

SPONSOR/PARTNERSHIP OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION: PRESIDENT AS MIDDLEMAN

I approach this subject somewhat gingerly not only because I am aware of the sensitivities involved but because I have listened from time to time to Alice Gallin's warning that "there is a different relationship in almost everyone of our 240 odd colleges covering a wide spectrum of everything from thinly disguised hostility to warm intimacy".

My familiarity with the subject is that of a "participant observer". In 1948 I had the awesome experience of starting my career as one of two laymen in a Catholic institution. Along the way I had to explain to local clothiers that I was not a wildly dressed priest or seminarian but a bona fide layman engaged full time as a college instructor. Then and subsequently I had the pleasure and tensions of working at or near the summit of four different Catholic institutions in as many states operated by four different religious orders, male and female, and associating closely with four more because of joint programs. In many positions I was the first layman and felt the sting of breaking new paths.

While I have reviewed quickly the research and studies on this subject and listened with great interest as part of an otherwise all-Religious study commission I am still striving for additional valid insights into a complicated subject. The empirical data {which needs upgrading now}, some of which I have listed in a simple bibliography for quick ^{review} recall leaves me with some uneasiness about its ability to convey the nuances and caveats that come with involvement. My approach, rather, is that of a layman admittedly angular and largely impressionistic. Moreover, it reflects continuous experience in middle sized Catholic institutions, not the largest ones which may provide a somewhat different milieu for a president.

Catholic College Potential

Catholic institutions of higher education have shown remarkable improvement academically in the past several decades, particularly at the undergraduate level. Whether they have closed the gap between themselves and good secular private colleges, a question raised by Ellis and others in the mid-fifties, depends a good deal on how one defines their purpose. They cannot be all things to all people.

I am confident, however, after thirty-five years of rumination that Catholic colleges have based their educational philosophy on a valid 'imago hominis' and

that they have as Robert Hutchins once said "the longest intellectual tradition in the West from which to draw". Only the weaknesses of human beings and the limitations of context may inhibit an exceptional opportunity to do the educating job well in our colleges. After a hiatus of a decade or more Andrew Greeley has again raised it to a level of national dialogue, the subject of how well we are doing it in practice although he focuses basically on graduate schools. Certainly the topic of this symposium, Sponsorship/Partnership of Catholic Higher Education is a significant consideration in this dialogue. And this relationship cannot be fully understood without also looking at its history. At the risk, therefore, of being redundant I make reference to the more recent past of this relationship, for prior to that period the assumption of separation would not be true.

The Beginning

Most Catholic colleges were founded after 1900, usually as a high school-college mixture, to serve the children and grandchildren of relatively unlettered and religiously docile immigrants. The founding story is an ~~inspiring~~ ^{inspiring} tale of courage and sacrifice on the part of the Founders. Except for them what is the largest complex of Catholic educational institutions in the world would be insignificant, the intellectual dimension of the American Church would be severely retarded, and the healthy impact of pluralism within the Church that inhibits monolithic thinking would be gravely reduced.

These colleges were established in an inclement social environment dominated by a WASP majority which controlled the power structure and which was suspicious and supercilious about the religion and culture of the newcomers. I felt this personally when I began soliciting financial support for my first college right after WW II. The response of religious orders was a defensive one and their colleges as an extension of themselves reflected it in many ways. Catholic colleges were extended families.

At least until WW II Catholic educators found it challenging to try to delineate between a minor seminary and a college of liberal arts. In some quarters it is still not a clear distinction. Newman was fighting that issue in Ireland by saying a university "is not a convent, it is not a seminary: it is a place to fit men of the world for the world". As Ellis has contended the Orders "saw the Church's educational institutions largely in terms of what might be called citadels

of apologetics". For this reason SRB's were {are?} reluctant to loosen the reins on their colleges where often the religious superior was also the president and where the trustees with some exceptions were entirely Religious--frequently the same ones who ruled the Order.

World War II is roughly a dividing line between this caricature and what we have today although the evolution was fairly slow, fitful, and somewhat uneven from institution to institution. Escalating size of student bodies triggered by the GI Bill and rising per capita income innundated all institutions of higher education. But ^{it was} ~~was not~~ of particular significance to Catholic ones for their constituencies were still climbing the income ladder and would have been hard pressed to receive higher education otherwise.

Transition and Change

The rising size of student bodies and somewhat later the decline in and loss of vocations forced the ingestion of lay teachers into these colleges. Pangs of change began to occur. A slowly dawning realization that internal financing of new plant, scholarship aid, and an escalating lay salary bill would no longer suffice drew attention to the need for external fund raising--again from the laity or their businesses and forced the colleges to look outward.

Religious returning from pioneering excursions into secular educational institutions reinforced the greater emphasis on humanistic excellence imparted by lay teachers--sometimes to the dismay of the House which regarded this as a move towards secularization.

Professionalization of management procedures began creeping into the colleges challenging conventional operating modes of the institutions as simple extensions of the religious family. New personnel, accounting and governance practices began to impinge on the easy informality of the old relationships. What in the religious family was an attractive characteristic--familial interdependence, compassion and mutual assistance--frequently challenged good management practices in the college where growing size called for "systems" that were fairly impersonal. Federal and state equal opportunity and fair employment practices rules reinforced the systems. Abandonment of Catholic college isolation in the national education community raised expectations for academic quality competitive with non-Catholic institutions and frequently on their terms. Self-criticism arose within

the college on the proper nature and function of a Catholic college and the role of the laity.

Impact on SRB's

This changing character of the college also impacted on the SRB's. Laymen began to compete with religious for leadership positions in their colleges stirring a debate within many Orders over how far this should go and what it might do to the identity of the Order. New search procedures for vacancies threatened placement of SRB personnel in the college. The need for fund raising in the college introduced competition for it with the House. Lay teachers, lay donors, professional standards of accrediting associations and even government itself by virtue of constitutional interpretation and pervasive grant and loan programs began to inhibit the monopoly on decision-making hitherto enjoyed by the SRB's with regard to their colleges. The effects of Vatican II were impacting also on the Houses many of which experienced loosening discipline and defection which acted in turn to further increase their anxiety.

By the late Sixties many SRB's were responding to their needs and perhaps to Vatican II blessings on lay activity by involving more laity in the governing apparatus of the colleges, more specifically, to the college Boards. But almost at the time this seemed to be a blossoming movement the McGrath-Maida controversy arose. It debated the relevancy of Canon Law to SRB property rights in their colleges and the proper role of laity in helping run them. Enter a note of confusion and indecisiveness into the legal propriety of "progressive" policies. This caught many institutions between conceptions of Canon Law which they did not wish to breach and fears that too great "entanglement" might cost them public funds. Some SRB's stopped dead in their tracks in the laicization and separate incorporation of their colleges. On top of this, increasingly close scrutiny of civil law applications to SRB-college relations raised the question of "ascending liability" of the religious orders, e.g. in case of college financial difficulties the SRB might become liable.

While these gave pause for thought in the early Seventies and while legal questions cannot be overlooked in this relationship certainly the commitments and motivations of persons who establish and carry out administrative and academic policies at the institutions are far more important in determining the actual

daily influences of the sponsoring religious body. "Legal relationships," says Moots and Gaffney, "are only a part and perhaps not even a major part in the considerations governing such relationships." Change continued to occur fitfully and unevenly throughout Catholic higher education in the Seventies. A few institutions followed the earlier pattern of Webster College and turned the entire governance of the college over to laypeople. Some who had responded earlier by liberalizing their Boards turned defensive and froze. Many varied in between those two extremes. However, most Catholic colleges continued to reflect a cultural lag vis-a-vis their secular counterparts which might loosely be typified by attitudes towards women {or men}, laity, sexuality, and censorship, among others.

President in the Middle

How does the Catholic college President deal with this reality? Although not the only one responsible for overcoming lag he/she is necessarily in an uncomfortable key position in this regard. And he/she may feel the nature of the problem more strongly than any other for as he/she gravitates in professional academic circles of the nation macro and current views of educational developments not normally available equally to others in the institution are absorbed. By virtue of peer pressure and commitments to professionalism the President strives to make his/her institution competitive with the rest and chaffs at obstacles. Every professional conference attended in one sense becomes an admonition to do things better, perhaps differently.

Dependence on the Board or former academics in the Order declines as college in-house expertise grows and external consultants are used. The President may wish to move faster than either the Board wishes or the RSB will countenance. He/she may develop an abhorrence for parochial practices and views that threaten academic excellence but which are anchored in time. ~~Some impatience~~ with "Monday-morning quarterbacking" from former academic Religious in the House may generate impatience and chip away at presidential morale. It is always difficult for religious presidents to be "top brass" during the day but just one of the fellows {or gals} in the Abbey social room at night. And it is usually uncomfortable to have the SRB headquarters on campus if that is the case for it encourages "end runs" and "peeking over the shoulder".

Other Nuances

In some cases SRB's do not always share the same vision nor wholehearted dedication to academic excellence. They do not reject it but it is not clearly an

unchallengeable first priority. In more extreme cases the refined distinction between a college and a seminary is not always recognized, or, if recognized, creates some discomfort. The House almost always places a heavier premium on saving souls as a ^{prime} mission of the college than the college ^{does} itself.

Too, the SRB may have its span of attention distracted by other pursuits--parishes, retreat houses, hospitals, social work, secondary and elementary schools, and, of course, a partiality towards a contemplative life style upon which college activities may intrude. Each of these other interests attract a support group within the SRB since man by nature is a political animal. How many presidents haven't gone to a college donor only to find someone from the SRB has already solicited him for other projects? If a faction does not directly compete for resource support it frequently contents itself with a detached superficial analysis of college needs and problems and is not too worried if important matters concerning the college which arise in SRB councils do not get resolved. This may in turn hold up action in the college which the President thinks is important.

So the President gets caught between the humanistic pursuits of the college and the spiritual detachment of the House. He also gets squeezed between the resource needs of the college and those of other missions. Finally, he may agonize between the canons of professional management and the familial expectations of the SRB.

President as Politician

How does a President persuade the SRB that a cultural lag may be involved in its relationship to the college; that what was sufficient yesterday in terms of quality is not so today; that valuable as familial loyalty is within the Order it may become debilitating if freely practiced in the college; that students of today must be handled differently than twenty years ago; and that desires for control carry corresponding obligations of support?

The President in situations of tension treads a thin line. Too vigorous a representation of his professional goals and the standards necessary to reach them may threaten, perhaps even destroy personal relations with members of the SRB--and, in the case of religious presidents, test the vow of obedience. Yet, too little expostulation may get the college less than it properly deserves and needs.

The President, lay or clerical, wants to maintain the prestige of the SRB in the college; values its presence; respects its traditions; recognizes its linkage to the history of the place--but worries over how to keep its presence without impairing other objectives of his own. How can mothering that becomes smothering be controlled? No wonder that internal personal conflicts exacerbate for Catholic college presidents the normal psychological stress under which all presidents operate.

Most Catholic college presidents emanate from the classroom where model-building is their proper *modus-operandi*. They are characterized by large doses of speculative knowledge and therefore tend to be quite intense about their goals. Implementing the model amidst the contextual limitations of the presidency always means less than perfection, often considerably less. The most professionally oriented and imaginative presidents chaff the most in making this accommodation--and some of them, we know, never make it--and don't last long. The relatively short terms of college presidents, in general, as compared with CEO's in other settings like corporate business testify to this frustration.

A study some years back comparing the problems of college presidents with those of mayors in fair-sized cities concluded that the parallels were very close. Both have to strive for their goals while living in the center of their constituency all the while trying to wring concessions and compromise from a welter of often conflicting clienteles. And amongst these clienteles is the SRB regardless of its legal standing on campus. The art of the possible often becomes the prime skill of the successful president rather than his scholarly ability. His position is very similar to that of a statesman who is working with variable situations and who must make prudential judgments based on the facts.

Communication Important

What's the game plan for the new president? Certainly, a sense of humor. Beyond that, frequent communication with the power structure of the SRB is essential. With or without legal standing vis-a-vis the college their power is usually present and real through the emotional bonds of memory with alumni and parents, not to mention the collar and scapular which continue to attract deference and respect with Catholic clienteles.

Communication helps to disarm fears, bring^s fantasies to earth, press^{es} the case for resources, soothe^s the hurt of having terminated a religious, explains the Edward L. Henry

nuances of student life styles and behavior, protects or explains an imprudent and outspoken faculty member, justifies open search procedures for vacancies, protects college donors from SRB solicitation, and so on, ad infinitum. The president should steep himself in the history and traditions of the SRB and then woo it with the same fervor he does college donors, trustees, and faculty. And in the wooing process it is well to involve, if possible, respected trustees to reinforce their president whose credibility on campus may be a good deal lower than it is across the moat. Persistent President-watchers on home base ultimately catch glimpses of the president's feet and note their clay composition.

When the President is faced with SRB intractability in key situations he may, of course, resign, or, rarely, make a sacrificial offering of himself in a confrontation designed to blow open a new channel for the college. For the Religious president this may be more costly than for the lay one, since the former also risks the loss of his family relationships, even his vocation.

Those presidents who may be less programmatic in their aspirations or who may be more persistent politically in reaching them may wish to "hunker down" and effect quid pro quo arrangements with the SRB either for self-protection or to assure their presence on campus. For instance, he may agree to give preference to SRB personnel for vacancies or tenure in the college, particularly in the theology or philosophy departments which are deemed the vital core. Many Catholic colleges have a preferential clause for religious other things being equal when vacancies occur. The argument is made that completely open search procedures handicap religious whose time for professional achievement may be more limited than lay competitors because of priesthood preparation time or by extra-collegiate assignments given by religious superiors such as weekend parish duties. A maintained flat numerical quota of religious appointments is another possibility even if this requires some featherbedding. Conceptually, advance joint personnel planning for the education and future placement of religious in the college is a possibility except that openings don't always occur at the proper time and good teaching and administrative skills are not always predictable in advance.

If control of the college by the SRB is an issue then a variety of structural devices may be incorporated in the by-laws. Ex-officio positions on the Board of Trustees is one. Sometimes the chairmanship of the Board or particular committees are reserved for religious. A two-tier system in which a smaller second board or committee dominated by SRB members can veto certain acts of the main body of

trustees is another. This opens seats for lay people but protects vital interests of the SRB. Extraordinary majorities on certain votes may be required by by-laws. And sometimes a balance is sought in administrative positions between lay and religious, or, indeed, as is true in several of the largest Orders lay persons are simply not eligible for the presidency. Some of the above may simply be by informal understanding or tradition rather than by formal legal provision.

Anyone who has read the voluminous literature on the varied governance relationships of SRB's to their colleges knows the almost infinite variety of possibilities extant. In some cases the worries of the college president disappear overnight with the passing from power of a single personality and things improve without structural modification.

The Tradeoffs

What seems clear to me, however, upon further reflection of the above is that all mechanical or legal devices to preserve influence by the SRB have tradeoffs that may in larger or smaller degree impede the college in achieving its larger goals. They may also handicap its survival in this most competitive and threatening of all decades in the history of American higher education. A "safe" president in SRB eyes may not necessarily be a good president for the college. A second tier board with veto powers may deter good laymen from accepting trustee appointments or reduce them to apathy. Constant clearance requirements by the President may sap his time, undercut his self-confidence, delay decisions, and expose him to the contempt of less understanding colleagues. "Quotas" arouse the enmity of lay faculty members and sometimes result in reduced quality. {They may also be unjust.} A "safe" theology or philosophy department may also become a stagnant one. Ex-officio positions on the board, particularly key positions, may deny natural leadership for important thrusts such as capital fund campaigns.

And worst of all, a leader, the president, consistently picked from a small universe, the 'family', increasingly may mean the difference between survival or disaster; good morale or poor morale; excellence or mediocrity. Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, to my knowledge, in enumerating reasons for his perception that Catholic higher education didn't "measure up" has never once mentioned this admittedly key factor in all effective organizations. Perhaps it is superfluous to repeat the Carnegie Commission's understatement on "leadership" that "the college president

has more potential for moving the college than most people probably more potential than any one other person".

However, more recently, the National Opinion Research Center in a survey of 31 Catholic colleges and universities seemed to see a problem in securing good high level administrators. Inbreeding and incestuous personnel practices in the long run must have a negative bottom line for the college despite the periodic emergency of a legendary Religious president in almost every Catholic institution. If nothing else, selection of a leader from a narrow field of choice undercuts legitimacy of the president given the infiltration of equalitarian concepts into Catholic institutions. The hierarchical systems of governance inherited by the colleges from the SRB's called for a different type of person in the presidency. Today the consensual or collegial mode of operation may present problems for the Religious president "of yore" of which there are only a few notable exceptions left in the Catholic circuit.

Curiously, many SRB's have chosen to ignore for particular reasons of their own the tremendous advantages of a wide search for presidential talent. If nothing else it helps to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their in-house candidates so that an appropriate support structure can be erected to compensate and complement the person selected. Women's religious orders, until recently, did better in this respect than their counterparts. The feminist movement may have reversed this trend. But, with the thinning cushion of SRB financial support for their colleges, presidential quality is more important than ever before in seeking material resources--one of the least attractive features of the position for most leaders. ~~But~~ In my experience, it is even worse for the Religious president whose education, training, aspirations and role model ^{characteristics} features by nature of vocation lie in less materialistic pursuits.

Questioning The Basic Assumptions

Creative mechanical measures as mediative possibilities between the SRB's and their colleges may be at best palliatives that promise short term reassurance for the SRB but possible long term headaches for the college. Perhaps the time is here when some radical reassessment of conceptions or assumptions underlying SRB-College relationships is in order. Sacred cows may have to be slaughtered if Catholic colleges are to achieve the excellence of which they are capable and if SRB's are to reach their apostolic goals of serving society in a changed context.

Edward L. Henry

If the SRB's at one time almost single-handedly founded and nourished Catholic colleges, continued improvement of the educational institutions, perhaps even their survival, today is beyond the sole concern of the SRB. Fortunately, the second and third generation Catholic immigrants who would accede to leadership in contrast to their forebears are well-educated, cultivated, affluent, competent--and critical. The partnership promised them in the Vatican II era must be reflected in a mutually trusting relationship between SRB's and laity in operations of the college. This is not only a matter of principle and justice but a pragmatic consideration as well. The alternative to first class citizenship as trustees, faculty members, or administrators is a brain drain to public sector and secular private institutions. Tokenism and window dressing are not enough to maintain morale if power is not really shared. Yet, even in colleges that have effected some partnership arrangement there is often private discussion in the House of regaining or assuring "control" while a frequent subject in lay coffee klatches in colleges manned by lay presidents is what young clerics are being groomed to replace the "Boss"?

What Is Control?

"Control" is really a specious term, however, and may not accurately portray what SRB's really desire. What is really desired is moral influence. And wise presidents want them to exercise this type of influence. However, "control" as discussed above does not equal "influence". One must assume we aim at influencing students. But trustees, the president, the religious superior, top administrators are often not known to students. The heroes on campus almost invariably are the teachers, campus ministers, low level administrators in direct contact with students, and coaches. It is at this level that SRB's ought to focus their attention and their best personnel if they wish to be most effective in molding human beings--the basic purpose of the college. Questions of power and control turn students off. These are not part of their agenda. But if "control" is put forward as a legitimate goal and if it does not constitute a confusion between means and ends, then surely the degree of control however defined should be exercised in some proportion to the contribution of the SRB to the college, material and spiritual. "Control" and responsibility go hand in hand!

Conceptions of Ownership

In discussion of SRB-College relations, property rights often are put forward

to justify such "control" of the college. While some colleges are legally owned by SRB's and some are separately incorporated there is an almost universal belief by Religious that the college founded by their forebears is "our property". Occasionally, less thoughtful remarks also conclude that as owners the SRB may do with their college what they wish.

If this is a legally correct conclusion (and it probably is not), it may be a morally invalid one since it reflects a discredited capitalistic conception of absolute ownership alien to Catholic social thought. Let it not be said that Catholic educators or religious communities are liberal with other people's property rights but conservative with their own. As Fred Crosson of Notre Dame told the ACCU in 1975: "We are not only Catholic colleges, we are public Catholic colleges." It would be denigrating and violative of our highest ideals to focus on questions of power, control, property rights, job security without asking whether each of these is fulfilling the apostolic and social goals properly germane to Catholic institutions. What is done with the property is more important than who controls it.

In a conceptual and moral sense, if not a legal one, ownership or title to property as John Locke and others point out so well springs from a mixture of sweat and toil to make it useful (and Catholic social philosophy would add, "socially useful"). Legal considerations aside the present day Catholic college unlike its earlier version is really socially owned by a number of identifiable groups: the SRB, surely; the alumni and donors who support the fund drives; the governments, state and federal, which have made colossal investments in our campuses; the administrators (lay and clerical) who have organized fund raising and husbanded the resources; and the faculty who have subsidized the college over many decades with substandard salaries. (If the religious founders made the early sacrifices, today it is not their latter day successors who are making the sacrifices but the young lay instructors with families whose salaries are below even the national family averages and who lack job security in addition. How much do they have to say about governance and control??) Rather than reverting to power claims based on ownership it may be more fruitful to ask what the college is supposed to do; whether it is doing it well; and, if not, why not? Msgr. Ellis' and Andrew Greeley's attempt to raise these questions are most appropriate even though their answers may not be wholly satisfactory.

Where does the President come in? These questions are at the heart of the matter; and if they are not being discussed he should raise them. Most of the other bread and butter questions properly ought to be addressed within a philosophical context built about questions of purpose.

In his survey of Catholic institutions Stamm concludes that very few Catholic colleges have indicated they do not understand and agree with the "aggiornamento" of Vatican II. Part of his evidence is that by 1977 laypersons comprised 62 per cent of all Catholic college trustees in the nation. Moreover, 73 per cent of all Boards who admitted laity also had lay chairpersons. This is encouraging but perhaps misleading since many laypersons are handpicked to support existing practices or, as products of an earlier culture, defer to Religious colleagues on the Board frequently justifying it with statements like: "Well, it's their college!"

Stamm also purported to see a return to community services on the part of SRB's along with a desire "to be relieved gradually of the total administration of their colleges". We need more current evidence to this effect since some feel the reverse is true.

Nevertheless, I am optimistic that the Sponsorship/Partnership approach may be able to confound the critics and withstand the extrapolations. We ought not to be led into the trap of confusing trends with prophecies. Success of the feminist movement and increasing recognition of the role and capacity of the laity may increase the average quality of leadership in the Catholic system. Where there is a shared consensus on the proper and specific goals of the college and shared roles in reaching them the resulting cohesion and high morale within the college will enable it to face adversity with optimism, creativity, and sacrifice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. ACCU, "A Note on the Present State of Roman Catholic Canon Law Regarding Colleges and Sponsoring Religious Bodies", Statement, Oct. 10, 1978.
2. Crosson, Frederick, "How Is a College or University Catholic in Practice?", Address, NCEA, (Washington, D.C., Jan. 11, 1975).
3. Ellis, John Tracy, "To Lead, To Follow, or To Drift: American Catholic Higher Education in 1976: A Personal View", in Delta Epsilon Sigma Bulletin, Vol. XXI, No. 2 (May 1976) pp. 40-66.
3. Ellis, John Tracy, American Catholicism, (Image Books, 1965), Esp. pp. 65-72; 108-117; 136-144.
4. Gaffney, Edward and Moots, Philip, Colleges and Sponsoring Religious Bodies, A Study of Policy Influence and Property Relationships, Monograph, ACCU, (Sept. 1, 1978).
5. Gatto, Louis, "The Catholic College Presidency--A Study", Current Issues in Higher Education, (ACCU), Vol. 2, No. 1, (Summer 1981) pp. 24-30.
6. Greeley, Andrew M., "From Backwater to Mainstream; A Profile of Catholic Higher Education", Commentary by David Riesman, (McGraw-Hill, NYC, 1969), Sponsored by The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education.
6. Greeley, Andrew M., "Why Catholic Higher Learning Is Lower", National Catholic Reporter, (Sept. 23, 1983) pp. 1 ff.
6. Greeley, Andrew M., The American Catholic, (Basic Books, N.Y., 1977), Esp. Ch. 3 and 4.
7. Stamm, Martin J., "Emerging Corporate Models of Governance in Contemporary American Catholic Higher Education", Current Issues In Higher Education, (ACCU), Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer 1981) pp. 38-47.
- 7.(A) Stamm, Martin J., "Catholic Education's New Lay Trustees", AGB Reports, (Sept./Oct. 1979) pp. 19-24.