

Catholic College Success Stories

By Father George Rutler, 31 March 2019

Thirty-five years ago I admired the neo-Gothic buildings of a Catholic college in Westchester County. But I was surprised to find that the confessional in the beautiful chapel was being used as a broom closet. There had been some misunderstanding about *aggiornamento*, or bringing the practice of the Faith up to date. That was the College of New Rochelle, begun in 1904 by the Ursuline sisters whose Religious institute was founded by Saint Angela Merici and who have graced the Church since 1535 with hospitals and schools and missionary work. They have not been unique in their numerical decline. In the United States since 1965, when the Second Vatican Council ended with sentiments of a “New Springtime” of the Church, Religious sisters have declined from 181,421 to 47,160, and most of those left are aged. This year the College of New Rochelle will close.

While various factors for all this may be cited, many Religious orders, trained in obedience, accepted bad advice from misguided and misguiding theologians and leaders. Bishops often have been at fault, timorous about correcting error, cheerily giving out diplomas while the spiritual foundations of the schools sank. It took a courage usually lacking to point out that serious mistakes were being made, and many Religious dug into their errors, abandoning community life and even Religious habits, and replacing doctrine with secular dogmas about “Peace and Justice” and “climate change”—all witness to the dictum, attributed to various sources, that “Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results.”

Such need not be the case, given a dose of humility and sanity. Those who stubbornly will not admit mistakes are easily annoyed when shown new Religious orders, faithful to classical doctrine and religious practice, that are rapidly growing. Something similar is happening in education. Take just two examples: Thomas Aquinas College has emphasized quality over size since its founding in 1971 and has become one of the best regarded colleges in California. This year, it is opening a beautiful additional campus on an historic site in Massachusetts. Its California chapel, built in the Spanish Mission style, is a magnificent witness to Catholic heritage, as is the new chapel planned for Christendom College in Virginia, which was founded just a few years after Thomas Aquinas College. In the few years of their existence, although primarily lay institutions, Thomas Aquinas has produced 60 priests, 44 consecrated Religious women and men, and 26 seminarians; Christendom boasts so far 80 priests, 55 Religious, and 22 seminarians. Those colleges have not turned their confessionals into broom closets.

Any individual or institution that seeks happiness on its own terms will not find it. Chesterton asks, “Do you have joy without a cause...?” On Laetare Sunday, the Church rejoices in the true cause of joy, which is God Himself. The failings evident in practical experience testify to what happens when vanity tries to usurp Him.

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