty has continued to decrease; they now constitute about one-fifth of the faculty and with few exceptions are concentrated in theology and the humanities. Neither college has sought to maintain a critical mass of Catholic faculty. Both have sought persons who support the spiritual dimension of their mission, and both have tried to find ways to assure that lay members of the faculty understand and appreciate the Benedictine heritage. For example, both Benedictine sisters and monks have invited the faculty to participate in a series of conversations on incorporating Benedictine values into the educational experience of students. A separate group of faculty members support a continuing conversation on spirituality.

To this point we have noted that the religious character of Saint John's University and the College of Saint Benedict has changed since the 1960s. We

have suggested that religion on campus today needs to be understood in the light of changes in the church since Vatican Council II and the social upheaval of the late 1960s. We have described a number of campus programs that take their inspiration from a sense of Christian community.

But statements of religious purpose and descriptions of programs that draw on a sense of community do not of course reveal how faculty and students view the relation of faith and learning on these two campuses. To learn how religion affects present-day faculty and students, the results of surveys conducted in February and March 1995 are instructive. One survey was addressed to the faculty; two-thirds of them responded. The other went to a statistically valid random sample of the senior class. What follows is a summary of main points.

We have already noted that the colleges do not have a policy of maintaining a critical mass of Catholic faculty. They do not in fact inquire about the religious affiliation of prospective faculty members except for positions in theology. The survey suggests that most faculty believe that this is the right approach and that it would be alien to the character of the colleges to require evidence of religious commitment from them. Yet eight out of ten indicate that they are Christian, the majority of them Catholic, and many of them, a good half, regard their religious beliefs as relevant to the way they teach.

From the students' point of view the faculty are good role models. There is large agreement on this point, and many students, well over half, say that some of their teachers have helped them appreciate their faith. Apparently this does not depend on knowing the religious affiliation of their teachers since almost all of the students say they do not know which of their teachers are Catholic.

On broad questions of ethical, moral, and religious values, faculty and students appear to be in accord. The faculty gives great importance to creating an atmosphere of open inquiry, discussion, and debate, and almost unanimously endorses this principle in regard to its own freedom in the classroom and in scholarly research, even if Christian and Catholic beliefs come into question as a result. Yet in almost equal numbers they endorse encouraging the students' moral development and sense of social responsibility. Not as many of them, although still a good two-thirds, regard it as important to encourage growth in faith.

A majority of the students in turn think that their college experience has strengthened their faith and that specifically they have grown in their knowledge of the gospel. That this is not an abstract knowledge appears from their very high rating of social responsibility and concern for human rights as practical applications of the gospel to life. On an even broader scale, two-thirds of them view the world as sacred because God created it and redeemed it. Quite consistently with this view, they see spiritual value in care for the natural

environment. Pressed further on their understanding of a Christian outlook on life, by more than two to one they reject the proposition that one's morality should be no concern of others as long as others are not harmed by one's conduct. Nine to one they reject the notion that the individual can do little to bring about social change. They appear to have a sense of community values and by about two to one credit the Benedictine environment on this score.

When it comes to theology and to religious practice, however, it is perhaps fair to say that both faculty and students are chary of requirements. By a large majority students reject the proposal that more than one theology course should be required. Many of them point to the religious value they found in the required course on Judeo-Christian heritage, and a majority say that the required Senior Seminar provided them with ethical guidance as it is intended to do.

The faculty, for their part, are about equally divided on whether growth in faith should be an objective of the academic program. About half favor requiring study of the Bible. Slightly more than half would approve a course in the Catholic intellectual tradition, not a current requirement. Slightly less than half approve presenting a Christian perspective in core courses other than theology. The number opposed or neutral on these questions is significant and perhaps surprising in view of the religious composition of the faculty. What is not surprising in light of this response is that about six out of ten faculty members would not lead their class in prayer or discuss their religious experience in class, even though they would do so with students outside of class.

As for churchgoing, the students are about equally divided on whether this is a regular student practice or not, and while a slight majority of faculty would encourage student participation in campus worship services, this number shrinks to about a third when the question is whether faculty should be given the same encouragement. Student response to another question perhaps sheds some light on the importance they do or do not see in liturgical worship. Queried about the pioneer role of St. John's in liturgical reform, the majority simply indicate unawareness. As to their actual practice, the same number say that they value the campus opportunity to take part in the Eucharist regularly, and a very large majority agree that students are encouraged to grow closer to God in prayer.

All in all, one has the impression of religion by osmosis rather than infusion. Faculty are for completely open inquiry and discussion but also for moral, ethical, and religious values. Over half of the students think that the colleges instill moral values by maintaining a Christian environment. Two-thirds of them think that they have learned about Benedictine values by associating with Benedictines. A sizable majority of them have taken part in volunteer service while in college and a sizable majority say that their college studies

have had an ecumenical effect, leading them to a greater appreciation of other religions. And in about the same proportions they are happy that during their four years here the colleges did not hassle them about religion!

If the composite picture that emerges from this review of faith and learning on the two campuses looks something like the mixture of faith and doubt, secular and sacred in society at large, that may be because open conversation is the paradigm for much of our pedagogy. A visitor from a distinguished New England college a few years ago noted here "the generosity of mind which can entertain any intellectual posture brought to a conversation for examination, exploration, evaluation."<sup>20</sup> The presence of the two monastic communities undoubtedly contributes to the conversation by providing both a sense of history and a contemplative background against which the complexities of individual experience and urgent contemporary issues can be viewed in a larger, longer perspective. The School of Theology at Saint John's, now made up principally of lay students, male and female, Catholic and Protestant, is a strongly Christian and ecumenical influence. So is the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, located at Saint John's but not a part of either college, yet a partner in the conversation which links the colleges and enriches both learning and faith.

The comments of some graduating seniors may provide a fitting conclusion. One says, "My work at St. John's and St. Ben's has strengthened my faith as a Lutheran, and enforced my decision to stay Lutheran." Another says, "I think faith is a personal thing and I believe St. John's and St. Ben's really encourage and offer programs to strengthen your faith, but don't insist and don't invade, which makes me very happy." A third comments, "[My education here] has helped me take a look at who I am and what I believe in. It gave me a chance to step away from the church and my going to church every week simply because that's what I did with my parents. Now I genuinely have developed my own faith. I can truly and proudly walk in the light of the Lord." A sobering comment comes from another student who to the question, How has your education here strengthened your faith? simply responds: "It hasn't."

In the midst of the hectic pace of campus life, administrators and faculty continue asking the question, "Are SJU and CSB becoming secular colleges?" — the title of a faculty panel in 1993. One panelist's response to that question resonated with many participants when he said, "Our colleges are not becoming more 'secular'; I am not afraid of the world or of the present age. The danger is more subtle and far more corrosive: the danger is that in our effort to take our place among our colleagues in academe, to keep up with the latest in higher education . . . we are starving our souls."<sup>21</sup>

20. Penny Gill, *A Sense of Place: Saint John's of Collegeville* (Collegeville: Saint John's University Press, 1987), p. 72.

21. Columba Stewart, O.S.B., associate professor of theology, November 18, 1993.

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This is not a new concern for any church-related college nor a concern likely ever to be ended. We continue to yearn for, and to work toward, the ideal described by that same panelist:

I see another kind of place, where the centrality of prayer is not proven by uniformity of rite but by privilege of opportunity. Where prayer itself is not measured by conformity to approved words but by reality of reflective experience whether explicitly directed to God or not. Where the Bible and liturgy at the heart of the Catholic tradition live at the center of the university in a way which neither judges nor excludes but simply is. . . . Where everyone has to reckon with traditions and experiences which assert that thinking is not enough to make us worthy of our humanity.

Throughout the history of our two Catholic colleges we have taken seriously our commitment to a liberal education which nurtures a fruitful dialogue between our faith and our culture. And we have maintained our commitment to remain authentic Catholic colleges, building a faith community dedicated to the search for truth, a respect for the dignity of all persons, and a love of God and one another. We continue, with hope and faith, on our journey to "another kind of place."