

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

Edited by Nicholas Ayo, Michael Crowe,

and Julia Marvin

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THE BEGINNING OF GREAT BOOKS IN THE CAVANAUGH YEARS

1946–1952

Nicholas Ayo, C.S.C.

The history of the Great Books program at the University of Notre Dame begins with a consensus All-American football player alongside of George Gipp in the era of Knute Rockne and a vice-president of the Studebaker automobile corporation in South Bend. They both graduated from Notre Dame in 1923, and they enjoyed a close friendship that would last a lifetime. Roger Kiley graduated from the law school, which then gave an undergraduate five-year LLB degree, and then went on to become a distinguished Appellate Judge in Chicago. John J. Cavanaugh left Studebaker and became a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross, serving as the fifteenth president of the University of Notre Dame in the post World War II years, 1946–1952. ^[1] He was succeeded by Theodore Hesburgh, his chosen executive vice-president, who would be president for thirty-five years, a time of enormous expansion for Notre Dame from a small Catholic college to a university of notable rank in the world.

Let us turn to the initial years of John Cavanaugh's presidency. The great war was over. The G.I. Bill of Rights brought numerous veterans to Notre Dame, and the future for the university was bright. The Law School under the deanship of Clarence Manion cherished the Thomistic tradition that civil law is properly based on natural law, which itself is based on God's eternal law. In the post-war world of the Nuremberg war-crime trials, the first Natural Law Institute was held at Notre Dame in 1947. Judge Roger Kiley came from Chicago to Notre Dame's Law School for several years on a part-time basis to conduct Great Books seminars, which he himself had experienced through the Great Books Foundation in Chicago. It was hoped the students would learn of natural law and of critical thinking, which would be encouraged by insightful group discussion. John Cavanaugh would lead with Kiley in seminar, following the pattern of St. John's College in Annapolis. Two tutors could better facilitate a Great Books seminar, because as one led the other could observe and evaluate the dynamics of the conversation. At first only select law students were enrolled in the Kiley-Cavanaugh seminar, but eventually all first and second year law students were required to take the Great Book seminars. The first Great Books program at Notre Dame was thus founded in the Law School during the presidency of John Cavanaugh. Theodore Hesburgh often took Cavanaugh's place in the seminar in the later years. When Hesburgh became president in 1952, he proved to be a patron and protector of Great Books education.

The story of the Great Books in the United States must also be told in brief as background to the coming of the Great Books to Notre Dame. Much credit for the Great Books movement belongs to John Erskine, a teacher of literature and humanities at Columbia University in New York City in the years following World War I. His departure from textbooks to original-source books of established merit and his espousal of the seminar discussion instead of teacher lecture sparked a revolution in American higher education. The newly founded University of Chicago, so ably led by the

innovative and brilliant presidency of Robert Hutchins, explored in the early thirties the pedagogy of the Great Books taught in seminar fashion as a model for liberal education. Hutchins was never able completely to persuade the distinguished faculty of the graduate departments at the University of Chicago that general education had a role to play perhaps more fundamental than specialized education. Rivalry among departments for faculty, students, and budget-share led to a severe modification of any Great Books agenda. In 1937 Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, who were collaborators with Hutchins, began a dedicated Great Books college at the then-failing St. John's College in Annapolis.

Mortimer Adler, by all counts the dean of the Great Books movement in America, stayed in Chicago with Hutchins. In collaboration with many supporters they formed the Great Books Foundation, an organization devoted to an adult education program in Great Books. Eventually there were Great Books seminar groups across the entire nation with membership in the many thousands and budget in the hundred thousands. That Great Books Foundation was widely advertised with the publication by the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of the multivolume *Great Books of the Western World* in the early fifties. Otto Bird was one of the collaborators in this endeavor with Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins, and he would come to Notre Dame to begin the Great Books program in 1950. At the close of World War II, the war to end all wars, the national hope was invested in a future without war. The Harvard report of 1945, "General Education for a Free Society," was one among many calls to a return to the basic principles of western civilization, a civilization seemingly unglued by two world wars of enormous barbarity back to back. The decade of the expansion of interest in the Great Books (1945–1955) took heart from this concern for a democratic society rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition of freedom of mind leading to freedom of the city. Not indoctrination, Great Books was all education. The content of the Great Books was pluralistic and covered all the great human questions and issues over the centuries from the beginnings of written literature. The seminar discussion method was radically egalitarian and not open to the power of a single authority to lead the group astray. Salvation lay in the pursuit of truth and in the trust of one another in community. When asked for a statement of the purpose of the Great Books movement, John Cavanaugh wrote "The Great Books that contain the great ideas are most helpful in any Twentieth Century attempt at liberal and general education, not only because they help lead minds to think, but also because they help lead minds to think about the basic aspects of the problems of the human community. Experience shows that liberal and general education for adults ordinarily can best be carried on with the aid of Great Books." ^[2] Even more apropos are the words of Robert Hutchins: "I believe that the University [of Chicago] and the Foundation [Great Books Foundation] have in the past six years demonstrated the tremendous possibilities of this type of education as a civilizing influence in the country, and as a force which may create an atmosphere in which the humanities and social sciences can thrive. I also attach great importance to the discussion method as essential to true education and as symbolizing the attitude which citizens of a democracy should take toward one another." ^[3]

During several years of his presidency, John Cavanaugh served on the Board of Directors of the Great Books Foundation in Chicago. As the Great Books movement spread

throughout the United States, concern was raised in Catholic parishes and dioceses about the wisdom of encouraging Catholics to read Great Books, so many of which were found in the Index of Forbidden Books. ^[4] Letters were written to John Cavanaugh in inquiry or in complaint that his name and position gave a dubious blessing to the Great Books, many of which, it was adjudged, were bad books. Better to read Catholic authors. Moreover, the seminar Socratic discussion method was without authority, without conviction, and without a knowledge of the truth. In short, the seminar method was agnostic and the medium was the message. Catholic education enjoyed an ancient tradition of reason and revelation, and it claimed to know the truth, in essence at least, and to have a divine mandate to teach the nations. When non-Catholic Great Books came to Notre Dame, the fear was that Notre Dame would become less Catholic. The issue became whether or not there could be a Catholic Great Books program. One Holy Cross priest at the university would share his concern with President Cavanaugh: “As Christians and as Catholics we have an intellectual position and a tradition—greatest in the world—which is not the intellectual position of American secular universities. Let's be ourselves.” ^[5] One should note that the huge contemporary issue in Catholic education concerning how to remain a Catholic university is but the extension of the same perennial questions raised by the Great Books in miniature. ^[6]

The survival of the young always seems precarious to me and even miraculous. Life is frail and fragile in its beginnings. The establishment of the Great Books Program at the University of Notre Dame is a story bordering on the unbelievable. In the initial years the Program, then called the General Program, lacked qualified students, faculty to implement its low teacher-to-student ratio, and money to carry it through its early years. The General Program was neither well understood nor well appreciated in the university at large. Great Books had reason enough to fold at its start. Add to that the criticism generated against the Program by critics inside and outside the university who felt a Great Books education was not Catholic as it purported to be in its teaching of philosophy and its commitment to theology. That the Great Books survived its birth and early years depended entirely on the initiative of President John J. Cavanaugh. He alone was able to protect the Program. He believed in Great Books because of his experience in teaching and attending Great Books seminars both in Chicago and at Notre Dame. What the President truly wanted, the President was ready to achieve, whatever the obstacles. John Cavanaugh wanted Great Books education, and he remains surely its founder at the University of Notre Dame.

Footnotes

^[1]John J. Cavanaugh is to be distinguished from John W. Cavanaugh, the ninth president of the university. John Cavanaugh worked for Studebaker scarcely two years. He was assistant manager of advertising, and when the vice-president of advertising died on the road with a crucial advertising campaign for a new car model, John Cavanaugh became acting vice-president.

^[2]Quoted in a letter from John Cavanaugh to the Great Books Foundation in Chicago, July 30, 1949, Archives of the University of Notre Dame — Box 5, Folder 9.

^[3]Letter from Wilbur C. Munnecke, president of the Great Books Foundation, to John Cavanaugh, December 12, 1949. Cavanaugh Letter Files in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame — Box 5, Folder 9.

^[4]When I was student at Notre Dame, the books on the Index were locked in a metal grill enclosure. Only with the President's permission (itself delegated to him from the bishop of the diocese) could a student read a book on the Index of Forbidden Books. One should remember, however, that the Index was both well intentioned and not without some justification. Uneducated persons, whether children or adults, need guidance in their exposure to thought that they are not prepared to evaluate. One might dispute, of course, what “uneducated” entails.

^[5] Letter from Thomas Joseph Brennan, C.S.C. to John Cavanaugh, July 16, 1951. Archives of the University of Notre Dame — Box 5, Folder 7.

^[6] The cry raised by John Tracy Ellis and others, “where are the Catholic intellectuals,” brought inspiration and motivation for the development of Catholic scholars deserving recognition in the academic world and the country at large. This encouragement was felt at Notre Dame in particular.

THE GENERAL PROGRAM

1950–1963

Otto Bird

The fall semester of 1950 witnessed the presence of a new program in the College of Arts & Letters entitled the General Program of Liberal Education. It opened with a faculty of five, forty-nine students, and an extensive list of Great Books of the Western World.

It was a new and different program of studies from any that had been followed at Notre Dame. It demanded the full time of all its students for the four years of their undergraduate life. It included an integrated plan of studies in all the basic subject matters: the linguistic arts in English, Latin, and French; mathematics; biological and physical science, philosophy; and systematic theology. However, the most distinctive feature was the Great Books Seminar, a discussion course based on an extensive reading of the Great Books and meeting a double period each week for four years to discover and analyze what they have to contribute to understanding the great ideas of our culture.

The primary aim of the program was to develop in its students and perfect in its faculty the arts and skills of the general intelligence—what Aristotle calls *paideia*—as distinct from a specialized knowledge of a particular subject-matter. In short, to concentrate above all upon the Liberal Arts of Words and Numbers.

Its theoretical orientation was to cultivate the whole of the Western Tradition from the ancient Greeks to the present according to the philosophical and theological principles of St. Thomas Aquinas. That position was the commitment of its faculty and indeed at that time the basic requirement of any Catholic university.

The program was intentionally set up as a pilot program to help chart a course for the future of the college. It may also have been the hope of its founder Father John Cavanaugh, that it would eventually be adopted for the whole college. That was not to be, nor was I ever so sanguine that it would. However, of the many splendid accomplishments of Father Cavanaugh, I believe he was proudest of the General Program.

Over and beyond the fine achievements of its faculty and students, it came to have a salutary influence upon the teaching in the rest of the college. Of these there are especially three respects that can be singled out.

First, it improved the selection of texts basic in the study of a subject matter. In 1950 it was the usual practice to use a textbook written by professors who presented a canned version of their understanding to be digested by the students. It was the professors, not the students, who read the great original sources of our knowledge. But with the coming of the General Program, beginning with the Freshmen, students as well as faculty became immersed in Great Books.

The second influence exerted by the General Program lay in promoting as a basic method of teaching discussion among students and faculty. Until that time, practically the only method of teaching was the lecture by the professor delivered to the students as so many patients. With discussion, the student in class is encouraged and incited to think for himself, to speak his mind, and to argue with other interpretations. The success of the General Program in this respect was marked in the fall of 1956 with the establishment of the Collegiate Seminar as a requirement for all students in the college.

In 1950 the university had virtually no policy of inviting specialists from the outside to present an occasional lecture. Because of that lack, the General Program in its beginning years had a weekly lecture series in which a speaker prominent in his field and often from outside Notre Dame was invited to speak upon a topic of interest. After a few years the university itself had established such an extensive special lecture series that there was no need for us to sponsor our own series.

We can now turn to consider what went on within the General Program from 1950 through the spring of 1963 when Professor Crosson took over as director, and I went on a leave of absence that lasted except for an occasional course until 1970.

A program such as ours consists of three elements: faculty, students, and a course of studies. Of these three I shall say little about either faculty or students. Instead, I will direct attention to the course of studies and especially to the principal changes in it.

Of all the changes that occurred from 1950–63, the most momentous, far reaching, and radical came in 1954. In 1952 Father Cavanaugh stepped down from the presidency of Notre Dame because the “Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross” allowed the religious superior (then also the President of the university) a term of only six years. Father Hesburgh then assumed the office of president, and for the next two years he deliberated with his advisers on the course the university should follow. One result was the establishment of a common year of studies for all freshmen entering the College. That year had to include courses in English, natural science, foreign language, and religion. In September of 1954 all freshmen embarked upon that common year. In short, there were no Freshmen entering into the General Program. Even shorter, the GP no longer possessed a Freshman year. It had been reduced to a three-year program. Consequently, the only students to complete all four years as planned for the original program were the members of the classes of 1954, 55, 56, and 57.

What then were the consequences for that loss and the reduction from a four to a three years program? In one respect it might be said that the most serious struck at the very heart of the program as originally conceived: that of establishing a tight learning community, something approaching a college within a college. The most intense learning communities are to be found in the professional training of a lawyer, a doctor, or a priest. For there, at least during the beginning years, all students are following, and all faculty have followed, the same course of studies. They are as it were, all together in one and the same boat of learning.

After the common freshman year, the General Program could no longer achieve such an ideal. For entering the GP after that freshman year, they entered as a diversity, a multiversity, since they came bearing different sciences, different foreign languages, even different courses in English.

The loss of freshman year reduced the General Program courses taught in both the first and the second year, including the language tutorials in English, Latin, and French; two years of mathematics; natural science, the philosophy of nature, and the Bible, as well as the many books read and discussed in the first year seminar.

For the cause of learning, however, not all could be counted as a loss. There were gains, particularly in the fields of natural science and of foreign language. We had only three years to attempt biology and then physics by means of the Great Books and their famous experiments. And not much good was accomplished. The difficulty was primarily one of staffing. It was awfully difficult to find scientists able and willing to teach their subject by means of the books at the source of their science. We were able to attract a biologist and a chemist who were willing to make the attempt. But the results did not amount to much. Indeed, the solution to the problem was not achieved until Michael Crowe of the class of 1958 returned to establish his program after taking a doctorate in the history of science.

For the learning of a modern foreign language, if success is to be measured by securing a command of the language, there is no doubt that the best method is to live and study for a time where the language enjoys its natural habitat. For that reason John Stuart Mill considered it a waste of time to teach in college a modern foreign language. Notre Dame now recognizes that fact to the extent that it sponsors a Year Abroad program.

The reduction of 1954 also allowed students the opportunity to follow an elective course outside the program. That choice became a common feature in the third and fourth years. It thus became possible for a student to accumulate a major concentration in a particular subject if he correlated it with a subject pursued within the program. Many students took advantage of this option.

I would like now to consider what seem to be certain emphases and strengths that the Program had during the years 1950–63. Most of them were in philosophy or closely connected with it.

The courses in language and logic concerned the nature and kinds of signs, of their functioning in the diverse uses of language, and of the arts required for their use as at work in selected readings from ancient and modern texts. This led to a study of mathematical logic for the analysis of the relations between propositions, predicates, and classes.

The tutorial in methodology offered a study of the theory and practice of argument in science: the methods of hypothesis, deduction, induction, and their synthesis in theory-construction. Methodology as a theory was studied mainly through texts of Aristotle,

Mill, Peirce, and Russell. Original texts of scientists were then examined for the methods they employed and their use or argument.

Closely allied to this was the tutorial in the philosophy of science, which consisted in the study of the idea of science, particularly in its relation to philosophy, as expounded in the writings of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Kant, and Whitehead.

In the beginning, history as such had no place of its own in the program. It was assumed that by reading the books in chronological order, not only in the seminars but in the tutorials as well, the students could not help but absorb a sense of historical order. But, unfortunately, that turned out to be an illusion. Chronologically, in practice the students would tend to assume that World War II was just as ancient as the Peloponnesian War 2500 years before. To overcome that illusion a lecture in historical orientation was introduced to accompany the seminar readings and indicate their place in history.

In those early years a great deal of time and attention was given to reading and discussing the writings of the philosophers, ancient, medieval, and modern. We read together far more of Plato and Aristotle, for example, than any other students or professors in the university. In fact, the program was at least in quantity much grander than that offered in the Philosophy Dept. Not that it lacked or skimmed in quality, as testified by the fact that General Program students won the prize for the best essay offered by the philosophy department—one, as I recall, on Plato's *Statesman*, the other on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. And that, I should point out was before the General Program offered its own prize essay awards.

The Great Books of the western world lay at the very heart of the program. At the time of its beginning they were not only known but even enjoyed considerable popularity. Great Books discussion groups had arisen across the county under the sponsorship of the local libraries. The books even became a commercial success upon the publication by *Encyclopedia Britannica* of its 54-volume set. And it is certainly no idle boast to claim that they also lie behind the success of our program.

Yet today in many schools and colleges they no longer enjoy that high esteem. It is maintained that the Great Books, especially those of the western tradition, are bound ineradicably to the language and culture of their origin and for the most part are nothing but the expression of the prejudices of their white male authors. Such a charge is silly and utterly false, based as it is upon a failure to make distinctions.

There are many different kinds of books, and since they differ, not all of them are related in the same way to the culture in which they originated. Books of science, mathematics, and logic give expression to truths that are world-wide in their scope and not at all bound only to the West, and they are so received, studied, and understood throughout the world.

The charge of being tied to their culture is somewhat more true of works in philosophy, especially those in moral and political philosophy. Even here, however, the relativity is far from absolute, since there are goods that are universal, such as happiness, which all

human beings seek, however they define it, and towards which everything else they do or acquire is acknowledged to be a means.

The reading and judgment of imaginative literature is the one that is most closely bound to its culture. This is so mainly because of its close dependence upon the language in which it was written. It is difficult indeed to appreciate the beauty and greatness of Virgil's *Georgics* when it is read in translation and not the original Latin. This is less so of the dramas of Shakespeare and Racine, since the characters, situations, actions, and speeches in them can evoke more or less comparable responses whether read in translation or not, even though something is always lost in translation of works of poetry. Yet whether it is read in the original or in translation, one work may be better than another because it meets more fully the form that it expresses and its conventions. Thus the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Faust* were each written in a different language and are great as an expression of that language, but more importantly, each is also great as a poetic structure of the epic.

Thus the charge made against the Great Books of being completely dependent upon and relative to the culture and language of their origin is both futile and false. In fact, we have proof of the very opposite. For fifty years now our Program has provided living proof of not only the validity but also of the great beneficial value of teaching and learning from and in and through the Great Books in pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

NOTE: For further reflections by Otto Bird on the early history of the Program, see the Appendix, which contains a selection from his autobiography.

GENERAL PROGRAM OF LIBERAL STUDIES

1964–1967

Frederick Crosson

The year 1963–64 was the last year of Otto Bird's tenure as Director of the Program of Liberal Studies (the name had been changed in the early 1980s from the original "General Program of Liberal Education"). The change when I became director was a little like someone (anybody know his name?) succeeding Father Sorin as President of the University of Notre Dame. Professor Bird had been Director for fourteen years, since 1950–51, the year of the founding of the Program. (A sign of the difference of the Program within the College was that its Chair, as we call its leader today, was called the Director, while the leader of a regular department was called the Head of the department.) Under his leadership, the Program had survived its infancy and attained a flourishing adolescence, an established place in the College of Arts and Letters. It had influenced the College as a whole, for example in the establishing of the Collegiate Seminar in 1955—a two semester Great Books course (the forerunner of the present Core Course) required of all juniors in the College, except those in the General Program. In fact the Program's faculty provided the Directors of the Collegiate Seminar for the first ten years of its life (namely Professors Bird and Crosson), as well as providing teachers for many years.

Of course the Program was also affected in important ways by its environment, by changes in the academic programs of the College and the University. One of the most significant of those changes had occurred in 1954, when a new common set of freshman course requirements was instituted. Few if any other departments in the University were affected by that change more than the Program, because it was not only a four-year course of studies but one in which 85% of the required courses were taught within the Program. So for example, as a consequence of the establishment of these common requirements, the Program no longer taught its own courses in foreign languages (Latin and French) but its students had to take a language course offered by the Romance Language Department.

But the Program continued, in the years of 1964–67, to enjoy the strong support of the Dean of the College and of the President of the University, the latter of whom commented that he thought the Program was the best major in the University. And it enjoyed the interest of enough students (54 signed up in 1966) to insure its stability and position in the College. In retrospect, the reduction to three years was not without its compensations: for example, freshmen could learn of the Program while in residence, could talk to its students and its professors, and have a better sense of whether it was for them than when they had to make that decision from home before coming to the University. The set of requirements common for freshmen in the various colleges was formalized and restructured in 1962 with the establishment of a Freshman Year of Studies, with its own Dean and staff. Henceforth all students, whatever their ultimate intended major, were accepted into the Freshman Year rather than as heretofore into the various colleges.

This is one small aspect of what is on the whole, I believe, one of the strengths of the Program as compared with stand-alone Great Books colleges like St. John's or Thomas Aquinas, namely, that we are located within a university. That situation provides a larger academic community with which to discourse, the possibility for our students to pursue specific interests in other departments, and of course all the resources of a university's cultural programs, its larger library, etc.,

Curriculum

In those years, after the Freshman Year of Studies was established, the three-year Program curriculum consisted of twenty-eight courses (counting two courses in French), and those included only four elective slots, while twenty-six of the courses were required. Compare that with today, when only twenty courses are required of a Program major, plus ten electives. ("Only" twenty courses refers to comparing today's curriculum to those days, rather than comparing it to other majors today in the College, most of which require only eight courses to satisfy the requirements for the major.)

One reason for the larger number of required courses is that the Program's organization of studies is not aimed at developing the skills of a specialized discipline, like economics or psychology. Rather its aim is comprehensive: to acquire a sense of what Newman called "philosophy," which is not something to be learned as the subject matter of a course but to be acquired instead through reflection on and appreciation of the different perspectives embodied in the disciplines of understanding, and in their greatest exemplars, the "Great Books." Nor is the Program an "interdepartmental" or "interdisciplinary" program: it is a unified program, having its own faculty and integrated with respect to both its content and its pedagogy. Those qualities require the study of a wide range of subject matters, of ways of knowing and of students and faculty committed to a different path of liberal education.

How was the curriculum of the Program different then from that of today? One difference is in the Seminar. Not only do we now read fewer books, but the sequence is different. In the period before the institution of a common set of requirements for freshmen, when there were four years of seminars, the chronological sequence went through two cycles: the first two years began with the Greeks and came up to the twentieth century, and then the junior and senior seminars repeated that cycle, beginning with Greeks and ending with moderns.

When the first year had to be dropped, the two cycles were retained, and in the period we are discussing the now-first sophomore seminar began with Greeks and ended with moderns, and then the junior and senior seminars together repeated that chronological cycle. In the summer of 1967, the faculty in residence came together for eight meetings to review the Program and propose changes; one of these was to do a Greek-to-modern cycle in each of the three seminars, and this was implemented in 1968–69. (Another topic was a more descriptive name for the Program, but no decision was reached.) But in later years, it was decided to follow the St. John's model and do all of the seminar readings in one (basically) chronological sequence. (Personally I still think there are educational

advantages in visiting the ancients a second time after you've read more widely and grown a bit more thoughtful.)

The tutorials are fewer today, as mentioned. Then there were four courses in literature (poetry, drama, novel, literary criticism) instead of two, three courses in theology instead of two, and four courses in science (three history, one philosophy of science) instead of three, and two courses in French were required, whereas now students are expected to have completed a language requirement in the First Year of Studies or to use elective slots for that purpose. (The French courses were five credits each, which accounts for the total number of courses for the three years being twenty-eight, instead of the present thirty.) Philosophy has the same number of courses (four), but some of them have changed: a course in logic was dropped (partially absorbed into the sophomore Philosophical Inquiry course) and a course in Ethics added (which used to be a theology course on Ethics and Moral Theology).

Two courses now required had their beginnings in the years 1964–67. One is the Essay Tutorial in the senior year. The writing of a senior essay has been required since the beginning, but for years it was incorporated into the last senior seminar, by devoting one-third of the classes in that seminar to meetings on the students' progress in writing their essays. In order to recoup some of the lost seminar readings and to provide more focused direction of the writing of the essay, in 1966–67 a separate one-credit senior essay course was instituted, which later became the present three-credit course. The second new course, also planned in the summer meetings of 1967, was a one-credit course in the history of art and music. Like the senior essay course, this later became the three credit course now required of all students.

Finally, several other courses were discussed at those summer meetings that did not win acceptance. One was a course in probability and statistics, to replace the logic course, and the other was a course on the socio-economic aspects of American society.

Faculty

The faculty of the Program, like most departments, consisted of a core of teachers who remained with it after their initial appointment, a number who left for one reason or another, and a roster of newer teachers who replaced the latter. Of the original founding faculty, only Edward Cronin remained as a full-time teacher. Willis Nutting was emeritus (although he still did some teaching), Otto Bird was on extended leave in Chicago to edit the *Great Ideas Today* annual volumes, and Richard Thompson had become Assistant Dean of the College. Of senior faculty members appointed in the fifties, there was Frederick Crosson (appointed in 1953). Other senior faculty, John Logan, Journet Kahn, and Frank Keegan, and C.S.C. priests Thomas Brennan and Roman Ladewski, had departed.

Of junior teachers (meaning here appointed in the sixties but not yet tenured in 1964–67) only Michael Crowe is still on the faculty. Others from those days, now departed or

deceased, included Stephen Rogers, Ivo Thomas, John Meagher, John Canty, Irving Carrig, and William Hegge, O.S.C.

One other junior teacher deserves special mention because she was, to the best of my knowledge, the first woman appointed to the faculty of the University of Notre Dame. Sr. Suzanne Kelly, O.S.B. (now deceased) had a doctorate in the history of science from the University of Oklahoma. Notre Dame's undergraduate colleges were then all male—it would be seven years after her appointment in 1965 before Notre Dame became co-educational. But it seemed to us that it would be good for our students to have a capable woman professor, so we pushed hard all the way up to the President's office with our arguments—and we finally won.

The “teaching load” then for regular faculty was three courses (it's now two), and many of the Program faculty because of their academic specialties taught courses (mainly graduate) outside the Program at the request of other departments. So Program faculty taught in the departments of History, Theology, Philosophy, and in the Medieval Institute during 1964–67. This practice, of course, remains to this day.

Students

Students go through their four years, graduate, and pass on. The University—and the Program—remain. But one of the remarkable things about the Program is the sense of community, a community of learning together, that its students acquire while they are here. Nor does that sense vanish upon graduation. In no other program in the University do its graduates retain such a sense of having belonged—and of belonging—to that community of learners, a community that includes their relations to faculty members.

In 1966, a questionnaire was sent out to graduates of the Program. Over 95% of them strongly affirmed that they would follow the same program if they had it to do over. It's not possible to summarize the lengthy form, but here are a few interesting and/or amusing snapshots, based on what a majority or plurality voted for:

—increased emphasis on Eastern Studies (at that time we had no Eastern texts)

—no interest in courses in computer science (some did approve)

—more emphasis on the contemporary period

—the “least valuable” seminar reading: Spinoza's *Ethics*

—the “most valuable” spread over two dozen works

—retain the senior essay—by a vote of 97% (probably would have been less if the vote were taken in senior year)

If I may end with a personal note: after serving as Director for these three years, I won a fellowship to do research and writing in 1967–68 and asked Michael Crowe to serve as acting director until my return, to which he graciously agreed. Little did I know that, like Odysseus going off to Troy, I would be gone for a long time. When I returned in the fall of 1968, it was to become Dean of the College, and when I finished that stint in 1976, the Provost asked me to move to the Philosophy Department because of concerns he had about the Catholic character of the University.

Only in 1984, some sixteen years later, did the occasion arise for my homecoming—like Odysseus returning to Ithaca. I have been at home ever since.

THE PROGRAM OF LIBERAL STUDIES

1967–1973

Michael J. Crowe

Some Background ^[1]

I received a severe shock in the spring of 1967. I had graduated from PLS in 1958, joined the PLS faculty in 1961, and in 1967 was an untenured faculty member with four children under nine, who was hoping that someday the department chair and university might grant me tenure. The shock occurred when the department chair, Fred Crosson, told me that he would be going on leave for a year and asked me to serve as acting chair during his absence. This was a pleasant shock, but a shock nonetheless. Another shock followed. During my year as acting chair, after Fred was named Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, I was chosen to succeed him as chair of the department, serving in that office until 1973.

To understand the opportunities and challenges PLS faced during those years, it is important to put the period in historical perspective in regard to the international political scene, the national educational milieu, and changes at Notre Dame. This was the period of the Vietnam War, with all that this entailed. The war situation pressed male students to decide whether they would serve if drafted, to postpone in many cases their plans for law or graduate school, and led many young people to question the legitimacy of our national government and in some cases of authority in general. We were all saddened by the report of a PLS graduate missing in action and of another suffering injuries that confined him to a wheelchair. And many undergraduates were torn by issues of the morality of war in general or of the Vietnam war in particular. Radical groups arose in every major university, with sit-ins, demonstrations, and even more confrontational actions being regularly reported.

On the national educational scene, the key word was “relevance.” American college students, perhaps more than ever before or after, felt the need that their education be relevant. Moreover, and more directly related to PLS, experimental colleges (within larger universities) arose with increasing frequency and disbanded or collapsed with almost equal rapidity. This period was a watershed at many universities and colleges, Notre Dame among them, in regard to required courses. My recollection is that at least for Notre Dame's College of Arts and Letters, the previous four-course requirements in philosophy, theology, and English were all reduced by half. In the more than four decades that I have been involved in university life, this period seems to have involved the most extensive changes.

Notre Dame reflected and reacted to all these developments and also underwent some major internal changes as well. Four of these come vividly to mind.

(1) *Increasing Emphasis on Research.* Expectations regarding Notre Dame's research productivity seem to have increased throughout the university's history. During the late 1960s, this took the form of the administration's conscious adoption of the concept of a "model department" for judging the various departments of the university. This model implied that each department ought to have a certain portion of its resources, e.g., teaching and funds, committed to undergraduates, and another portion committed to graduate training. By the early 1970s, this concept gave way to the notion of a departmental quota for tenuring; in particular, the expectation was that no department should have more than two-thirds of its faculty tenured. Much of the motivation for this latter strategy seems to have come from the second form of change that Notre Dame underwent during this period.

2) *Increased Democratization of University Governance.* The late 1960s saw the creation not only of Notre Dame's Faculty Senate, but also of the first departmental appointments and promotions committees, hiring, promotion, and termination having up to then been the responsibility of the department head (not chair) in conjunction with the deans and higher administration. At first such committees seem to have been reluctant to take responsibility for terminating colleagues, leaving those decisions to the administration. Being faced with quotas put increased pressure on us to make decisions based on the long-range needs of the department.

3) *Decision to Become Coeducational.* For Notre Dame's first dozen decades, all undergraduates were men. In the late 1960s, a decision was made for the university to become coeducational, but for a few years it was unclear how this would be accomplished. At first, it seemed that this would be brought about by merging with St. Mary's College. Departmental records from this period show many discussions of what this would entail for PLS; in particular, it seemed to entail that we would merge with St. Mary's Humanistic Studies program. Eventually, St. Mary's College declined the chance to merge, which led Notre Dame to begin accepting women undergraduates. In 1972, Mary Celeste Amato (who had transferred from St. Mary's) became the first woman to graduate with a PLS degree.

4) *Extensive Discussion of the Religious Aspects of University Life.* During the 1967–73, Catholics everywhere were concerned about implementing the directives that had emerged from the Second Vatican Council. But it was far from clear how this should be done. In fact, many Catholics had become confused by the questioning of many aspects of Catholicism that for some years had been taken for granted and by the large number of clerics leaving religious life. Moreover, the commitment to raising the research productivity of the faculty seemed to imply that the religious concerns of a person considered for hiring should be given diminished attention.

PLS and Its Image

In 1967, as the Program of Liberal Studies completed its seventeenth year, its status at Notre Dame remained somewhat anomalous. In most ways, it functioned like other departments and had its own faculty, budget, and requirements, but it was called a

program rather than a department, had goals somewhat different from the specialized departments, employed significantly different teaching methods (greater emphasis on discussion, less on lecture), and at least by 1973 differed in important ways from most other departments in terms of the content of its courses. The last point is especially significant in that whereas the course content for most departments in 1973 had changed very substantially from what it had been fifteen years earlier, the course content for PLS had remained for the most part the same. For example, probably seventy-five percent or more of the books in the seminars from the 1950s were still read.

Footnotes

^[1] The chief source of the information contained in this essay consists of the Annual Reports that I submitted each summer during the six years I served as chair.

Another major difference between most departments and PLS is that departments had the security that universities almost never drop departments, whereas programs are seen as expendable. I had heard stories that in the first decade or so of the Program, whenever the dean requested a meeting, the faculty feared that PLS was about to be terminated. The achievements of the Program had by the late 1960s led to a lessening of that fear, and within that context, the appointment of Fred Crosson as Dean of the College of Arts and Letters gave us all a welcome sense of security.

During the 1967–73 period, the image of the Program seems to have shifted significantly. During its first decade and a half, PLS was seen as a rather radical program. Perhaps around 1970 or so, as other departments adopted new materials and methods, we came to be perceived as more closely associated with tradition. During that period, we were sometimes confused with the experimental colleges that were springing up on many campuses, sometimes faulted for not conforming to the format of such colleges, and sometimes visited by experimental college faculties trying to define their goals! Something of the image of the Program is indicated by the accompanying advertisement for PLS created (unbeknownst to the departmental chair) by various students and published in the *Scholastic* in 1968. As many graduates know, that advertisement was resurrected in the 1990s and is currently featured on the PLS t-shirt.

The PLS Faculty

In 1967, the PLS faculty consisted of twelve individuals, although only nine were actively teaching in the Program. The three not active that year were Fred Crosson, who was on leave and who, as mentioned before, became Dean in 1968, Otto Bird, who was also on extended leave, and Richard Thompson, who had become Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. All three now and then over the next six years taught a course, but their role was far smaller than it had been earlier. Of our nine full time

faculty, only Ed Cronin, one of the founding fathers, was tenured. The other eight faculty were Irving Carrig, who in 1968 took a position at Loyola in Chicago, Suzanne Kelly, who in 1971 departed to Carroll College in Montana, John Lyon, then in his first year in PLS, Willis Nutting, who had become emeritus (retired) in 1965 but continued to teach full time until 1970 and even somewhat beyond that time but on an unpaid basis, Stephen Rogers, who had joined the faculty in 1961 and continued to teach in the Program until his death in 1985, Ivo Thomas, who joined our faculty around 1962 as a visiting faculty member and who taught with us and for the Collegiate Seminar until his death in 1976, and Robert Turley, who in 1970 joined the philosophy faculty at Fordham.

Leaving aside persons who came as visitors for only a year, other members of our faculty during the 1967–73 period include Walter Nicgorski, who came to us in 1969 from Notre Dame's government department and has now completed thirty years on our faculty, Brother Edmund Hunt, C.S.C., who joined us in 1968 and taught with us until his retirement in 1974, Deirdre La Porte, Harold Moore, Kenneth Thibodeau, and Jill Whitney, all of whom moved on after teaching with us three or four years. The last faculty member added to the PLS staff during my years as chair was Katherine Tillman, who in 1998 received her pin for twenty-five years of service.

Curricular and Other Changes during the 1967–73 Period

Although, as already noted, the PLS curriculum has remained relatively close to its original design, some changes have emerged. Among those that came into existence or fruition during the 1967–73 period, the following four seem most noteworthy.

1. *Introduction of the Fine Arts Component.* During the 1967–68 academic year, the PLS faculty decided that it should find a place in our curriculum for the fine arts. This was not an easy commitment to implement because none of our faculty at that time possessed expertise in that area. Consequently, for a time we borrowed faculty from the departments of music and art to give a sequence of four one-credit courses. A much more successful approach became possible after 1968 when Brother Edmund Hunt joined our faculty and began teaching a well-received fine arts course focusing on the visual arts but giving some attention to music. He taught this course until he retired in 1974, at which time PLS hired a faculty member specializing in musicology.

2. *Introduction of Readings from Oriental Authors.* The original Great Books movement, for example, as embodied at St. John's College or the Britannica's *Great Books* set, gave essentially no attention to works by Eastern authors. Three justifications for this were evident to us: the complexity of such works, the lack of faculty with training in Eastern cultures or languages, and the need to give adequate attention to the multiplicity of Western authors. By the late 1960s, our faculty had resolved to introduce some Eastern classics into our seminars. The leader of these efforts was John Lyon. To prepare faculty for teaching these works, we organized, over a four-year period, four week-long faculty seminars led by outstanding experts from outside Notre Dame. The experts and their topics for each year were:

1970 Phillip Ashby (Princeton University): India

1971 William T. de Bary (Columbia University): China

1972 Joseph Kitagawa (University of Chicago): Japan

1973 Fazlur Rahman (University of Chicago): Islam

The patience and enthusiasm shown by PLS faculty during this process of retraining were highly commendable.

3. *Student Advisory Board.* In 1971, at the suggestion of PLS student Dan Moore, I tried the experiment of forming a small group of PLS seniors who served as an advisory board for the chair. This proved very fruitful and has continued (now in somewhat altered form) to be a distinctive feature of PLS.

4. *Creation of the Graduate Program in History and Philosophy of Science.* Various reasons, not least the university's adoption of the "model department" concept, led Fred Crosson in 1966–67 to discuss the possibility of creating a master's program that would be associated with PLS and give the historians of science on its faculty a chance to teach advanced courses in their specialty, an opportunity already available, at least in principle and frequently in practice, to most of our other faculty. The task of implementing this fell to me. The program thus created attracted some exceptionally talented students and in a substantially altered form continues into the present.

Two other alterations that occurred during this period are less tangible but seem well worth noting. Gradually, many PLS faculty came to think more about the need to carry out publishable research. This does not seem to have entailed a decrease in the effectiveness of teaching; at least, teacher course evaluation scores for PLS courses continued to remain well above the college average. Another change, resulting partly from information gathered from questionnaires distributed to earlier graduates of the Program, was that greater attention was given to history, which is the one of the areas of liberal learning that is sometimes neglected in Great Books programs.

Size of the Student Body and Faculty

Our faculty during the 1967–73 had substantial grounds for worrying about enrollment. The cry of relevance, so often heard in universities during that period, could send shudders through professors concerned to introduce students to books written frequently centuries and sometimes millennia ago. Moreover, the competition created by Notre Dame's new American Studies major and the revitalization in the same period of the undergraduate programs in philosophy and in classics were also causes for concern. Nonetheless, PLS enrollment increased significantly. Whereas the average graduating class for the years 1962 to 1967 was 26.5, for the period from 1968 to 1973 it rose to 33, with the 46 students graduating in 1973 surpassing by 10 the previous record. Overall enrollment for 1972–73 was 143, also a record number, even at a time when the

enrollment in the College of Arts and Letters was decreasing. This increased enrollment and involvement in such matters as the graduate program in history and philosophy of science also led to an increase in the size of our faculty from nine full-time members in 1967 to eleven in 1973.

Conclusion

Two final comments:

(1) Not long after I became chair, our faculty had an evening seminar in which each person, as I recall, was invited to share some writing on educational philosophy by a favorite author. My contribution consisted of distributing photocopies of materials by my two predecessors in the chair, Otto Bird and Fred Crosson, and a section of Willis Nutting's *Free City*. This was my way of expressing what I took to be a central concern of my work as chair, to keep alive the visions of three of our founding fathers, all of whom had been my teachers.

(2) In reflecting on the materials presented in this sketch of the 1967–73 period in the history of PLS, I am struck by one contrast and one comparison with the present. Probably the greatest contrast is that when I became department chair, we had nine full time faculty, only *one* of whom was tenured. Now we have fifteen full-time faculty, *ten* of whom are tenured. If this is the most striking contrast, the most noteworthy similarity is that our curriculum has changed less in essentials than that of any other major in the College of Arts and Letters. This seems to be to be strong evidence of the viability of that curriculum, of the vision of our founders, and of the dedication of the faculty and students who for fifty years have shared in the exciting experience of learning in the Program of Liberal Studies.

GENERAL PROGRAM—PROGRAM OF LIBERAL STUDIES

1973–1979

John Lyon

The recurrent issues that provided intellectual and spiritual nourishment—and often indigestion—during the years of my chairmanship (1973–1979) provide a convenient frame on which to weave the fabric of life in the Program. At memory's prompting, then, distant on this northern sea and half a life apart from my coming to teach in the Program, I shall try to suggest the issues which gave partial definition to our common work.

Let us start with the most recurrent but perhaps least disruptive controversy. There seemed to be interminable arguments, in and out of faculty meetings, about books to be added to or withdrawn from the seminar lists. We tried to establish principles by which the process might be facilitated, and over the years came to establish a Committee on the Course of Studies, which did much of the sorting and arranging prior to full faculty discussion. ^[1] We tried to make it difficult for certain contemporary cultural factors to be determinative of a text's inclusion in or exclusion from the seminar lists: neither faculty or student dislike of a text, for instance, nor the text's apparent opaqueness, nor the race, class, sex, religion, or orientation toward avocados of the author would assure a text's selection or rejection.

Then there was the incessant tension arising from the necessity of fitting the Program of Liberal Studies into what at times seemed to be the Procrustean bed of the University. Our emphasis on teaching generally seemed to be too long, our publication record too short. The disparity between the Program's emphasis on teaching and the trajectory of the University as it aimed at research pre-eminence meant, e.g., constant concern in hiring and promoting faculty. What was the likelihood that so-and-so, after meeting our standards, would be tenurable at the University? Should the likelihood of tenure by the University standards trump other hiring and promotional considerations? ^[2] The higher administrative echelons of the University seemed favorable to the form of education the PLS offered. But, as we labored amidst the papyrus, we worried about dynastic change, and what would happen should a Pharaoh arise who knew not Joseph.

For much of the time prior to 1975 the fine arts component seemed to be the Cinderella of the Program, ashly ensconced in the inglenook of the course of studies. A report of a faculty committee made in May 1975 suggested a drastic change from the survey of graphic arts lecture format that had prevailed for some years. A six-credit tutorial (two semesters) patterned basically on the St. John's music tutorial was proposed and accepted. The evolution of the essay tutorials gave evidence of no saltations during my tenure as chairman. They retained the general form impressed on them under Michael Crowe's chairmanship. There remained, however, the two-fold problem of creating topics broad enough to cover a multitude of seniors' sins, and—no matter how broad the topics might

be—trying to accommodate the inevitable antinomian and outrageous proposals that were regularly made.

A great question troubled us during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Was it possible to transplant seminal works of Asian civilizations and Islam into the canon of the Western Great Books—or at least into a Great Books course of study—without doing irreparable damage to host, or donor, or both? In an attempt to explore this common concern and perhaps implement the transplantation if it seemed warrantable, we organized, under my responsibility and by means of the leadership of experts in the relevant texts, a series of week-long faculty seminars on the classics of India, China, Japan, and Islam. ^[3] If the works would bear transplanting without endangering the Program, were *we* capable of doing so? Were we willing to do so? Where would such texts appear, e.g., in the seminar lists? In chronological sequence with Western texts composed at about the same time, or at the time that a given text began to make an impact on the West (e.g., the seventeenth century)? What control could we possibly have over the meaning of such texts when none of us knew anything of the languages of their original composition, and little of the civilizations that engendered them? Weren't we laboring under a cognitive overload as it was? Why should we even try the experiment? As (we were to learn) Chuang-Tzu said: “Your life has a limit but knowledge has none. If you use what is limited to pursue what has no limit, you will be in danger. If you understand this and still strive for knowledge, you will be in danger for certain!” And we already knew, *Ars longa*

As Gerhart Niemeyer argued, however (the seminars were open to non-Program faculty), the future of the world would be largely determined by the interactions of those societies whose formative works came out of the Greco-Roman-Judaic-Christian traditions on the one hand, and the Buddhist and Confucian traditions on the other. Perhaps if we could come to know, even with the superficiality necessitated by translation, just a few seminal works from the non-Western traditions, we might come to know the adequacy, depth, and coherence of our own canon better and, in some minimal way, prepare our students for the amalgamation or contestation of cultures they were sure to live in.

We tried. Succeeding generations in the Program would no doubt give mixed evaluations of our efforts. Perhaps it will be thus into the indefinite future. In reflection, however, I find myself assenting more and more to Bob Fitzsimons' observation regarding the Faculty Seminars on Asian Civilizations. At the time I found his assertion mildly astonishing, given the extent and depth of his academic exposure: “This is the finest intellectual experience I have ever participated in.” ^[4]

There were always claims that some segment of the course of studies was the tail that wagged the dog of the Program. During my tenure in the Program those claims were ordinarily leveled against the math-science or history and philosophy of science component. When I first came to the General Program in 1967 a plan had already been afoot to establish a graduate program in the history and philosophy of science, to be staffed in part by the General Program faculty, in part by faculty from the department of philosophy, with other interested faculty offering courses as circumstances determined.

That graduate program began in the fall of 1968. It came to expect of me one-third of my teaching load, or, when chairman, one-half of it. I found that a burden and a burden I could not bear. I grew to understand the frog in Aesop's fable. If I stretched my distinctly limited abilities any further I would burst. Beyond my personal problems, however, were the demands the graduate program made on the General Program at large, and the demands made on it by the history and philosophy of science component of the undergraduate curriculum. It seemed to some people not "natural" that the GP should have a HPS graduate program attached to it, and that the demands of teaching in it limited the flexibility of teaching that otherwise would be demanded of its faculty. By the end of my tenure as chair it was obvious that the HPS graduate program would have to become autonomous, or else find a home in some other department.

Whatever the merits of the HPS approach and whatever the merits of the St. John's approach, dealing with the development of mathematics and science in the West both is absolutely necessary and presents peculiar problems for most who would teach or learn it in Great Books programs.

History. History? History! I reread the first chapters of my Thucydides, especially these memorable lines from Book I: "The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, detract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content." ^[5] The need to do something about history in the General Program was one of the factors that made my candidacy there in some fashion attractive to the faculty, I believe. As was the case with the fine arts, it was never quite obvious just what role history should play, or in what form it should play it. Between 1967 and the mid-seventies a two semester tutorial for seniors called "The Intellectual and Cultural History of Europe" developed. This senior tutorial initially contained much Church history and some theology, but as the need for distinct theology tutorials was acted upon, and as we took on Bill Frerking and Father Nicholas Ayo, C.S.C., those elements of this tutorial diminished.

Indelible memories stand out from these years in the General Program: of Willis Nutting coming to tell me that he could teach no more; of the suicide of one of our students whose academic progress and general mental and spiritual health I had, rather routinely, inquired into some weeks previous; of sitting in evaluation of men and women far more competent than I. Nonetheless, I suspect that I shall not be accused ever of "hiring down." Let these names, among others, stand in witness: William (now Abbot Thomas) Freaking; Phillip Sloan; Stephen Crockett; David Schindler.

It would be impossible to end this brief account without a deep, sincere bow of respect and admiration to each of the lovely colleagues with whom I was privileged to spend so many years of what now seems to have been the springtime of my life of learning. How fine that common life was, and how I have missed it since my departure from the General Program.

And what shall I say of our students? Some I served well, I presume, and some I certainly mis-served. Knowing that the final sorting is not mine, I must rest content that the penultimate will be no less merciful than the ultimate reckoning. I humbly ask pardon of those whom I have in any way scandalized, and ask of them their prayers, which I also ask of those whom I may have served well, and, indeed, ask of my colleagues.

In conclusion, let me make one suggestion that, strange as it may appear at first, might make a significant and indelible addition to the *esprit* of the Program of Liberal Studies. I make this suggestion both on the basis of my own experience in choral groups since leaving Notre Dame, and because the practice appears to have been a most useful one at Pearson College (the Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Kansas): Class should be preceded by song! Perhaps a half-dozen or so simple part songs could be learned initially in the music tutorial, and then be used until they become common knowledge to both students and faculty.

Once more I must say farewell to you all. May God bless and keep you.

Footnotes

^[1]See the statements regarding principles made to this Committee by Professors Frerking, Crowe, Nicgorski, Cronin, and Lyon, sometime in the fall of 1975, I believe.

^[2]For example, see my 1976 report to the faculty on this matter.

^[3]See Michael Crowe's account above. The experts and their topics included in 1970 Phillip Ashby (Princeton University) on India; in 1971 William T. de Bary (Columbia University) on China; in 1972 Joseph Kitagawa (University of Chicago) on Japan; in 1973 Fazlur Rahman (University of Chicago) on Islam.

^[4]Niemeyer and Fitzsimons. *Ecce pedagogi magni*. May they rest in peace.

^[5]Observing NATO transformed from a defensive alliance into an aggressive arm of the New World Order brought me back to Thucydides. Compare his treatment of Athens' transformation of the defensive alliance against Persia into an Athenian empire, to the great suspicion of Sparta and, ultimately, leading to the Peloponnesian War.

THE PROGRAM OF LIBERAL STUDIES

1979–1985

Walter Nicgorski

Twenty years ago, as I pen these words, on August 29, 1979, the Program's students, faculty and friends gathered in the library lounge for the annual opening meeting and “charge” address. It was the beginning of the Program's thirtieth year at Notre Dame, and it was also the beginning for me of two terms as chairman. Notable for me in all that occurred in the following six years were the efforts to secure the unity and distinct identity of the Program, to serve well the students who came into PLS in increasing and then record numbers, and to deal with the ever-thorny but most important decisions of faculty recruitment and retention. I am grateful that Providence gave me such support from my wife Elaine, faculty colleagues, and students to be able to do what I could with those challenges and to be able now to share with you readers how I view that period of the Program's history. A modicum of wisdom, one hopes, comes from experience, especially experience reflected upon with a little distance.

The symbolism of the ceremonies on that August evening of 1979 seemed just right. Edward Cronin, the senior faculty member and a member from the Program's first year, presided; he introduced the faculty in the customary fashion (with, of course, appropriate references to their relative distance from full faith in the Democratic Party and the Chicago White Sox). David Schindler, hired in the previous year, was presented to the students for the first time. Then I was called upon as the new chair to deliver the opening “charge.” I had chosen a theme to capture what I thought needed emphasis then and in the years that immediately followed. In the previous years the faculty had struggled with the issue of what kind of graduate program, if any, might be built on the Program or on a part of the faculty of PLS. Once this difficult and divisive issue was settled with an affirmation that the Program's mission would remain strictly undergraduate, it seemed sensible if not necessary for the Program's unity, spirit and ultimately its enrollment to emphasize anew the significance of the national reform movement in which the Program was founded and of the nature and power of a PLS education.

The title of my remarks that evening was “Building a Cathedral,” and it was drawn from an allegory G. K. Chesterton was said to have used, possibly in his Notre Dame lectures of the 1930s. Chesterton's story told of his coming on a construction site and seeing three mason's apprentices moving bricks. Asking each in succession what he was doing, Chesterton heard three different answers: from one, that he was passing time and earning a living, from a second, that he was moving bricks from here to there, and then from the third that he was “building a cathedral.” My point, of course, was to try to lift sights and renew hearts with respect to the greater enterprises in which we faculty and students were engaged. For faculty, the investment in the PLS community, notably in the arduous process of reaching and sustaining curricular common ground, and in the sustaining and nourishing the breadth of their own learning, might not only be satisfying in itself but was also to be seen as an effort to make successful here at Notre Dame the Great Books

alternative. Then as now I hold that alternative to be representative of the most important reform movement in the history of American higher education. For students, it was important as they climbed the mountain of each seminar book, of each paper, to be reminded, at least in outline, of the whole person their efforts were fashioning.

I spelled out in the talk what I expected to be my guiding principles in the years ahead, the principles of the Great Books movement integrated with a Catholic dimension. The first of the three principles was that the liberal education of undergraduates (indeed of all) is a goal of the highest importance and a great national and human trust; it is worthy of the time and efforts of the best minds and souls that higher education can assemble. The second was that liberal education is best sought not through the use of textbooks, commentaries, and secondary digests, but through direct encounter with the greatest achievements in thought and expression as found in the Great Books and other outstanding artistic and scientific achievements. Third, as to its mode or way, liberal education cannot be mass education; it must leave room for and encourage personal interaction between teacher and student and between student and student in the exploration of the great human questions and the great ideas that help with those questions. The Catholic dimension was articulated with beautiful conciseness in Vatican II's Declaration on Education which I read from briefly that August evening: Christian education is characterized by its striving "to relate all human culture eventually to the news of salvation, so that the light of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world, of life, and of mankind."

"If you build it, they will come!" Enrollment grew progressively each year. There were 109 students in the Program on that August evening; we had lost a faculty line on the budget in the previous year. As I began my last year as chairman, there were 192 enrolled, a peak, it seems, in the Program's history. That was a very manifest reward for all the efforts of faculty and students at renewing the original mission of the Program and emphasizing its distinct identity. This was, of course, a *renewal*, drawing inspiration from and building on the foundations of thirty years of earlier efforts. But as is often the case with renewal, change was involved in the effort to remain essentially the same. The faculty voted to change the name of the Program by dropping the "General" in General Program of Liberal Studies. Faculty had been divided on the matter; so were alums; in fact, they probably inclined against the change – more than a generation of them recognized themselves and one another affectionately as "GP'ers." Being something of a traditionalist and having then in prospect handsome support by early alumni for such contemplated ventures as founding the Notre Dame Series in Great Books, I was at first reluctant about such a change. The good arguments for change were that the term *general education* had come to mean in American higher education something different from what we were about in the Program. And if we understood "general" in the Aristotelian sense in which it was intended by the Program's founders, it seemed in current usage to be redundant with the term "liberal." There then occurred an illuminating moment for me and at least a couple of other faculty on the fence about the name-change issue. I must confess it occurred in Rockne Stadium at a football game, perhaps not such an implausible setting for this Program in which Notre Dame and the Great Books movement were married. It was the 1981 game with Georgia Tech. As sometimes

happens, the program for this game had printed under the name and picture of each player their major field of study. As I paged through this program, I noted that the great majority of the Georgia Tech players were listed as majoring in the “General Program.” I then knew that we had best adjust the name of our Program.

With the name issue resolved, the faculty undertook a range of new efforts to articulate and publicize the kind of education which took place in the Program. Katherine Tillman and Michael Crowe joined me in making a very effective talk-show type video about the Program. There was, of course, new letterhead, new formats for posters and a new brochure, all of these not just featuring the new name but emphasizing how the cultivation of seven ancient liberal arts continues in contemporary form to be the Program's way of working at the circle of knowledge, the ultimate unity of all knowing. The old blue/gray brochure's text had evolved for some years from a draft whose primary author was Stephen Rogers. All of the new efforts at this time were marked by the Program's distinctive seal which resulted from a contest which the faculty sponsored among the students. That winning design, still evident in most publications of the Program, was the work of Richard Houghton, a young man of Jeffersonian range who upon completing the Program went to Jefferson's University of Virginia to study architecture.

Internal efforts at renewing the spirit, unity and communal dimension of the Program were continuing. At one autumn faculty dinner, we ate by dividing one six foot long submarine sandwich. More to the point, we worked hard to keep alive the tradition of faculty seminars and the monthly meetings of the faculty and students, built around lectures, debates, poetry readings and performances. Our events were always followed by what my predecessor, John Lyon, had named so very well, “modest comestibles and libations.” The faculty read, talked and argued with one another in three summer workshops (1981–83) focused respectively on improving student writing and approaches to mathematics and the Bible in the curriculum.

I made what turned out to be an unsuccessful effort to found an annual or biennial distinguished lecture series which would bring to campus a national or international scholar who shared in a significant way the commitments of the Program. I suspect this did not catch on because it lost priority as time passed and the campus calendar was ever more filled with distinguished lectures, symposia and conferences; the regular departmental budget also became better equipped to sponsor some outside lecturers. I did, however, get the initial funds to start such an annual lecture. This occurred through the offices of Robert F. Smith, a young Ph.D. from Notre Dame who had studied with me and now was influentially placed in public relations and speech writing in a major oil company. Our inaugural lecturer was Paul Weiss, emeritus Sterling Professor of Philosophy from Yale and then holding an endowed chair at the Catholic University. He offered three lectures on “The Blessings of Liberty.” The President of the University, Father Hesburgh, joined the departmental faculty, spouses, Professor Weiss and representatives of the supportive oil company at a dinner the night of the initial lecture. Father Hesburgh had agreed, despite the fact he would be returning earlier in the day from a trip to far corners of the world, to provide an introduction of Professor Weiss and

a public thank-you to the corporate sponsors. He wove into those introductory remarks a very strong endorsement of the Program and its approach to philosophy over that of the professional philosophers who lost sight of the “central human questions” and of the great voices of the tradition. Both he and senior faculty of the Program had some fence-mending to do, in the days following, with members of the Philosophy Department who were in the audience that night. That little somewhat humorous incident is, however, a reminder that “Father Ted” was surely a true successor of Father Cavanaugh in being a constant public supporter of the Program. His support, which I believe was there throughout his Presidency, was particularly evident in this period of mounting enrollment. On top of all of our efforts for the renewal of the Program, now and then we were buoyed by reports from students that upon meeting the President he indicated that if he was able “to do it over again,” his choice for undergraduate education would be PLS.

So energetic were our student recruiting efforts in this period that Michael Crowe once, only partly in jest, I suspect, said that no student delivering mail to the office ever left without signing up for the Program. He not only blamed or credited me for this phenomenon but also pointed to Mary Etta Rees's vigorous and poised presentation of the Program as she served as secretary-plus in the office outside 318 O'Shaughnessy. Mary Etta, now living in retirement with her husband Ed in South Bend, was the commanding and witty presence that students came to know during this period as she policed and charmed the office as well as the Agora, the substantial adjacent lounge the College had given the Program and which meant so much to our communal spirit during this time. On weekends before each term, as transfer students came into the College, I was in the office, without Mary Etta's protection, to provide initial counseling and registration for those who came by with interest of any sort. During the heavy regular preregistration periods all the faculty took turns at meeting and counseling students. Our efforts to renew the Program and publicize it better had an impact outside the University and thus into the pool of transfer students. The late Assistant Dean Bob Waddick was probably as responsible as anyone in those days for making the case for the Program before students, including transfers. He never ceased reminding anyone who cared to listen that, despite national and local laments over the state of undergraduate education, there was still dedicated undergraduate teaching, including attention to writing, going on in the Program. I must slight many fine students who came from the transfer pool if I mention a couple, but it is illustrative of the quality of students who came into the Program this way to recall that weekend day when I opened to the outer office to find it filled with such students waiting to sign up for the Program. The particular group I recall included Libby Drumm and Michelle Thomas whose class of '83 a couple of years later closed their junior year at the Grotto with Mass celebrated by Nicholas Ayo, then just completing his first year in the Program. I wasn't there, but one photo taken of the group was particularly inspiring to me in the day-to-day work with students and faculty for it showed such manifest joy and satisfaction, and thus reminded me that there were those times when it “all seemed to come together.”

As we moved along in this period, the increasing enrollment became a challenge, soon to be a problem. In order to keep classes and seminars the right size and not continually overtax faculty (now ever more under pressures from the growing importance of the

research dimension of this University), we needed help from visiting and adjunct faculty. We got excellent assistance from such faculty, whom many of students of this time will recall: Barbara Turpin, Steve Crockett, Damien Leader, Bill Wians, Father David Garrick, C.S.C., Paul Roche (poet-in-residence), Kerry McNamara, Father Charles Corso, C.S.C., and the distinguished emeritus historian Matthew Fitzsimons. During this period, there were senior faculty losses that were unexpected and left holes in our community painful to this day; I refer to John Lyon's resignation and Stephen Rogers' death, the latter coming on that May day of 1985 when senior essays were due and when students wept openly on campus and in the office as they arrived with their essays. There were the disappointments in not being able to retain tenure-track faculty marked by such excellences as were Father Gerard Carroll and Linda Ferguson; Linda had manifest success in developing the music tutorial in the Program and in enriching the common life of the Program by regular student/faculty Chicago concert trips and various gallery visits. We lost too the full teaching presence of Ed Cronin who formally retired with a festive, thoroughly Irish celebration attended by many alumni/ae, students, faculty and friends throughout the University. Then with initial funds received on that occasion, the faculty instituted the Cronin Award to be given for the best piece of writing by a student in the Program each year.

In these six years, I served under three different Deans of the College of Arts and Letters, and we were able with their assistance not only to secure the temporary help noted above but also to make replacement hires as well as new faculty hires, usually with much pleading, in the light of the increasing enrollment. And so we brought to the faculty that spirited Socratic existentialist Juan de Pascuale and the classicist Janet Smith, who during her South Bend tenure founded the Women's Care Center now in multiple locations throughout this area. We brought back Mark Jordan from the Provostship at the University of Dallas. We proved wrong those who claimed that one could not find a social scientist who would have both the learning and disposition to embrace the Great Books and its discussion method; our find was Clark Power, who had worked closely with Lawrence Kohlberg at Harvard on theories and practices of moral development. We brought Susan Youens aboard to replace Linda Ferguson and Andre Goddu to replace John Lyon. Steve Fallon was the fine result of the search to replace Ed Cronin; and Professor Rogers' sudden death left us in search of immediate help, which need was fortunately satisfied by Kent Emery's ability to come as a visitor. Earlier in the six-year period, Father Nicholas Ayo, C.S.C., initiated a correspondence with me as he prepared to leave his post as Novice Master for the Congregation of Holy Cross. Before that service to his religious community, Father Ayo had held a tenured position in English at the University of Portland. His interest in the Program was welcome, and a visitorship grew into a regular appointment, and Father Ayo came to serve not only as an academic presence in the theological and literary parts of the curriculum but also as a pastoral presence. In the last two years as enrollment peaked, we were fortunate to have Katherine Tillman back to full-time teaching from a stint as Assistant Provost of the University. She promptly won the Sheedy Award in 1985, following Ed Cronin among our faculty in attaining the College's highest teaching honor.

Before the year of 1979, in which this tale of six years began, was done, the legacy of Father Cavanaugh touched the Program again and contributed to our renewal. In late December Father Cavanaugh died, and in his memory the University instituted the John J. Cavanaugh Chair in the Humanities. Father Cavanaugh's critical founding support for the Program, Father Hesburgh's continuing support, alumni/ae enthusiasm for the Program, and the mounting enrollment in the Program provided a context in which University administrators were able to be persuaded to locate the new Chair in the Program. After a two and a half year search including campus visits by two leading candidates, the decision was made to bring back Frederick Crosson to full citizenship with us. In 1984 Fred then became the first Cavanaugh Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at Notre Dame, giving up a Chair in the Philosophy Department to which he had been appointed after leaving the Deanship. ^[1] I write of bringing him back to “full citizenship” because it was very clear that his heart had never left PLS; this was evident in many ways but particularly in his continuing to lead seminars in the Program while occupied with other responsibilities in the University. Fred's return brought to all of us on the faculty and to another generation of PLS students an even fuller gift of his practical and theoretical wisdom.

As we built it, they did indeed come. Other developments in these years supported and enriched our building and renewal efforts. A renovated music teaching room in 221 O'Shaughnessy was followed in a couple of years by a generous gift by Dr. James McCormick to equip room 214 as a model seminar room and science teaching facility. Decio Hall opened with its abundant grant of daylight to a faculty long underground in the library. The University initiated the London Programme in which PLS was soon participating. By 1985 we clearly had too many students! too many for the kind of Program we wanted to be and for the resources available to us. A leading question for us became how to control entrance to the Program so as to keep classes smaller. There were other questions that were surfacing with regularity and clarity, and they usually had some relation to the enrollment success. How to reduce other demands on faculty in a University emphasizing ever more its research and publication expectations? How to maintain the coherence of the curriculum in the Program while cutting back to provide some reduction in teaching loads and to provide opportunity for faculty to participate in graduate programs in their various disciplinary fields but maintained outside the Program? Though just a few years before in the 1980s we had added a theology course, early in 1985 the faculty dropped one tutorial each in theology, history of science, literature, and philosophy. Concern for use of the limited faculty resources was the key consideration in this decision; the argument that students should have more electives outside the Program also carried weight with some. These seemed to be the big issues and the setting as I passed the baton of leadership to my learned and judicious successor, Phillip Sloan.

Footnotes

^[1]During his tenure as chair, Prof. John Lyon had written earlier to Father Hesburgh with just this proposal.

THE PROGRAM OF LIBERAL STUDIES

1985–1992

Phillip R. Sloan

My stewardship of the Program of Liberal Studies occupied seven years, with a one-semester leave in the spring of 1990. This was an important time of transition both in the Program and in the university at large, and there were many challenges to the traditions that had guided us for thirty-five years. It was also a time when we were given opportunities for growth in new directions.

When I was asked to take on the leadership of the Program, it was also impressed upon me by the administration that the university saw itself in a period of growth and development in the research area, particularly in the College of Arts and Letters, and that a new level of research productivity would be expected of faculty of the Program. There were also many challenging internal issues that I could see would require creative leadership and energy. Although I still considered myself one of the “young” faculty, I had been privileged to have had personal contact with the “founder generation” of Otto Bird, Willis Nutting, and Edward Cronin; my close friends and colleagues, Stephen Rogers and Michael Crowe, had been students in the original General Program. I had also grown up in an era when Mortimer Adler and Robert Maynard Hutchins were names in the public intellectual sphere and the “Great Books” movement was something every reader was aware of. This same awareness of a larger “Great Books” tradition could not be presumed of a new generation of faculty, and it seemed a good time to examine the underlying educational goals of the Program as we adjusted to the developments within the University and College. This was also a period when criticisms of “canonicity” and denials of the value of studying the tradition of Western learning were being raised by academic elites. These currents, lumped loosely under the label of “postmodernism,” were affecting graduate schools in the humanities and the young Ph.D.s they were producing.

I also had to devote time and effort to substantial curricular matters that altered the Program in some important ways. As Walter Nicgorski has described, the faculty approved in 1984/85 a discontinuation of four of our required tutorials from the natural science, literature, theology, and philosophy components. This reduction of the curriculum was the largest change in the Program requirements since its loss of the first year in 1956. It had the positive effect of permitting the PLS faculty to achieve a teaching load somewhat equivalent to that of surrounding departments, a pressing need in light of the higher research expectations on the faculty being imposed by the University. But a curricular reduction of this magnitude also demanded further reflection on the character and goals of our new “streamlined” curriculum if we were not to let the Program lose all coherence, or reduce it effectively to the status of a “second major” for our students. One of the most attractive dimensions of the Program, as I had experienced it since I joined it in 1974, was its strong internal cohesion, both for the faculty as well as the students, in large measure created by the integrity of our curriculum and our continued interaction in

the three required tutorials and one seminar each semester. The new curricular structure removed important components of this cohesive plan of studies. It also meant that we as faculty would have less contact with our students, although it would allow students more freedom to pursue second majors and concentrations outside the Program.

I concluded as I took office that if the Program was to maintain a sense of cohesive purpose, it was time to begin a major review of the curriculum and the fundamental educational purposes that lay behind the founding of the Program. It was also necessary to articulate future goals for the Program that could lead it in the changing Notre Dame environment. This was an ambitious project, more challenging in implementation than I originally anticipated, and its completion took up much of my energy during my years in the Chair.

It has long been my conclusion that the primary organizational concept behind the Program's successful negotiation of the changes that have taken place in the external University since 1950 was Otto Bird's decision to structure the Program around recognized disciplines (literature, theology, mathematics, foreign language, natural science, and philosophy), ^[1] rather than following the "trivium-quadrivium" model that underlay the Great Books programs at St. John's College, the Integrated Studies program at St. Mary's in California, and the Thomas Aquinas College program. This disciplinary organization has meant in practice that new faculty could be hired from leading graduate schools with well-developed research specializations in standard disciplines, increasingly necessary if we were to meet the growing research expectations of the University. On the negative side, it also carried the potential to "compartmentalize" the Program into disciplinary areas, particularly as we dropped the original ideal of having faculty teach regularly in tutorial areas outside their disciplinary specializations. This carried the potential of developing a "multidisciplinary" view of the Program rather than that of an integrated liberal arts curriculum. To clarify some of these issues, a sustained period of examination was needed.

The first phase of this curricular reflection was a week-long workshop held from July 21–24 of 1986 attended by all the faculty. This was to commence with a common reading of the original founding documents of the Program and the Great Books movement. It was also intended to initiate an internal review of the various components of the Program and the pedagogical goals of each sector. To acquaint us with the original vision of the Program, all were assigned the reading of Otto Bird's *Cultures in Conflict*, and Otto made the opening presentation to the workshop on July 21.

To counteract some of the tendency for the Program to divide into traditional disciplinary distinctions, the workshop was also organized into faculty subcommittees that were asked to review the curriculum in terms of the classical seven liberal arts rather than from the perspective of standard humanistic disciplines. Faculty were in this way required to interact on subcommittees outside their disciplinary groups. Professor Frederick Crosson chaired the discussion of the Seminar on July 21. The "trivium committee" report was presented by Prof. Walter Nicgorski on the morning of July 22, and the "quadrivium committee" report was presented by Prof. Sloan on the afternoon of the 22nd. Discussion

of the theology component was chaired by Father Ayo on the 23rd, and a general discussion of the unity of the whole curriculum occupied the afternoon of the 23rd.

The resulting “sense of the faculty” that emerged from this workshop was a significant outcome of this workshop, and it resulted in a concrete plan of curricular reform that was to be enacted in stages. The first decision of the faculty was to reorganize the Seminar reading lists chronologically over the three years of the Program, rather than continue the policy of three different “ancients to moderns” Seminar sequences that had been a novel characteristic of the Notre Dame Program from its beginning.^[2] This chronological revision also gave us the opportunity to review the entire Seminar list and make needed revisions in the list. The Seminar committee, again chaired by Frederick Crosson, took suggestions from the faculty, reviewed the total list, and presented a new list for discussion, and final approval was given in late 1986. Beginning with the sophomore class entering in the fall of 1987, the new list was instituted, meaning a stage-wise institution of the new sequence that was completed only in 1991. The structure of this new list can be found on the Program Web Page (<http://www.nd.edu/~pls>).

Revision of the tutorial sequence was a more complicated process. The discontinuation of four tutorials in 1984-85 had been made on a provisional basis, with the assumption that a permanent reduction of the Program requirements by four tutorials would be made following the careful review by the faculty. This also required the review by faculty subcommittees of the larger pedagogical goals and the structural revisions necessary to accomplish these revisions on a permanent basis. The “trivium” and “quadrivium” reports from the 1986 workshop formed the basis of these reflections, which were then refined by faculty subcommittees for more specific discussion in our meetings. We also made an effort at this time to obtain a greater degree of consensus on a list of common texts that would be predictably treated in parallel sections of given tutorials, increasing the sense of cohesion in the Program.

The final reduction of tutorials was approved at a faculty workshop held in the fall of 1988. This revision permanently eliminated one intellectual history tutorial and replaced this with a restoration of a third semester of natural science with a revised content that would include one half-semester of social science. The fine arts tutorial was reduced to one semester, and the concepts of man and novel tutorials were eliminated, making room for the restoration of the Scripture course. The “Ways of Knowing” tutorial in the philosophy sequence was also replaced by a revised “Metaphysics and Epistemology” tutorial. The structure of the new curriculum can be found on the Program Web Page.

These reforms were also accompanied by a more general commitment of the faculty to a streamlined, but pedagogically focused, emphasis on a genuine “liberal arts” curriculum conceptually distinguished from an “interdisciplinary humanities” program. This difference has not been always easy to articulate, particularly as the original tradition of the Adler-Hutchins-Buchanan-Bird generation fades into historical memory. From many faculty discussions held over these years, we nonetheless came to a general consensus that our contribution to higher education resided in our commitment to integrated liberal arts education, and that it was important to maintain this theoretical focus. The Program

remains the only example of the original University of Chicago ideal of the Great Books curriculum of studies that now exists in the context of a multi-disciplinary, research University. We have also been able to maintain a steady perspective on our position as a program within a Catholic university, with a special focus and emphasis on the important authors and reflections within this tradition, distinguishing the Program from its secular affiliates. In this respect, Otto Bird's neo-Thomistic view of the organization of learning, with its primacy of theology and philosophy, remains still intact. This is manifest by our commitment to the two required Theology (Scripture, Christian Theological Tradition) and four philosophy (Philosophical Inquiry, Ethics, Politics, Metaphysics and Epistemology) within the Program in addition to University requirements in these areas.

One manifestation of our renewed commitment to a “liberal arts” model of the Program was the decision in 1986 to institute a one-year classical language requirement, to be taken through the classical languages department, with Daniel Sheerin of Classics as the original coordinator from the classics side in this collaboration. PLS students were given the option of taking either Greek or Latin. This requirement was maintained until 1997.

In addition to curricular innovations, we also saw the development of our physical facilities. In the spring of 1988 we were given the option of moving from room 318 O'Shaughnessy Hall,—the home of the Program since its inception—to new quarters at 215 on the second floor, where it currently resides. With the conversion of most of the classroom space of O'Shaughnessy into offices in this period, this was a way for us to maintain closer proximity to our two “dedicated PLS” rooms, 214 and 221 O'Shaughnessy Hall. This decision has been particularly important, as we have experienced a dispersion of Program teaching locations from their original concentration on the third floor of O'Shaughnessy Hall to locations in the new DeBartolo Hall since its opening in 1995.

The move to the new quarters in 1988 also made possible a long-needed administrative restructuring of the Program. The availability of a second office in the main headquarters allowed me to institute the position of Undergraduate Advisor. The sharing of these advising responsibilities has freed the Chair position for other administrative needs that have increased in number with the development of the College and University. Father Nicholas Ayo was appointed as the first Undergraduate Advisor in 1988 and remained in this position during the remainder of my term in office.

The unusual nature of the Program makes external reviews and evaluations very important for our long-term success. A major external review was conducted in 1992, part of a review process required of all departments by Father Edward Malloy when he assumed the Presidency of the University in 1987. A favorable external review at a time of major presidential transition was very important for us to obtain, and the Program came through this review with flying colors. The external reviewers—Thomas Slakey of St. Johns College, Annapolis, Thomas Roche, Jr., of the English department of Princeton, and Louis Dupres of the Yale Divinity School—were particularly impressed with the integrity of the curriculum, the satisfaction of the students, and the high caliber of the faculty. As a result of this favorable review, the Program has been positioned to develop

vigorously within the larger structure of the College of Arts and Letters during the Malloy presidency.

There were also important personnel changes, some unexpected, during my tenure. With shock and sadness to all of us in the Program, a mainstay of our endeavor, Professor Stephen Rogers, died suddenly at the end of spring term in 1985, just before I assumed leadership, requiring both an immediate replacement and also depriving me of his wise counsel and the close friendship we had developed over a decade. During my years in office I would see added to the faculty Kent Emery, Linda Austern, Cornelius O'Boyle, Henry Weinfield, Michael Waldstein, and Felicitas Munzel. Departing from the Program during my tenure were Janet Smith, David Schindler, Andr  Goddu, Susan Youens, and Mark Jordan. Professors Fallon, Emery, Weinfield, and Munzel are now members of the regular tenured faculty. We also had as temporary full-time visiting faculty Rodney Kilcup, Glenn Olsen, and Paul Opperman. This meant a significant turnover in the regular faculty of the Program.

As I recall those years in which I was privileged to serve the Program in this leadership position, I feel these were important years both in my own career and in the life of the Program. Because of the efforts of my predecessors and successors as well as my own, I have a sense that the PLS is a fully participating member of the Notre Dame of the new century. It has a faculty fully able to meet both the high research expectations of the University and the special demands of our unique undergraduate program. It also has remained strongly committed to the Catholic mission of the University and to the development of an undergraduate program that continually encourages its students and faculty to dive ever more deeply into the intellectual and spiritual heritage of our tradition. Creating a program like our own in the current academic world would likely be impossible. Maintaining this precious heritage and developing it in the future as a flagship program in liberal education has been made possible by our unique and unusual history, and the dedication of faculty, students, and the loyalty of our alumni/ae. The developments during my Chair years could not have been possible without the assistance of Mrs. Mary Etta Rees and Mrs. Debra Kabzinski, our departmental secretaries, the work of Father Nicholas Ayo, who was both an advisor to me as well as to the undergraduates, the many faculty who served on the various committees, and especially to my wife Sharon and family, who made many sacrifices and saw me spend many hours at the office. These years also confirmed my choice of the Program as the ideal place to pursue my academic career. The Program has always seemed aware of the admonition of St. Bonaventure that we cannot assume "mere reading will suffice without fervor, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, observation without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, [or] study without divine grace. . . ." ^[3]

Footnotes

^[1]By 1985 when I assumed the Chair, this list of Program disciplinary areas included fine arts and intellectual history tutorials. The separate tutorials in mathematics had been incorporated into natural science I, and there were no longer foreign language tutorials taught within the Program.

^[2]The original four-year program involved two “ancients-moderns” cycles, each of two-year duration. With the curricular revisions required by the reduction to a three-year program in 1956, the Seminar had a first one-year ancient-modern cycle, followed by a two-year Junior-Senior cycle. The revisions of the 1960s replaced this model by three separate cycles of different levels of difficulty. The assumption was that this would have all the Program students reading from the same general period at the same time, increasing the possibility of dialogue between classes.

^[3]*Journey of the Mind to God*, “Prologue,” trans. Philotheus Boehner, Indianapolis: Hackett 1993.

THE PROGRAM OF LIBERAL STUDIES

1992–1995

Stephen M. Fallon

The Program of Liberal Studies was not the same place in the fall of 1992, when I moved into the chairperson's office, as it was when I arrived fresh from graduate school in 1985. Notre Dame by 1985 was well into the process of reinventing itself as a research university, while remaining committed to providing excellent undergraduate education and to retaining its distinctive and animating Catholic character. Perhaps no department felt the growing pains more than the Program, given its particularly strong tradition in these two areas as well as its ties to the Great Books movement, which favors the generalist over the specialized scholar. While the faculty had always included accomplished and visible scholars, the Program had been known mainly for its teaching, and there were some mixed feelings about the university's increasing emphasis on specialized scholarship. The challenge taken up by my predecessors in the chair's office was to meet changing university expectations by raising the research and scholarship profile of the faculty while not sacrificing excellent teaching, Great Books pedagogical goals and methods, and the department's Catholic character. If the Program today has succeeded in nurturing a faculty distinguished for both teaching and scholarship, it is largely owing to the efforts of my predecessors. By the middle of the 1990s all faculty were actively engaged in significant publication programs; many were involved in Notre Dame graduate programs in the history of science, English, government, music, psychology, and theology; and new faculty hires exhibited superior potential for teaching, for nationally and internationally recognized scholarship, and also for commitment to Great Books education and to the Catholic character of the department and university.

The Program's vigorous health was evident on the occasion of Father Malloy's meeting with the department faculty in December of 1992. In a frank and wide-ranging discussion with the university president, we were able to reflect on our relation to the battle over the canon in the modern university. With no apology and with no second thoughts, we continued to teach classic works. At the same time, given our efforts to include classic works by women, by non-Western authors, and by persons of color, the Program was perhaps the only department in the university in which every student was *required* to read a significant range of culturally diverse works. All of our students read Confucius' *Analects*, the *Tao-te ching*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*; Christine de Pizan and Virginia Woolf; and Ralph Ellison, to say nothing of works as culturally alien in their own ways as Herodotus' *Histories* and Euripides' *Medea*. The Program, as we pointed out to Father Malloy, was finding ways to introduce students to varying voices and competing systems of value, without abandoning the criteria of excellence and lasting significance, and in doing so we were pioneering ways to address creatively the otherwise sterile culture wars carried on by entrenched sides. Critical to that mission was continued excellent teaching, and the occasion of Father Malloy's visit allowed us to point once again to the clear statistical evidence for that excellence, as well as more anecdotal and impressionistic evidence, especially in the form of alumni/ae loyalty and enthusiasm. Finally, we

demonstrated vividly that our commitment to teaching the Great Books did not conflict with scholarly achievement. We pointed out that while a university publication had at that time featured the Romance Languages faculty for winning six full faculty fellowships in the preceding five years, Program faculty had earned *nine* full faculty fellowships in preceding seven years (4 NEH, 2 NSF, 2 ACLS, 1 Guggenheim). Father Malloy was greatly impressed by the state of the Program, and he left us with the observation that, were he to be an undergraduate again, he would very likely major in PLS.

While it is true, as the meeting with Father Malloy made vividly clear, that the Program had balanced the demands of teaching, research, and commitment to the Catholic character, raised standards and potentially competing priorities made for spirited debates among the faculty. These debates were perhaps most pointed on the occasions of faculty recruitment. Was superiority in scholarship potential to be *prima inter pares*? teaching potential? Catholic profession? While all faculty were committed to all three, we weighted them differently. Would placing first priority on research threaten the Catholic character? Would placing first priority on Catholic profession limit candidate pools enough to make it difficult to hire tenurable colleagues? Different weighting of these priorities, along with differing judgments of how candidates met them, made for the intense deliberations. In this climate, the department felt the need for something it had lacked: a set of hiring procedures to guide debate. One of the more important changes during my years as chairperson was the adoption of a set of procedures to replace the looser and *ad hoc* procedures that we had formerly employed. These procedures were designed to involve as many colleagues as wished to participate in screening and evaluating candidates. The details are less important for a history such as this than the mere existence of a set of written procedures, which allowed us to focus debate on department needs and candidate strengths rather than on alternative procedures.

The other large change during these years was the change in faculty teaching loads. In 1992, we were the last department in the college requiring more than a 2–2 teaching load (two courses per term). The PLS load of 3–2 was a relic of the days when the Program was perceived as lagging behind other departments in scholarship. In working toward a 2–2 teaching load, I had in mind not only increased time for scholarship, but also increased time for excellent teaching in an environment where scholarly excellence was required by the provost, the dean, and by ourselves. Faculty involvement in graduate programs in their home disciplines, which is vital given the research aspirations of the university of individuals, meant directing theses and dissertations, and serving on examination and area committees. This left less time for adequate attention to each course when one was teaching three in a semester. The department's move to a 2–2 load, therefore, boded well not only for scholarship but for attention to undergraduate courses and individual students, especially as the dean's office committed itself to giving the Program several new faculty slots so that Program courses would not have to increase in size. We succeeded in moving from a 3–2 load to a 2–2 without increasing adjunct and other non-regular faculty participation in Program courses in two ways, by new faculty lines and by eliminating the four or five sections of Senior Essay Tutorial each spring. The latter move required us to disperse the work of senior essay direction among all faculty each year; instead of four or five professors directing ten to twelve essays each,

each faculty member directs three of four. This move has, I believe, been beneficial for faculty and even more for students, who have a greater chance of finding faculty members with the necessary background and interest to direct their essays when they can choose from fifteen rather than four.

Apart from these changes in hiring procedures and teaching loads, the Program was relatively stable from 1992–1995. Walt Nicgorski and Phil Sloan had each presided over significant curricular changes, including reduction in the number of tutorials and the reordering of the seminar sequence to a single chronological sweep from Greeks to the moderns. The department was ready to live with its revised curriculum and to give it time to exhibit its strengths and weaknesses. There were some changes in seminar texts, but in most cases they involved only a change in texts by the same author. Over the three years, Euripides' *Bacchae* replaced his *Alcestis*; Aristotle's *On the Soul* replaced his *Physics*; Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* was added; Handel's *Messiah* replaced Mozart's *The Magic Flute*; Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* joined his *Discourse on the Method*; and Wittgenstein's *Blue Book* replaced selections from his *Philosophical Investigations*. In addition, final chronological adjustments to the seminar lists were made.

The faculty changed little over these years. Gretchen Reydams-Schils, a classicist from Belgium by way of the University of California Berkeley, joined us in 1994. Enrollments were stable and, by design, relatively modest. I did not aggressively pursue students in order to avoid ballooning class sizes. Still, we averaged around 145 majors over the three years, or 48 per class year. In this area my successor Clark Power has proved wiser, as increased enrollments have led to further support and more faculty positions from the dean.

Among the students we experienced pressure from the increasing popularity of double majors. Notre Dame students in general seem to have concluded that multiple majors will increase their marketability. Whatever the wisdom of this perspective, and I have my doubts, this has meant for us increased requests for exemptions from courses. The department has responded with a set of strict guidelines for exemptions owing to foreign study and second majors, administered wisely and firmly in my time as chair by Father Nicholas Ayo and since then by Professor Henry Weinfield.

A continuing challenge for the Program is to pass on the essentials of seminar pedagogy, in which teachers supply questions rather than answers. While it may be a case of nostalgia, I have sometimes thought in the nineties that Program students were increasingly willing to look to professors for answers in the Great Books seminars, and the faculty has recommitted itself to passing on the tradition of seminar teaching to new members. Students sometimes want to be able to capture a “right” interpretation in their notebooks, and we must continue to remind ourselves that seminars are not in the business of supplying the right answers but of building readings together and fitting students to read texts on their own.

While it is perhaps inevitable in a history to focus on changes, more has remained the same. During my term we continued to be blessed with eager and intelligent students. If some observers say that Notre Dame students, while intelligent, lack the intellectual passion of, say, Chicago undergraduates, we have never had that problem in the Program. Like their predecessors, the students of the early and mid-nineties loved to read, to discuss in seminar, and to carry those discussions back to the dining hall, quad, dorm, and even nightclubs, much to the amusement of campus watchers from *The Observer* and *Scholastic* (an amusement tinged with respect and envy). The students continue to surprise and instruct us with their insights and to humble us with their commitment to service. A remarkably high number are involved in service while here and in yearlong or multi-year service commitments after graduation; in 1993, for example, 39% of our graduating seniors embarked on service stints in the U.S. and abroad of a year or more. And the faculty, if it includes more non-Catholics than in the past and sports a higher percentage of degrees from secular universities, remains committed to the Program as a Catholic Great Books department, and like its founders, including the still-active Professor Edward Cronin, remains convinced that the books are the best teachers. Approaching the end of the century, the Program faculty believe that we have a model worth emulating in other universities, and we are heartened that the time seems to be ripe for that emulation. If some observers look suspiciously at our curriculum as basic training in the univocal and oppressive views of the body of works of the so-called dead white males, those who know us better see that there are few places where such significant diversity of views and competing perspectives are aired. The Program values the Catholic intellectual tradition and shares that tradition with its students, but it does so by academic inquiry and not by catechesis. There is sufficient confidence in that tradition that it can survive and flourish in an atmosphere of open inquiry. The Program curriculum, those closest to it realize, is predicated on confidence that what society, and the church, needs most are men and women who are not afraid of new ideas, who are eager to see world in its variousness, and who can think, write, and speak for themselves.

THE PROGRAM OF LIBERAL STUDIES

1995–2000

Clark Power

Without the benefit of hindsight, my contribution to the Program's history may more reflect my hopes for the future than my appraisal of our most recent past. I served as Acting Chair during the Spring semester of 1990 while Phil Sloan was on leave and again during the 1995-1996 academic year while Steve Fallon was on leave. Whatever success we may have enjoyed while I have been chair, we owe to their visionary leadership and unstinting dedication to the Program. I will always be grateful to them not only for their example but for their advice and encouragement over these past five years.

Throughout my years as Chair, I have focused on the Program's relationship to the College, University, and local community. When I first came to Notre Dame in 1982, I felt that the Program was somewhat isolated from and misunderstood by other departments. To many of our colleagues, the Program was out of step with the rest of the university and with prospering major research universities. While research and graduate teaching were becoming the focus of attention, the Program maintained its commitment to undergraduate education. While elective courses were proliferating, we held fast to our required core of seminars and tutorials. While less writing was being assigned, we increased our requirements and maintained our mandatory senior essay. While grades were inflating, we tightened our standards. While context seemed to make texts inaccessible to all but the experts, we persisted with our Great Books Seminars. While the canon was being called into question, we revised but never abandoned our collective Great Books curriculum. While specialization was isolating scholarship among and even within departments, we fostered discussions across the disciplines.

In recent years, the pendulum has begun to swing the other way, and much of what we have been doing is now at the forefront of higher education reform. While many still see us as traditionalists, we are increasingly regarded as visionaries. I am fortunate to be chair at such a time and to have an opportunity to communicate the achievements of the Program.

As previous chairs have noted, the Program enjoyed exceptionally strong central administrative support during the presidencies of Fathers Cavanaugh and Hesburgh and the deanship of Fred Crosson. President Malloy and subsequent Deans continued to support the Program, but with far less personal involvement than their predecessors. During my few years as chair, Nathan Hatch became Provost and Mark Roche became Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. They brought to their positions great determination to take Notre Dame to new heights of excellence as a research university. They also made it clear that their support depended upon what each department could contribute to Notre Dame's future.

Fortunately, just before Nathan Hatch took office, the Program underwent an external review. The assessment was glowing. Louis Dupre of Yale noted that PLS was “the *best* Great Books program” in the nation; and Thomas Roche of Princeton said that PLS was “one of the most interesting educational programs in America.” During my second year as chair, the Templeton Foundation issued a report recognizing the Program as an “outstanding example of the Best in American Higher Education.” After almost fifty years, the Program had begun to win the national recognition that it so richly deserved. The Program had also earned great respect throughout the university. Although our department was the last of the departments to move to a 2–2 teaching load, our record of scholarly publications, grants, and fellowships was, nevertheless, one of the best in the College.

I believed that during my years as chair we should build on these achievements and make them and other accomplishments better known throughout the university. Our faculty are vital contributors to the departments of English, History, Music, Psychology, and Theology as well as to the Institute for Educational Initiatives, the Medieval Institute, the Nanovic Institute for European Studies, the Reilly Center for Science, Technology, and Values, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and International Studies, the Center for Social Concerns, Gender Studies, the African American Studies Program, the Program in Philosophy and Literature, and the Center for Sports, Character, and Culture. Michael Crowe, Katherine Tillman, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, Phil Sloan, and other members of our faculty have also organized major international conferences and symposia at Notre Dame. Walt Nicgorski is the Editor of the *Review of Politics* and Edmund Goehring edits the Mozart Society of America's *Newsletter*.

One way of familiarizing outside faculty with the Program has been by involving them in our recruitment and hiring process. We were among the first departments to open our candidates' lectures to colleagues in the College and to invite their feedback. In the past, we have been rightly concerned about maintaining a distance from other departments in order to protect our autonomy in selecting candidates who could best meet the particular needs of the department. We have now established a relationship of mutual trust and respect that allows us to seek advice with the confidence that we can and will choose the candidate best disposed to serve our department as well as the College and wider university. As our department has become more open to others outside our department, we are seeing signs that the walls that separate departments and colleges throughout the university are slowly crumbling. Not surprisingly, our faculty occupy leadership roles in many of the interdisciplinary centers and institutes that are at the cutting edge of research and teaching at Notre Dame.

Curricular Issues and New Faculty

Over these past few years, we have made very few changes to the seminar reading list. We did discuss a major revision of Seminar VI, but in spite of concerns about certain texts and some interest in including a contemporary text on Catholic theology, we have kept Seminar VI pretty much the same, with one exception, the experimental addition of Plato's *Phaedrus* at the conclusion. When we organized the seminar lists chronologically,

we lamented the fact that our seniors would no longer have the opportunity to revisit some of the ancient texts. Whether we retain the *Phaedrus* or add additional ancient texts to the senior seminars remains to be seen.

In 1996, before hiring a musicologist to replace Linda Austern, we had an extensive discussion of the Program's Fine Arts requirement. We debated whether we should continue to base the Fine Arts course on music, or change to a course on the visual arts. We decided to uphold the decision made in 1975 to emphasize music in the Program. Early in 1996, we had the good fortune to hire Edmund Goehring, a Mozart specialist for the Fine Arts position.

One of my greatest joys as a Chair has been to hire outstanding new faculty members. These new faculty have succeeded in highly competitive searches, as the Program has strongly appealed to the very best candidates in the job market. The same year that we hired Edmund Goehring, we also hired Julia Marvin, a specialist in medieval literature. The following year, Fabian Udoh, a specialist in New Testament studies, joined our faculty. This year we welcomed Francesca Bordogna, a specialist in the history of nineteenth-century science to the Program. In addition to their wide range of expertise, Fabian, who is from Nigeria, and Francesca, who is from Italy, join Gretchen Reydams-Schils, who is from Belgium, in giving our department a strong international presence.

As we have welcomed new faculty to the department, we have become more conscious of the importance of mentoring them, particularly as they begin to lead Great Books Seminars. When I first came to Notre Dame, I was assigned to observe a seminar class in addition to the one that I was teaching. This practice had to be discontinued as faculty teaching loads were decreased. As we have added new faculty at a pace of one per year over the past five years, we have become more aware of the need to take a more deliberate approach to mentoring. We now have several experienced faculty visit the new faculty member's seminar and we have the new faculty member visit their seminars. With the help of a gift from a friend of the Program, Gabe Zarnotti, we established a class visitation program, which provides a modest stipend for faculty who visit each other's classes and for an annual faculty retreat dedicated to fostering our pedagogy.

The World Masterpieces Seminar at the South Bend Center for the Homeless

For many years now, graduating seniors, their families, and faculty have gathered for breakfast right before the commencement ceremony. At this time the chair reads the students' names, the titles of their senior essays, and the names of their faculty advisors. A number of faculty and I were struck by the number of our graduates who volunteered for a year of service. When I became chair, I counted the number of volunteers and discovered that thirty to forty percent of our students planned on doing some sort of service activity after graduation, which was well above the university's average of ten percent.

Feeling both proud of our students and challenged to make service a more visible part of the Program's identity, Steve Fallon and I began to explore how the Program might be

able to make a corporate contribution to the community. We had no concrete ideas about how to do this until Fred Crosson brought to my attention an article in *Harper's* by Earl Shorris describing a class in the humanities that he initiated for adults below the poverty line in New York City. Shorris's article was based on a chapter of his 1997 book, *New American Blues: A Journey through Poverty to Democracy*. Shorris was a graduate of the University of Chicago during the Hutchins era, when students in the College followed a rigorous Great Books curriculum. In his book, Shorris makes a strong case for a Great Books education as “an answer to the problem of poverty in the United States.” He argues very simply that a Great Books education in the humanities fosters human development and political participation. Shorris's *New American Blues* offers both an intellectual and practical response to the elitist view of university education put forth by his classmate Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind*, a book that Bloom discussed with our faculty prior to its publication in 1987. While I agreed with much of Bloom's criticism of American culture and with Bloom's celebration of the great works of the Western tradition, I was dismayed by his view that liberal arts education should be preserved for the few. While the term “liberal arts” originated as a reference to the arts of free or privileged man who had leisure to explore them, the term has come in a democratic age to refer to the liberating effect of the arts, which can prepare any man or woman for full participation in the community's cultural and political life (in the widest sense).

Unfortunately, Great Books programs, including our own, have tended to serve the privileged in our society. We have focused our energy on carrying forward the Great Conversation without paying sufficient attention to those excluded by race and class. Shorris's course in New York City, taught by a cadre of volunteer professors, convinced Steve Fallon and me not that the Great Books were for everyone—that we already believe—but that the Program of Liberal Studies could reach out to the most marginalized in our society if we were determined to do so.

Steve Fallon and I turned for help to the Director of the Center for the Homeless, PLS graduate Lou Nanni. With Lou's leadership, the Center had become nationally recognized for providing not merely a shelter for the homeless but a way out of poverty. Lou suggested that we recruit our students from those who had finished the initial treatment phase offered by the Center. By the beginning of the 1998-1999 academic year, we received approval for a course bearing credit from the Program of Liberal Studies, and we launched our course that year.

As we were navigating the Notre Dame bureaucracy, we worked out the logistics of the class with Lou Nanni and Debbie Lane, who directs the Adult education Program at the Center for the Homeless. Because the life circumstances of guests of the Center often change quickly and unpredictably, we decided to offer a sequence of three eight-week units. Students earn a credit at the completion of each unit. We organized the units thematically, beginning with the theme of *Justice and Tyranny*, moving to *Self-Discovery*, and concluding with *God and Nature*. We took most of our texts from the seminar lists and added a few contemporary selections, such as Martin Luther King's “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and Doris Lessing's “The Old Chief Mshlanga.” PLS

faculty have volunteered to help us as “guest seminar leaders,” and over twenty PLS students have been involved as childcare workers, van drivers, tutors, and ethnographers.

Our costs have been minimal. The W. W. Norton & Company initially donated copies of its two-volume anthology of *World Masterpieces* for our first-year class and subsequently gave us 200 sets for future courses. Other expenses have been modest, mainly for refreshments, for copies of books and essays not contained in the Norton text, and for concert and theater tickets. We originally met expenses through t-shirt sales, gifts from our alumnae/i, donated tickets from Notre Dame and St. Mary's, and free use of a van from the Center for Social Concerns. This year we added a generous grant from the College of Arts and Letters.

The World Masterpieces Seminar has received national and international media coverage; over thirty-five universities have sought our assistance in setting up similar programs. Overwhelmed by these requests and seeking to expand our outreach, at the beginning of the 1999–2000 academic year we hired Mary Hendriksen to serve as a part-time coordinator. Mary established a World Masterpieces Seminar, led by Gretchen Reydams-Schils, for women living at the YWCA in South Bend. [Community Extension Seminar](#)

Alumni Relations

The greatest gift of these past fifty years has been our loyal alumnae/i, who have generously assisted us both materially and spiritually. In the past two years, thanks to the ingenuity of a couple of our faculty members, we have deepened our relations with many of our alumnae/i. Shortly after becoming editor of *Programma*, Julia Marvin asked alumnae/i to volunteer as career mentors for our students as they contemplated life after the Program. We now have a substantial list of mentors from all walks of life. About the same time, a visiting alumnus suggested that we think about some kind of summer continuing education program for our alumnae/i and friends of the program. Steve Fallon picked up on this idea and organized a one-week summer symposium for the end of June 1999, which featured a variety of faculty-led seminars centered around a daily seminar on the *Brothers Karamazov* led by Fred Crosson. The symposium was a great success, and I believe that it will become a permanent feature of the Program and a model for other departments at Notre Dame.

The Future

As I look back over the past fifty years and ahead to the new century, I fully expect that the Program, blessed as it is with strong faculty, students, and alumnae/i, will continue to flourish. We are in many ways stronger than ever before, yet we are also more vulnerable than ever before. Most of our students are double majors, most study abroad, and increasing numbers are being drawn into an ever-expanding number of interdisciplinary minors. Students' lives outside the Program are busier. We can no longer mount the extensive extracurricular program of lectures and social events that we had when I joined the Program. Our faculty are busier as well. The reduced teaching load means that we teach fewer courses to fewer students; our commitments outside the Program mean that

we have less time for faculty seminars and social events. Over the years the trend is clear—both faculty and students have been devoting less and less time to the Program. Some see this as a loss and fear for our survival. I am more positive. I think that the Program has been enriched by the contacts that our students and faculty have had outside the Program. We have become less insular but no less of a community dedicated to ideals that gave birth to our Program. I am confident that we can and will move ahead preserving what has made us great but also willing to embrace the challenges of the future.

APPENDIX

BECOMING A GREAT BOOKIE AT NOTRE DAME

from the autobiography of Otto Bird

Seeking the Center: My Life as a Great Bookie

(San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 73–97.

The first secure center, and intellectually the most influential one, I found in the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas. But he also in his *Summa theologiae* produced a great book, and the Great Books movement extended the circle of which Thomas remained for me the center.

As I have already noted, I was present at the University of Chicago in 1937 when that movement reached one of the highest points in its development. But at that time, as a mere student, I was only on the edge of that development. It was not until ten years later that I became an active participant in it and entered upon the way that led to my career as a “great bookie.” For in 1947 I joined the staff that under the direction of Mortimer Adler was engaged in producing the set published by Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., as *Great Books of the Western World*.

If there is any single person who deserves the title of “The Great Bookie,” it is certainly Mortimer Adler. He makes no claim to be the originator of that movement. Credit for that he attributes to his own teacher, John Erskine, musician, first president of the Julliard School of Music, novelist, literary critic, and professor of English, who in 1919 inaugurated at Columbia University the Honors Colloquium in the Classics of the Western World. Adler, however, does claim credit for coining the phrase “Great Books” when he persuaded Hutchins to set up a “Great Books course” at the University of Chicago, of which I was later a member.

Founding a Great Books Program

As my work on the *Great Books of the Western World* was drawing to an end, events were occurring at the University of Notre Dame that were to result in my continuing to work with Great Books, although in still another way. This development was one in which Adler was again a major mover. The other person who was even more responsible was Father John J. Cavanaugh, C.S.C., president of the university from 1946 to 1952.

The material and underlying condition for a change lay in the new situation in which Notre Dame found itself at the end of the war. Before 1941 it is not inaccurate to say that Notre Dame provided a good example of what has come to be called the “Catholic ghetto” complex in that it was a place where Catholic students could withdraw into a totally Catholic environment and learn, treasure, and defend the truths and values of Catholicism. That descriptive name is now usually used in a pejorative sense. But it has

become clear following upon the destruction of that “ghetto” after the Second Vatican Council that there was much good in it that has since been lost. A pluralistic society contains many different and diverse goods, but it lacks the special good and beauty of a unitary society founded on deeply shared beliefs.

The war brought with it the establishment of a Naval V-12 training program at Notre Dame, and this opened up the “ghetto” in the university by suddenly introducing much of America's pluralism. As a result of that experience Notre Dame at the end of the war faced a difficult and crucial decision. Would the university try to return to its pre-1941 status and remain fairly small and compact, or would it keep open its doors and be willing to expand and experiment? Father Cavanaugh was as responsible as anyone else, I believe, for the decision to follow the latter way.

That an experiment in a new kind of liberal education would move in the direction of Great Books was even more exclusively the initiative of Father Cavanaugh. In the early days of the Great Books movement in adult education, Father Cavanaugh had become an avid “great bookie” and a friend of Adler. He also became closely associated with Roger J. Kiley, judge of the Illinois appellate court in Chicago, an alumnus of Notre Dame, a football great under Rockne and a teammate of “the Gipper,” and in the 1940s a member of the “fat men's class” in Great Books that Adler and Hutchins had in Chicago. In 1945, Kiley began to come to Notre Dame regularly to lead with Father Cavanaugh and Dean Clarence Manion a Great Books class with a select group of law students.

In the Arts College there was also a small group of faculty members working to introduce the Great Books approach to their teaching. This group included Rufus Rauch and Frank O'Malley of the English department, the former of whom spent a year in the Saint John's program in Annapolis, and Father Thomas J. Brennan, C.S.C., of the philosophy department, who also led a Great Books adult class in South Bend; and Willis Nutting of the history department.

Father Cavanaugh became president of the university in 1946 and soon began preparing for the introduction of a Great Books program. Toward that end in 1947 he invited Adler to come to Notre Dame for a series of discussions with its faculty on how a Great Books program might be adapted to a Catholic college. By the fall of 1949 the situation was favorable enough to make it feasible to put on a series of Great Books seminars to demonstrate to the faculty that they should be adopted by Notre Dame. The students for these demonstrations came from a third year philosophy course taught by Father T. J. Brennan, himself a leader in an adult Great Books seminar. Adler and the four other editors of the *Syntopicon* were to be the principal leaders. Adler himself took the opening seminar on November 4, 1949, for a discussion of the *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* of Sophocles. I took the second a week later on the *Meno* of Plato. We met in a large room of the old administration building under the golden dome. The students and their two leaders sat around a large table placed in the center of the room while the attending members of the faculty sat and observed from chairs placed around the walls of the room.

For Father Cavanaugh these seminars marked the end of preparing the ground. By January of 1950 he initiated the establishment of a Great Books program in the Arts College. He could have established such a program by presidential fiat, but he preferred to have the approval of the faculty. As a first step I was called back that same month to discuss with the college faculty what such a program would look like if it were to take all of its students' time for all four undergraduate years. Shortly thereafter I was made director of the General Program of Liberal Studies that opened the fall semester of 1950 with five faculty members and forty students, which in effect established a college-within-a-college. Father Cavanaugh was optimistic enough to hope that it would prove so successful as to absorb and take over the entire liberal arts college. I was never as sanguine.

There is no such thing as a single agreed upon program of education based upon the Great Books. They could be used to form the basis of many different programs as different from one another as the philosophical positions to be found among the Great Books. Hence too, they could be used as the basis for an educational program with a very definite commitment to the truth. That is what the University of Notre Dame set out to do in 1950 when it established the General Program of Liberal Studies, and it is to describe that program in some detail that I now turn.

Notre Dame's General Program

First, a word about commitment. Ours was intended and organized to be a program professing and practicing the faith of the Roman Catholic Church. That in itself, of course, counts as one very large commitment. But we went still further. For although there are admittedly several different, even competing, Christian philosophies and theologies within the Church, we further committed ourselves to the philosophy and theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas. That commitment was stated clearly and made the basis for the courses, or tutorials, as they were called, devoted to the systematic study of these two disciplines. For this purposes two hours a week were allotted for each discipline for all four years. The method in each was the same and consisted of the intensive reading and analysis of a basic text chosen as providing the best way to the truth upon its subject.

In philosophy we would begin by reading an appropriate dialogue of Plato as providing an introduction and then turn to a text of Aristotle read according to the commentary of Thomas upon it. During the four years, the major parts of philosophy were studied: the philosophy of nature the first year, followed in the second by metaphysics; the philosophy of man was the object of the third year tutorial with the study of philosophical psychology and ethics; the fourth year focused upon social and political philosophy and intensive study was also made of *The Federalist Papers*.

In theology the first year was devoted to the study of Sacred Scripture, and the following three years to that of systematic theology. Here the basic texts were those of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas, and conciliar and Papal pronouncements. Reason and revelation, and the divine essence and Trinity were considered in the second year;

creation, redemption, and the virtues in the third; and in the fourth, sacrifice, sacraments, the mystical body, and the social teaching of the Church.

As is evident from even so brief a description, the tutorials in philosophy and theology were definitely “committed.” However, I should also note that these two series of tutorials by no means exhausted the reading in philosophy and theology. Indeed, much more reading in these disciplines was done in the Great Books seminars, which included modern as well as ancient and medieval books. Also in the language tutorials, especially during the first two years, shorter texts from both disciplines were read for comparisons with other kinds of writing.

At the time the program began in 1950 the most innovative part of it, aside from the great dependence upon Great Books and the seminar discussion, was undoubtedly the language tutorial. This met five periods a week throughout the year. It combined features of both the seminar and the tutorials in philosophy and theology. Like the tutorials, it was intensive in purpose in that it consisted of an intensive reading of a few selected texts. Unlike them, however, and like the seminar, it did not confine itself to any one subject matter of discipline. Its aim was training in the basic Trivium: grammar, rhetoric, and logic. For this purpose texts were chosen from different subject matters that represented not only different ways of knowing, but also different ways of writing. Texts were usually selected from books also read in seminar, but only a few passages from a few books.

In 1950 students entering Notre Dame had usually studied Latin for at least two years. Thus after a review of Latin based on a study of the Ordinary of the Mass, the language tutorial I conducted read the following texts:

Gospel of Saint John, prologue

Saint Thomas: *De verbo*, *Summa theologiae*, I.34.1–3

Genesis: The Joseph story

Lucretius: *De natura rerum*, III. 1024–94

Virgil: *Georgics*, II. 45–540

Virgil: *Aeneid*, I. 450–93

Cicero: *De officiis*, I.iv–v

Tacitus: *Annals*, III. 26–28; VI. 23–25

Saint Augustine: *Confessions*, IX. 23–25

Although the texts were read in Latin, the aim was not to attempt to make Latinists out of the students. Its purpose was to use the Latin along with English to develop skill and understanding in the basic arts of language.

The second year of the language tutorial was like the first, but with French instead of Latin. The third year was devoted to the theory and practice of literary criticism, and the fourth to the study of tragedy and the novel.

The tutorial in mathematics and science was organized so as to study in the first year Euclid's geometry and some elementary conic sections from Apollonius, and to turn in the second year to the analytical geometry of Descartes and an introduction to calculus. Experimental science was the object of the third year's study of science, and biological science was studied in the fourth year.

As originally established, the program aimed to secure and assure an integrated intellectual community, something that no contemporary university is. The principal means was to develop an omnicompetent faculty in the sense that every member would be expected to know, as teacher or student, every course that its students were required to study. This ideal was never realized, except for the seminars, which all of the faculty would eventually come to know through actually having to teach them.

As director, partly by way of example and more so from my own personal interest, I can say that I believe without exaggeration that I did more than anyone else on the faculty to realize that ideal. At the risk of betraying the sin of vainglory, I will list by title the courses that I taught during my years of teaching in the program.

Latin and the Arts of the Trivium

French and the Arts of the Trivium

Euclid's *Elements*

Descartes's *Geometry*

Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *Physics*

Russell and Whitehead: *Principia mathematica* I

Mathematical Logic, especially syllogistic

Methods of Knowing

Kant's Philosophy of Science

Intellectual History

Philosophical Inquiry

Origins of Christianity

Concepts of Man

Metaphysics

Great Books seminars throughout

Such great diversity, one may say, cannot help but make for superficiality. And if such a course of study makes for the generalist, where does it leave the specialist? This question raises one of the greatest difficulties and the most acute source of strain for a faculty member in a program such as the one I have been describing. It obviously attracts those who are devoted to a life of learning. But as one's learning grows and develops it soon wants to venture into areas and pursue directions that lie beyond the needs and wishes of an undergraduate college student. The tension mounts between the needs of teaching and the desire for research. That may be faced by any undergraduate teacher. But it is more intense in a Great Books program, which unlike other departments in a comprehensive university has no graduate extension that can serve as an outlet for such yearnings and ambitions. To add to the frustration it is usually through just such outlets that advancement in the academic profession can be obtained. Often a faculty member becomes so dissatisfied that he will seek a way out by locating a slot in a department that possesses a graduate program as well as a "major concentration."

The program at Notre Dame enjoyed a distinct advantage in that, as a college-within-a-college, it is surrounded by research and graduate programs in the other departments. Thus it has been possible for a faculty member of the General Program to offer occasionally graduate courses in other departments. Thus members have taken advantage of this opportunity to offer courses in the Philosophy, History, and English departments. Frequently too this experience has resulted in the production of research papers, unfortunately necessary for advancement in this day of "publish or perish."

However, there is a special and particularly important benefit that a Great Books program derives from being a part of a Catholic university. As Cardinal Newman noted in his defense of the university, wherever a commitment to theology is lacking there will be a hole, an emptiness, which has to be filled, and if it is not filled by theology some other discipline inevitably will endeavor to take its place. ^[1] Devotion to the Great Books divorced from a theological and religious commitment all too readily moves over to fill that empty place and to become a quasi religion. The most ostensive sign of such devotion that I know of is the temple to the Great Books that Wabash College has erected in its new library. I suspect that it was probably built at the behest of a donor who was a great bookie and made that room a condition of his gift. It is a splendid large room, walled in marble, with the names of the authors of the Great Books carved as a frieze around the top of the walls. It has the appearance of a temple, but, if so, it is a temple to a false god.

The Great Books that made and recorded our intellectual tradition cannot and should not be more than a means to develop our minds through deepening our understanding along the road that we are hopefully traveling to that wisdom that lies in the worship of the one and only true God. As Saint Thomas once wrote: “Although it is not in our power to know by ourselves the things of faith, nevertheless, if we do what we can, that is to say, if we follow the guidance of natural reason, God will not fail to give us what is necessary to us.” ^[21]

The Program, 1950–63

When established in 1950, the General Program called for all four years of its students' career for all required courses, without any electives. However, only four classes were graduated that pursued the complete four-year program. The change came in 1952, when Father Theodore Hesburgh became president of the university. For in that year a common freshman year, which went into effect in 1954, was set up for all incoming students. With this innovation the Great Books program not only lost a year, but some of its own requirements were met during the first year. These included requirements in foreign language, mathematics, and laboratory science. Such changes necessitated a wholesale reorganization of the General Program. Rather than attempting to provide a detailed review of the various changes, I will summarize them by describing the shape the program came to have by 1963–64, which as the last year that I was its director.

The tutorials in language, mathematics, and science were reduced to the following courses: Language and Logic, mainly devoted to mathematical logic in the sophomore year; the History of Science in the junior year; and the Methodology and Philosophy of Science in the senior year. A literature sequence was set up following a genre approach with separate courses devoted to the study of poetry, tragedy, the novel, and literary criticism. Philosophy had three semester courses, as had theology, each of them following much the same order as that already noted for the four-year sequence. The Great Books Seminar remained the same except that it was reduced to a three-year sequence.

Two other innovations should be noted. A lecture course in historical orientation was introduced as a small means of overcoming the students' appalling ignorance of chronological development; their inability was so great that often they could not place even within centuries the time at which a book was written. Another reduction came from the felt and expressed need of the students for time to take at least one elective course a semester during the last two years.

After these changes the General Program became much less distinctive than it had been at its beginning. Much that was good was undoubtedly lost. It no longer enjoyed the strong sense of community that it has possessed as a college-within-a-college. Yet some of the reductions had distinct advantages. It was a relief, at least administratively, not to be burdened with the task of trying to locate scientists who would be willing and able to teach the laboratory sciences within the context of the Great Books. Instead, the program could turn its interests to the history and philosophy of science. In fact, one of the earliest

graduates from the program, Michael Crowe, obtained a doctoral degree in the history of science and returned to offer the first course in it at Notre Dame.

The foreign language requirement became a responsibility of the common freshman year. This, along with the possibility of taking elective courses, enabled students to increase their proficiency in a foreign language. This possibility became increasingly desirable with the introduction of the “year-abroad” programs. The electives also provided the students with an opportunity to obtain a “major concentration” in a particular discipline, especially if it built upon the strong foundation in literature and philosophy within the program.

The General Program, now known as the Program of Liberal Studies, remains distinctly different from other programs at Notre Dame. It still forms an intellectual community from its commitment to learning and teaching the Great Books. The seminar thus remains the center on which that community is based, since it is shared by students and faculty alike, however different their special interests may be.

I went on an extended leave from Notre Dame in 1964, and although I returned in 1970, I never thereafter had much to say about the direction of the General Program.

During my years at Notre Dame, from which I retired in 1977, all but two were under the presidency of Father Hesburgh, who remained a strong supporter of the Great Books program. During that period the university almost quadrupled the size of its student body, its faculty, and its buildings. It admitted women students and faculty members. It increased its graduate school, with corresponding emphasis upon scholarship and teaching, and this is almost certain to result in the deterioration of its undergraduate teaching. It became “secularized” as it would never have dreamed of becoming when I entered in 1950.

Is Notre Dame today a better university than it was in 1950? Measured by secular standards of non-Catholic universities, there is no doubt that it is. Its faculty is more scholarly and scientific. It has more publication and research to its credit. Its students score higher on the entrance tests. It is more international.

Yet it certainly is not as manifestly Catholic as it was. But then, of course, neither is the Church in the United States. Now neither the faculty nor the students, I believe, practice their faith as regularly as they did then, even though there may be more interest in religion and theology as an intellectual subject. It is less Catholic in that it no longer supports the universal, that is, the “catholic” mission of the Church under the leadership of the pope as strongly as it once did. The Magisterium of the Church under its head seems almost to be forgotten as a teacher. Latin, the official language of the Church, is all but forgotten, even among seminarians.

The changes in the religious character of the university derive, mostly, it seems to me, from the policy that has been adopted for the hiring of faculty. The administration now

hires for its faculty many men and women who are not Catholic and who have no interest in or intent of promoting the truths and values of the Catholic Church.

In the 1950s I was a member of the Faculty Hiring Committee, a body appointed by the administration to put pressure upon the department heads to seek for and hire the best candidates they could find for the position that became open. As it turned out, I became the one member of the committee who asked the candidate, when he was not a Catholic, about his ability and willingness to live and function in a Catholic university. Usually, of course, he foresaw no difficulty, since if he had any such doubts he probably would not have applied for the position in the first place. The committee functioned as a kind of watch force to encourage departments to improve the qualities of their faculty and so too the excellence of the university. Father Cavanaugh was looking to that same end when he started the General Program.

The times have brought great changes to the campus in still other ways. At its inception in 1950 the Great Books program was the most “liberal” one in the university. It assigned books that were on the Index of Prohibited Books, for which permission had to be obtained from the president. Discussion seminars were held in which the students were encouraged to speak out and not just listen to their professors. The texts for study were great and difficult books, not just hashed down versions of them. All of this has now become standard practice throughout the university. But the Great Books program is also now considered one of the most “conservative” and reputedly the most Catholic.

I do not think that the program today is as good as it was in its first years. In theology and philosophy it has been watered down so that it no longer studies as intensively and extensively as it once did the writings of Plato and Aristotle, Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas. It has opened its readings to classics of the Orient, thereby further diluting its study of the Western tradition. There is also less study of logic and mathematics than there used to be and so less in the way of discipline and rigor. More attention is given to the fine arts. As a whole, the program is less “intellectualistic” than it was in the beginning. Yet it remains a program that is highly intellectual in that it places its work upon the primacy of the intellect in education. So although less so than it once was, in this respect it still remains faithful to the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Footnotes

^[1] John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 55.

^[2] Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. II, ad 2.