

A NEW ERA IN CATHOLIC TERTIARY EDUCATION

By DOROTHY BELL

PLUS ÇA CHANGE, *plus c'est la même chose* — is it? That depends on many factors, not least on what changes or is changed, and who it is that evaluates the degree of change; but perhaps some questions are not meant to be asked, or at least not answered. To speak of a new era in any field necessitates some looking backwards as well as some attempt at definition. Tertiary education may be taken to cover all post-secondary education, education for those over the age of sixteen who have already left a secondary school; but is more often confined to the over eighteen-year old. In its current usage in this country, it refers to institutions such as universities, polytechnics, colleges of one kind or another where people receive instruction towards the attainment of a degree, diploma or other recognized qualification. It is not synonymous with higher education, but embraces both higher and further education, though what is called by the French *éducation permanente* is still largely excluded.

For over a hundred years, catholic tertiary education in the United Kingdom has been carried on solely in colleges of education, teacher-training colleges as they used to be known, with the specific purpose of producing catholic teachers for catholic schools. This was essentially a missionary endeavour made possible by catholic emancipation in 1829, by the restoration of the catholic hierarchy in England in 1850, and by the subsequent growth of religious orders bringing schools and colleges into existence. The mission of the Church in this country developed from an almost purely pastoral role into a considerable share in educational institutions with a resulting widening of influence and power. The catholic Church was not the only christian body to pursue such an end. The earliest training college was established at Borough Road in London as far back as 1798, and was administered by the British and Foreign School Society; though this organization aimed at a national educational policy based on general rather than on sectarian religious principles. It was not until the beginning of this century that the first colleges to be begun or taken over by local education authorities came to exist as 'maintained' institutions. In 1974, there were some one hundred maintained colleges and approximately fifty voluntary colleges

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backed by a variety of providing bodies such as the Froebel Educational Institute, the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Catholic Education Council and individual catholic religious orders. Such colleges of education have been the traditional way into the teaching profession for those employed in primary schools, often for many of those in secondary modern and later, comprehensive schools, and for those whose subject, such as physical education, home economics, metal and woodwork, has lain outside the range of degree subjects normally offered in universities. Grammar schools and, increasingly, comprehensive schools, have recruited staff direct from universities and polytechnics, though for all those graduating since 1974, a professional training course has been compulsory for those entering the secondary education field, except in mathematics and the sciences. Until the advent of the degree of Bachelor of Education in the late 1960's, virtually all catholics who graduated from a british university had therefore undergone their studies in a non-catholic institution, though some had then followed the one-year professional course in a catholic college of education. The Bachelor of Education, validated by some universities as of honours standard, by others awarded only at ordinary or pass level, has not in fact been taken by as many as was originally hoped and expected, and has, in the minds of many people, been little more than a cumbersome method of offering graduate status to those concerned with the teaching of younger children.

Why should the present situation change or be changed? Even within the teaching profession, too few people are aware that in 1972 two documents of great significance to education in England and Wales were published: the James Report,¹ purporting to be mainly concerned with teacher education and training, and later the conservative government white paper: *Education: A Framework for Expansion*.² Paradoxically, these were simply the beginning, not of expansion nor of an improvement in the quality of teacher-training, but of a series of events and statistics which, however disastrous they may seem at one level, do supply the material for hope that there may emerge a new era for tertiary education, not least for catholic tertiary education.

It is ironic that those very institutions which were put to considerable strain, financial and educational, during the 1960's by the deliberate increase in the number of student places, should be put to even greater

¹ *Teacher Education and Training: A report by a Committee of Inquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, under the Chairmanship of Lord James of Rusholm (Her Majesty's Stationery Office [HMSO], 1972).*

² *Education: A Framework for Expansion (HMSO, 1972).*

strain by a deliberate reduction in recruitment to those places — and within ten years. To the outsider, the expansion of the 60's may appear absurd, but had this expansion not taken place, the average size of a primary school class would still be over forty children, and the raising of the school-leaving age could never have been implemented. The dramatic reduction in the intake of student teachers, and the corresponding drop in the output of newly qualified teachers which now face the colleges of education, are largely due to the sharp decline in the birth-rate over the last ten years, with some credit going to the earlier return to the classroom of married women with smaller families than in previous years.

With the cut-back in teacher-training numbers, no providing body, whether a voluntary organization or a state-maintaining body such as a local authority or the department of education and science itself, would be willing to see purpose-built premises under-used or staff under-employed; either a college must close or it must, by one means or another, 'diversify'. A few colleges in areas where teacher recruitment is difficult, or diversification well nigh impossible, will be allowed to remain monotechnic, that is, to engage solely in teacher-training. Since most colleges of education have been monotechnic throughout their history, this may be no bad thing, except that, in the usual fashion in which we are often led to discredit the past, the James Committee considered

whether it is possible to break down what is often described as the 'isolation' in which many teachers are at present educated. Many voices have urged that prospective teachers should not be obliged to commit themselves at the age of eighteen to a course which can lead only to a teaching qualification. It is argued that students following courses which may lead to teaching should have the opportunities enjoyed by students in other sectors of higher education of moving in other directions without disadvantage and that the presence in institutions attended by potential teachers of students proceeding to other careers would end the 'isolation' of which complaint is made.³

So much has this idea been found acceptable that there is now considerable doubt as to whether a monotechnic institution will prove sufficiently attractive to students to survive. In support of the wider range of courses, it is apt to cite Newman who, in *The Idea of a University*, said:

³ *Teacher Education and Training*, p 41.

. . . it is a great point then to enlarge the range of studies . . . even for the sake of the students; and, though they cannot pursue every subject which is open to them, they will be the gainers by living among those and under those who represent the whole circle.⁴

The same view has been taken by many modern educationists, amongst them Peter Venables, formerly vice-chancellor of Aston University, in his article on the expansion of higher education:

A single or narrow vocational purpose is no longer a sufficient justification for an institution of higher education, and multi-purpose institutions are an inescapable necessity for the following main reasons:

- (a) the changing nature of society and employment, and the increasing difficulty of prediction of changes.
- (b) the increasing requirements for literacy and numeracy and on interdisciplinary understanding, with which go deferred specialization, wider groupings of cognate studies, and an increasing proportion of common and combined courses.
- (c) the increasing necessity of re-education of mature employees from time to time, to keep them up-to-date . . .
- (d) a certain minimum provision of cognate studies, with adequate staff and facilities, is essential for interdisciplinary courses to be effective.⁵

Later he adds:

A graduate profession of teaching would have a great deal in common with the personal service professions also emerging towards full graduate status, and training for these would be the concern of the multi-purpose institutions which the colleges of education should become.⁶

Venables here introduces a further reason for abandoning monotechnic training, that of changes in employment. Theorists hold that in the future individuals will seek a change of career more frequently than in the past, hence the need for a more broadly based tertiary educational system. The necessity for in-service courses and re-education in general is also mentioned.

Diversification has come to mean any non-teacher training course; ideally it could lead to a number of interesting developments, such as Venables and members of the James Committee had in mind when they

⁴ Newman: *The Idea of a University*, Discourse V, 'Knowledge its own end', Section 1.

⁵ Carter, Venables and others: *Patterns and Policies in Higher Education* (London, 1971), p 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 136.

condemned monotronics; but the difficulties inherent in providing and in validating courses for social workers, occupational and speech therapists, health visitors and for members of other professions engaged in personal service occupations, are seemingly insurmountable at present; and so for the moment at least, the field of diversification is a relatively narrow one. The whole tertiary education system in this country, particularly in further education, is so diffuse that often the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, and has resulted in a poor geographical distribution of courses, as well as over-provision in some areas of study. Diversification will therefore be for many colleges something along the lines of the American liberal arts colleges, with validation either by a local university or by the Council for National Academic Awards. Since even a medium-sized college of eight hundred to a thousand student-places would find difficulty in offering an attractively wide and academically sound variety of courses to ensure recruitment, amalgamations, federations and associations are taking place up and down the country: a few colleges have been taken fairly and squarely into the university sector (one hopes they will have a fair share of finance and resources and not be left as a square peg in a round hole), some have been or are being absorbed by polytechnics, others are linking with similarly minded colleges of education, and others with institutions of further education, some of which are planning to become institutes of higher education.

This trend was amongst the objectives stated by the James Committee and taken up in the government white paper: "The whole-hearted acceptance of the colleges of education into the family of higher education institutions",⁷ notwithstanding that later in the document this is spelled out in the following terms:

. . . leaving aside those colleges which find their eventual home in a university, the substantial broadening of function proposed for the great majority of colleges of education will involve their much closer assimilation into the rest of the non-university sector of further and higher education. Put another way, a college which expands and diversifies, either alone or by joining forces with a sister college or a further education institution — enlarging the range of its courses and extending its clientele — will not be easily distinguishable by function from a polytechnic or other further education college.⁸

⁷ *Education: A Framework for Expansion*, para 56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, para 160.

This moving upwards and outwards has been welcomed by the majority of those in the college of education world, and has been seen as an opportunity to embrace the wider challenge and the broader aspects of tertiary education.

In the course of time, once the reduction period has passed, the advisability of locating directly or indirectly vocational courses in the new institutions may become more apparent to those who control the distribution of courses. Ideally, to bring together all those involved in the education and welfare of children and young people could be of lasting benefit to teachers, careers advisers, youth and probation officers, social workers and others, as well as to those at the receiving end, who are at present often the victims of a fragmented system.

As far as all this affects catholic tertiary education, there are and will continue to be those who maintain that the catholic colleges of education should remain as they have long been: centres whose *raison d'être* is to produce catholic teachers for catholic schools. For as long as the dual system lasts (and here no attempt will be made to enter into the pros and cons of this subject, but simply to say that while the members of the Churches in this country can afford and are willing to pay what amounts to a double fee in the form of education rates and in contributions in the Sunday-collection plate, the system is likely to continue); for as long as this system lasts, then, there will certainly be a specific need of dedicated catholic teachers for catholic schools, of dedicated anglican teachers for anglican schools: a need none the less urgent in state schools, where there are many catholic children. Should the dual system cease, the need for such dedicated teachers will increase rather than diminish.

But is to maintain the present position enough? In his *Apologia pro vita sua*, Newman, referring to Thomas Scott, who had been an important influence in his early life, wrote: 'For years I used almost as proverbs . . . Holiness before peace, and Growth is the only evidence of life'.⁹ It is tempting to settle for peace, for the preservation of the *status quo*, in the false belief and hope that this will be not only peaceful but also fruitful. If we belong to the Church militant then we must expect 'not peace but the sword', aware that the peace Christ came to give lies in interior resourcefulness rather than in exterior circumstances.

Growth as the only evidence of life is an aspect of that more abundant life which Christ promised to his followers. It is one of the temptations of our technological age to plan for the future with preconceived ideas about that future, and with a consequent lack of freedom in the face of

⁹ Newman: *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London, 1959), p 99.

events. This does not mean that we should not plan, that we should abandon legal safeguards, but rather that we should not be so hidebound by plans that we cease to be open to the Spirit who speaks through events and circumstances, through the signs of the times which must themselves be considered and discerned, neither rejected out of hand nor swallowed whole.

Clearly the present reorganization of colleges is one of those events through which the Spirit indicates the need for change, for a reappraisal of the situation so that we may renew our aims and objectives. The opportunities afforded by a wider range of professional training courses, of degrees, even by the two-year Diploma in Higher Education, are great opportunities for the christian body as a whole, the catholic Church in particular. The idea of a catholic university has never found favour in this country,¹⁰ and the notion of a catholic polytechnic has never been raised. But the newly emerging colleges and institutes, be they distinctly catholic or a collaborative effort on an ecumenical basis, will provide for catholics the possibility of studying for degrees and diplomas in a christian environment, not only for the teaching profession but for other and more widely ranging careers. For the most part, courses will be unit-structured, enabling students to build up an individual programme suited to their interests and to the type of career each has in view. Mature choice of options and flexibility should result from this system, new to this country although well tried on the other side of the Atlantic.

Since any academic institution will ultimately stand or fall on its ability to recruit students, it may not be inappropriate to look for a moment at the way in which a modern student relates to academic bodies:

To generalize somewhat, he is, in contrast to many previous generations of students, an instinctive radical. He has an enquiring mind, distrusts any kind of *status quo*, and takes it for granted that, on the whole, change is a good thing in principle. He is suspicious of authority as such, especially if the awful word 'paternalistic' can be attached to it, and he expects to be consulted. He dislikes conformity, rigidity and legalism even more than the rest of us do. He is used to moving in an 'open' society . . . prefers an exposed situation to a sheltered one and is willing to take risks in his personal life.¹¹

¹⁰ Up to the time of the Reformation, colleges at Oxford and Cambridge were all religious foundations.

¹¹ Milroy: *Ampleforth Journal* (Spring 1975), p 22.

Students nowadays are deeply concerned with the needs of contemporary society. Modern students have a mistrust of those who allow the complexities of life to blind their judgment, of those who become submerged within and enslaved by a life revolving round 'keeping up with the Joneses'. The characteristic preoccupations of modern society: relationships and their effects, various types of protest, the problems of alienation and loss of moral purpose, the search for meaning in a world where the paradoxes of unparalleled affluence and unnecessary poverty, of warm ethics and cold wars loom large; all these must be faced, not dismissed for fear of what they may reveal if probed.

The challenge to catholic tertiary education is obvious. Can it be grasped? It is a time of great and unprecedented change, a time when the pastoral mission of Christ in and through his Church is offered to the members of that Church as never before in this country. 'Church 2000' has little to say on education, but in any case the year 2000 will be too late to seize opportunities; by then they will have been lost, for ever but not 'for good'.¹²

As has been said, there are some who see the inclusion of non-teacher training students in catholic colleges as a threat to the production of dedicated catholic teachers; they fail to appreciate the needs of catholics in general who may wish to pursue one of a variety of advanced courses in a christian environment, and do not take into account that such institutions are particularly suited to diversification because they offer opportunities to the whole catholic community, by providing curricula which feature personal and social relationships and serve to intensify awareness, concern and humanity.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the fathers of Vatican II laid stress on the mission of the Church in the modern world, in the midst of the changing conditions of life, the increasing population explosion, the disintegration of many family and community structures, in the advance of human knowledge which often leads to a spiritual, psychological and social disorientation. The message of the Church, of the gospel, is one of hope and freedom, therefore of strength: 'linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, man will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope'.¹³ The Church has reaffirmed her belief in the dignity of the human person, in the importance of human community and in the significance of human activity; she reaffirms the need to work for justice and peace but is not

¹² *The Church 2000: An Interim report offered by the joint working party on pastoral strategy for study and consultation (1973).*

¹³ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

blind to those factors which make their attainment problematic and often illusory. Freely admitting her own limitations, the Church relies on the power of God to ensure her contribution towards making the family of man and its history more human. In a powerful section on the value of cultural education, the Council proclaimed a truth which should be at the heart of the new era in catholic tertiary education :

The possibility now exists of liberating most men from the misery of ignorance. Hence it is a duty most befitting our times that men, especially christians, should work strenuously on behalf of certain decisions which must be made in the economic and political fields, both nationally and internationally. . . . Efforts must be made to see that men who are capable of higher studies can pursue them. . . . irrespective of race, sex, nationality, religious or social conditions.¹⁴

Courses in social and economic administration, in youth and community work, in world studies of one sort or another which open horizons into how other nations view their own history and world development, all have a special place in this broader curriculum, and have a particular attraction for the modern student, who feels the urgency of universal brotherhood and understanding in a way not always appreciated by an older generation.

In a great number of Council documents, the need for christians to work together is stressed: 'Let christians work together to animate the cultural expressions and group activities characteristic of our times with a human and a christian spirit'.¹⁵ In the *Declaration on Christian Education* :

At diocesan, national and international level, the spirit of co-operation grows daily more urgent and effective. Since this same spirit is most necessary in educational work, every effort should be made to see that suitable co-ordination is fostered between various catholic schools, and that between these schools and others that kind of collaboration develops which the well-being of the whole human family demands. It is particularly in the circle of academic institutions that increased co-ordination and joint effort will yield abundant fruit. Therefore, in every college and university, the various faculties should be at the service of one another to the degree that their purposes allow. Let the various colleges and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

universities unite in a mutual sharing of effort; together they can promote international conferences, allot fields of scientific research, share discoveries, exchange teachers temporarily, and foster among themselves whatever else contributes to a more helpful service.¹⁶

Similar references can be found in the decrees on the Missions and on Ecumenism.

In the future, in a world where God is not merely dead for the majority of peoples, but totally irrelevant, the importance of bringing together the various christian bodies in order to lighten the world's weariness and confusion is paramount; the task of educating, of offering opportunities of education to a wider public so that

the faithful can be brought to live the faith in a more thorough and mature way through appropriate use not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology . . .¹⁷

becomes in a new way the mission of the Church. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*: the more externals change, so much the more does the essence of the Church's mission remain.

In order to achieve her mission in tertiary education, the Church must seek to collaborate with other christian institutions. Only in this way will she have the full support of students. It is not hard to understand the impatience of the young when, in the face of universal needs and problems, they are confronted by seemingly trivial, parochial, ecclesiastical debate which they see as fragmenting and weakening.

In so far as education for leisure pursuits is concerned, *Gaudium et Spes* makes this further comment:

The widespread reduction in working hours brings increasing advantages to numerous people. May these leisure hours be properly used for relaxation of spirit and the strengthening of mental and bodily health. Such benefits are available through spontaneous study and activity. . . . These benefits are obtainable too from physical exercise and sports events, which can help to preserve emotional balance, even at the community level, and to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Gravissimum Educationis*, 12.

¹⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 62.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

Here again, the opening up of catholic tertiary education offers scope for the development of various forms of community and adult education, hitherto little considered.

Although the recently published Bullock Report, *A Language for Life*,¹⁹ deliberately omitted any specific consideration of higher and further education, the committee felt a particular concern about the needs of those pupils who leave school unable to read, and accordingly stretched its brief to include observations on adult illiteracy, resulting in a thought-provoking chapter on this topic. The committee showed an equal concern about the language problems of children from families of overseas origin. Without doubt these are areas where the trained teacher should play a predominant role and where many dedicated catholic teachers are already involved, but the awareness of the catholic community as a whole towards some of the inherent problems could do much to ameliorate the position in a particular area of tertiary education to which little heed has so far been paid. The language problems of families from overseas are not confined to the children!

Whether we are catholic or not, we need much greater insight into the sorts of learning difficulties under which students of many social backgrounds labour. Even where there is no apparent language difficulty, relatively few reach such a high level of achievement in the course of their secondary education that their motivation for academic success does not become somewhat dimmed.

It would be foolish to suggest that catholic tertiary education should concern itself in detail with all these aspects; but it is important to show the width and the scope of tertiary education which will now lie before the reorganized colleges of education, and consequently the field in which catholics may become more involved. Education is more than what is taught, caught or learned in school; indeed, followers of Ivan Illich would 'de-school' society. Education is more than what comes to us through professionally trained teachers, as the Church has always affirmed when she has stressed the role of parents and of pastors. Catholic tertiary education in this country should therefore reach out to more than teacher-training, if the next generation of catholics is to hold its own in an increasingly complex and materialistic world. The Church cannot afford to ignore what many now consider as a right to tertiary education. To refer to Venables again:

¹⁹ *A Language for Life*: Report of the Committee of Inquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science under the Chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock.

The recognition of the right to tertiary education must not be frustrated either by entrenched attitudes or by fears of the future. Without the exercise and fulfilment of this right other rights will be eroded, responsibilities hampered or neglected, and creative energies misdirected. Hooliganism and other social disorders are not so much signs of unoriginal sin as the effects of boredom and frustration, arising especially from the cumulative erosion of the rights of the individual.²⁰

The Church of the latter part of the twentieth century is most certainly a frontier church, whether one thinks of frontier in terms of a dividing line or as an area waiting to be opened up: not so much as a situation into which we move as an attitude of mind which we must foster. It is, inevitably, a situation of risk, and we may find strength and consolation in Charles de Foucauld's 'Absence of risk is a sure sign of mediocrity'. For the future of catholic tertiary education above all, we have to ask ourselves not where we are, but whether we are moving, and moving forward. That surely must have been a frequent, silent question voiced by the apostles who had heard and seen the pastoral activity of Christ, his particular educative mission in Palestine two thousand years ago and which he left his Church to continue.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose: all growth involves change, not all change is growth; evidence of growth is life, not stagnation. Because of and by means of a living faith in Christ's mission which is our mission, let us hold to the essential message of hope and freedom through the new opportunities offered us in this time of change.

²⁰ Cf *Patterns and Policies in Higher Education*, p 17.