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THE LAY FACULTY ON THE JESUIT CAMPUS

by Robert O. Bowen

ROBERT O. BOWEN, *novelist and critic*, is best known for his *World War II* novel, *The Weight of the Cross*, which has been highly praised by Father Harold C. Gardiner, S. J., in his *Norms For The Novel*. Mr. Bowen has taught at several Universities, including the University of Santa Clara and (currently) the University of Dallas. An Associate Editor of *RAMPARTS*, he lives in Texas.

IN A RECENT LETTER from a colleague fleeing a Jesuit university in—to be charitable—impatience, I came across the following: “The position of the lay faculty member on a Jesuit campus is both intolerable and absurd.” The remark is worth considering since Catholic higher education in America is largely Jesuit and since Catholics have begun to look at education and intellectual life and to ask just where the Catholic lay intellectuals are. For one thing they have made no broad slash of brilliance on the Jesuit campus.

There are many reasons why American Catholics have not put forward an intellectual cadre comparable to the New England Brahmins or the Jewish or Negro intellectuals. Catholics are not a folk, and instead of looking within their own group for cultural leaders, they tend to look to the nation at large. The Church is a source of faith but not of politics, philosophy, or even cooking recipes. In a large part the general failure of the lay faculty at Jesuit universities to develop intellectual leaders, on even the parochial campus level, is a result of common American Catholic non-folk attitudes.

Aside from such theorizing, the laments of lay faculty members in Jesuit institutions are many and varied, but they tend to fall within certain relatively regular patterns. Laymen rarely complain of ill will or dishonesty or politicking, favoritism or the like, which are the common complaints at lay institutions.

The Jesuit administrator is ordinarily pleasant, charitable, well-meaning, almost avuncular. But

he doesn't listen. The little jolt of anguish one often feels just after closing an interview with a Jesuit administrator is the knowledge that beneath the superficial kindness and the patience, the administrator simply didn't listen, that the words used by a professional lay person do not exist for him. The Jesuit doesn't wish to be uncooperative; rather he cannot see that anything outside his own Order is significant enough to make any ultimate difference in the career of the university or Catholic thought. Being outside the Order, it doesn't really signify.

THE JESUIT OF TODAY differs in certain important respects from his predecessor. On the surface he appears the same, and to one not working closely with him, he may seem no different from those dedicated men who died in pairs in England under Elizabeth I or were driven out of the great Jesuit empire in South America. But there is a large difference.

Ignatius Loyola was a man of considerable spirit, and having dominated his own strong nature, he trained his followers to channel their energies into constructive enterprises. The Society he founded is known in history as an organization of great *élan*. Even its enemies looked to it as a spring of vast intellectual prowess and unbending commitment. At some time in the history of the American branch of the Society of Jesus a change came about. Though this is not the sort of thing Jesuits ordinarily discuss with laity, I have discussed it at elaborate length with a Jesuit friend on many Sundays as we walked together in the hills near Los Gatos, California. Thus I can speak with some authority on the matter in spite of a lack of actuarial evidence.

My Jesuit friend agreed with my interpretation and added that both the topic and the conclusion were common talk among his colleagues in the Order. My point was that at some time in the history of the American branch of the Society,

the older Jesuits decided that the Society could not survive in this predominantly Protestant and strongly anti-Catholic nation unless it subdued its *élan* temporarily. At that point the older men began to encourage vocations among patient and far-seeing youths who would wait through “the captivity” as it were. In time the patient young men became old and ruled in their turn. In the process, since the difference between patience and lethargy is not particularly objective, many lethargic men came into the Society. As these new Jesuits reached dominance in the Society, they chose people like themselves. Gradually the search came to be not so much for patience as for “young men who would not make trouble,” and finally for “young men who would not make effort.” At that point the Society became an organization of followers rather than an organization of leaders, and now, trapped by a *fait accompli*, it is unable to reverse itself.

Evidence to support such a contention is that among the would-be Jesuit intellectuals today we find one major policy: agreement with the leaders in the general culture. Far from pushing Catholic thought, our Jesuit thinkers strain to *justify*, or say *respectabilize*, Catholic thought within the *superior* patterns advanced by non-Catholic or even anti-Catholic cultural leaders such as Barth or Tillich or worse Salinger or Sartre. The design here, the cultural pattern, subordinates the Jesuit to the Protestant, the Communist, the non-Christian. Unfortunately, the Jesuits do direct American Catholic thought, and without any question they control in its significant aspects American Catholic higher education. That they should consistently follow a ghetto attitude in their direction is lamentable, but it is a matter which the laity cannot work out with the Jesuits. The Society must solve this problem from within because by its nature, and apparently its rule, it cannot enter a dialogue on the problem with a lay Catholic.

SURELY MY JESUIT FRIENDS will be offended at the fact that I offer criticism at all, a feeling which itself is an index of the very problems I cite, particularly the lack of consideration for any Catholic authority except Jesuit authority. The failure of real respect toward lay faculty is

immediately apparent in the Jesuit’s asking—a frequent case—that the lay teacher change a student’s grade because the Jesuit “knows the family” or is “looking after the boy.” Beneath such casual requests lies the assumption that the grade is quite arbitrary and that only a personal standard applies—charity perhaps. How deeply would the same Jesuit priest be offended by a lay professor’s recommendation for leniency in a penance that priest assigned a penitent student!

In fact, the often violently defensive reaction of the Jesuit clergy regarding criticism of any aspect of its universal authority has almost precluded an honest approach to the problem of lay authority in Catholic education. *America*, *The Catholic World*, and numerous other Catholic publications have touched the idea from time to time. Common practice is for a priest to mention it as a problem, after which the matter is gently pushed aside. Should a layman broach the topic—as one innocent did in *America* a year or so ago—he is immediately attacked by a withering fire of correspondence, a sort of *auto da fé* by mail order as it were.

Ironically an incidental effect of the Jesuit attitude toward higher learning and professionalism is the tendency for the Order to give considerable respect to methodology courses which do not basically require a deep intellectual discipline of the sort that might conflict with the Jesuit intellectual authority, namely Business Administration, Education, and Engineering. Although these methodologies are under pressure across the nation at large as lacking an organizing principle and therefore being sub-professional, they are advancing rather than declining on the Jesuit campus. Naturally the advancement of these disciplines serves against the Liberal Arts and basic Sciences.

THAT METHODOLOGIES with heavy emphasis on memorization should appeal to the Jesuit academic mind is not surprising in light of the catechistic tradition of Catholic learning. None the less, this emphasis is especially unfortunate in advancing exactly the opposite result to that which Catholic doctrine in general, and even the latest Papal Encyclical in particular, require: individual judgment. Where the student is put

through Saint Thomas by forced memorization of passages, as is frequent in Jesuit curriculums, he learns not the profound method of judgment Saint Thomas tried to elucidate but rather the mere words in which judgment might be uttered. That is, the student's mind functions like a digital computer in simply matching a specific reply to a specific query; whereas Saint Thomas would have required a function more nearly like that of an analogue computer since the latter requires judgment in analyzing similar essential patterns and not mere detail or mere words. This particular ambiguity has lain at the core of Catholic education for centuries, drawing the wry humor of even Rabelais in his hilarious anti-academic charade, "The Great Argument For Truth In The Cathedral."

A professor familiar with non-Catholic university teaching, whether Protestant or non-sectarian, will recall his annoyance at students who rejected his authority or refused to understand the principles involved in his reasons for judgment. Such a man entering a Jesuit university usually notices an odd difference in his new students. They will be troublesome in that they will not directly refuse to accept his comment, but that they will resolutely refuse to understand *that he is reasoning*. Often in a conference one will reply to his complaints with a frustrated "What do you want me to say?" In fact, they indicate an inability to comprehend *that judgment is possible*.

Students of this sort are a common product of Jesuit high school training, and they present a special problem almost impossible of resolution. They are not merely stupid or untrained. Their training is extreme, particularly in memorization. But their minds are so chockablock with elaborate Latinate terminology and complex though undigested concepts that they are likely to soar off the earth of common sense and concrete fact at a touch; and though a professor would expect such students to be extremely sound in logical analysis, they rarely "think" as clearly as a mediocre agriculture student at a state college.

Minds such as those described here are very useful in industry at the lower engineering and junior executive level and for general use in business as clerks. Such minds cannot produce the

judgment essential at the professional or managerial level. They belong to a class that looks healthy, meshes smoothly into the administrative machinery, and obeys by nature. They do not know what disobedience is. A moment's thought will clarify that such is the common product of the Jesuit—and by influence general Catholic—education in America. Though partisan bias is somewhat responsible, it is quite certain that Catholics are in part not leaders because their training precludes leadership to them. They make good law clerks; thousands of them become librarians; they often become police and military personnel. Very rarely do products of Catholic training become artists of rank or even criminals of imagination.

These observations, it is noted, refer not to Catholic doctrine but to the forms of education common throughout American Catholic culture and particularly encouraged by Jesuit educational systems. In short, what they point to is the refusal on the part of the Jesuit to tolerate the consideration of judgment at any level, from any but a Jesuit.

CERTAIN FACTORS in the training of Jesuits contribute to our problem, for there is a Jesuit mind just as there is a military mind or a feminine mind or a criminal mind. The Jesuit, being a member of an Order, is submitted to a tremendous mental discipline. He is trained until he reaches full understanding of the universe in philosophical and theological terms. Now, it is no small thing to be, as the clerical member of the Society of Jesus appears to be to a layman, completely trained. Although I do not think any Jesuit of my acquaintance would claim perfection in his conscience, I believe that every one I ever met could place in his trained mind any problem I turned to him. He could program it and absorb it as a digital computer would. The anomalies of modern life may trouble him as engineering problems. He may struggle to clarify a matter to a student or to organize a phase of an institution. But the major problems of modern times, the centrifugal effect of multiplying frames of reference—sociology to anthropology to psychology to social psychology to political science and ever on-

ward—these new ways of seeing do not bother him inwardly. He has essentially been trained to relate them to patterns already learned. In fact, the Jesuit has been trained so thoroughly in philosophy and theology that he cannot see the worth of other disciplines. He has been, we could say in the computer terminology, “programmed.”

While the modern layman is troubled by problems of orientation, the Jesuit is what a psychologist calls “fixed” in his attitudes and so does not make adjustments of himself to the world. Rather he adjusts the world to himself.

Literature to the Jesuit is apparently a popularization of philosophy. Perhaps the figure is strong, but essentially most Jesuits consider a novel true in about the way a competent criminologist considers *Dick Tracy* true. That is, the criminologist acknowledges that little bits of police procedure do slip into *Dick Tracy*, while by and large the strip is hardly a reasonable reflection of life in a metropolitan precinct. To the Jesuit, novels, epic poems, tragic drama, all of fiction must appear either a crude effort to illustrate philosophical or theological principles, or it must be a crude effort to present historical fact painlessly, and quite naturally inadequately.

Since such is the Jesuit attitude toward lay disciplines and professions, it is hardly surprising that Jesuits do not take seriously the problems of the Liberal Arts on the Jesuit campus. No Jesuit university can present a man of letters with anything like the status, on his own campus, of a Jacques Barzun or an Archibald MacLeish, and the Jesuit influence does control American Catholic thought so that no Catholic campus, as being subject to Jesuit influence, would take a layman seriously enough to allow of such status. Certainly Columbia and Harvard are more responsible for the fame of Barzun and MacLeish than the men are responsible for the fame of their universities. What Jesuit university would consider, even locally, using a man in this fashion?

A Jesuit is a man with a vocation and an Order. He thinks in terms of vocations, and the end of his vocation is service to God and the Society of Jesus. The Jesuit's ends cannot lie in this world. Theoretically all the things of this world are to

him temporal and subsidiary to a higher end. His Order guarantees his interest so. He is allowed no family concerns and is unable to submerge himself thoroughly in a profession. Is there any wonder that he cannot take seriously the profession of the historian or literary critic?

The special vows of the Order further the split between the Jesuit and laity in a profound though obscure fashion. Oddly enough, this particular of the lay faculty problem is probably the most serious, but, because most Jesuits are so pleasant to laymen, it is the most obscure. If the gulf between layman and Jesuit were the result of a quarrel, no grievous harm would result. Sooner or later, well-meaning souls in both factions would heal the wound. Where a natural good feeling exists, a problem is aggravated by that very sympathy.

Because the Jesuit's Order requires his loyalty, his attitudes are scrupulously directed within the Order as regards ends. He has no career, no life, no deep concerns outside his position in his Order. Having no true professionalism, the patterns of a professional career do not occur to him. He looks forward not to becoming an old and established historian, who will be invited about the country to give lectures at adequate fees or to write profitable textbooks. Rather his age will pass in his Order. His life is not cluttered with any hostages to fortune, whose future he must secure. If he is worn out teaching over-loaded classes in Liberal Arts, he will be rested by the Order. He does not go on, as his lay colleagues must, on minimal salary, worrying how year on marginal year he can raise a family, educate that family, and pay for his dying without leaving his widow on Social Security alone and in debt.

TO THE GENERAL RUN of campus Jesuits, the financing of a family is as obscure a field as the inflections of the Welsh tongue are. A colleague of mine, now a refugee from a Jesuit college, offered an example of this ignorance. This man, an English instructor with a Ph.D. and some years of teaching, was being paid a little over \$6,000 annually for teaching five days and three nights a week. He had four children, some in high school, and he could not yet gather sufficient

money to put down a payment on a house. When he finally left his Jesuit college in despair of communicating the simple idea that his family had been what case workers describe as “underprivileged” for years because of his loyalty, he left his superiors in real bafflement. He is convinced to this day that the Jesuit who let him go believed that he left for some private and personal reason which he withheld out of embarrassment, possibly a bad feeling toward a dean or the like. Actually he liked every person at the college and left for a lay institution with real dread at the reports he had heard of feuding in lay colleges and especially at the dread of the normal American academic pressures against Catholics.

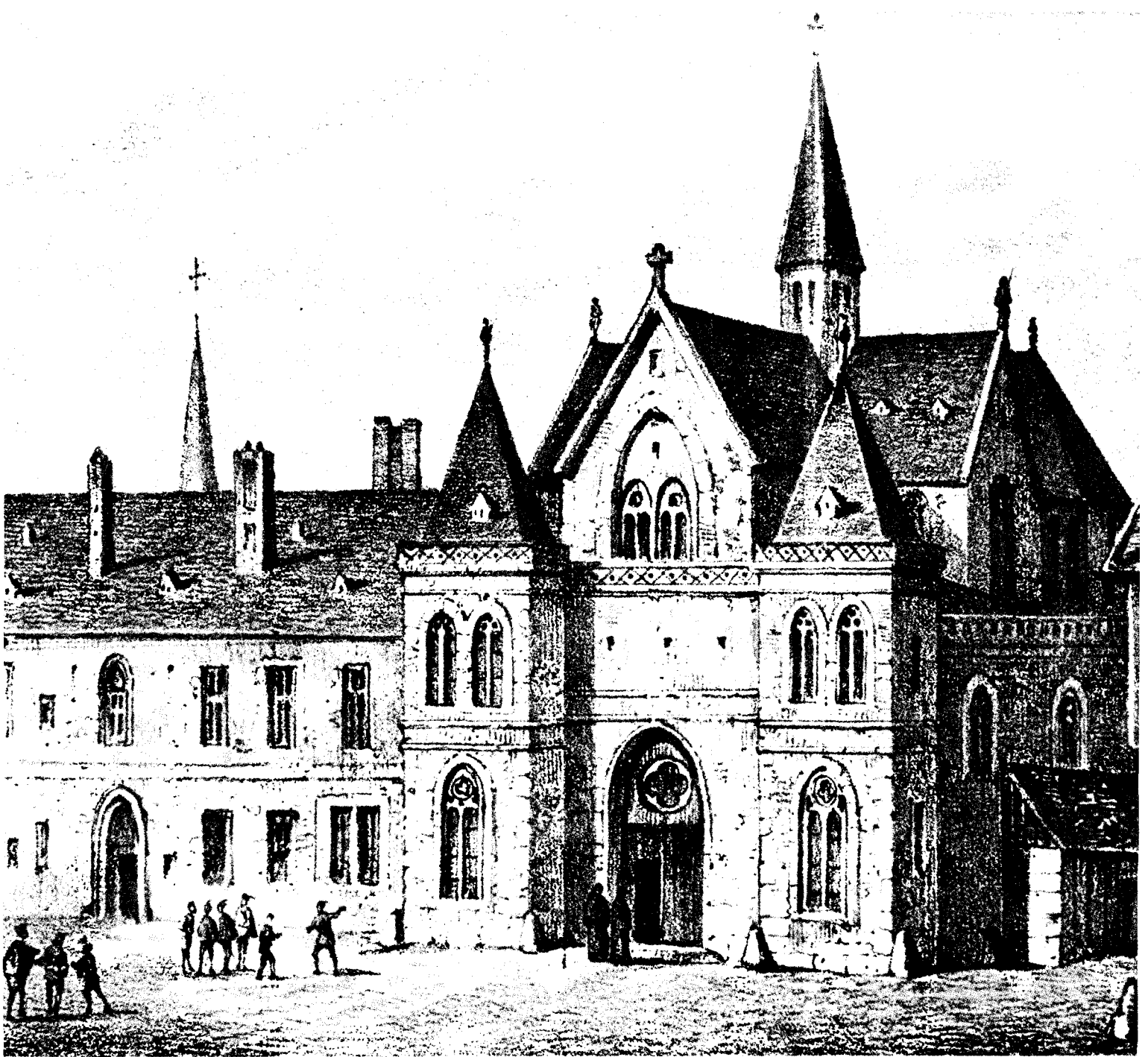
Of course, at most Catholic universities the lack of status and leisure influence the lay professor negatively in another area, and this factor is rigidly sustained on the Jesuit campus. Students are quick to sense the value an institution puts on a man, and they react accordingly. The English or History or Speech professor on a Jesuit campus is not only overworked and underpaid relative to his state college colleague; he is more than usually harrassed by a lack of cooperation among his students as well, and it is worth noting that this lack of effort is most obvious in the freshmen, those who have not yet been led into the slight professionalism of the upper class student, and who conversely react most directly to the general campus attitude as set by the Jesuits. The general campus air toward the Liberal Arts faculty member is one of condescension and contempt, not necessarily

through any formally stated policy of the Order or even through a conscious effort but effectively so anyway since the physical indices of salary, teaching load, office space, and such all point to this.

A PARISH PRIEST would perhaps see these problems in their true light. He is not of the world though he *is* in it. The Jesuit is caught up in the Order, and since his Order is a family to him in a rather full personal sense, he is neither of nor in the lay world. No particular reason exists for his ever seeing the professional failure of the lay faculty, the social malnutrition of a professor who can seldom afford a new pair of shoes and can almost never afford a new book.

However, the basis of the problem is neither money nor the teaching load; it is respect for authority. Until the Jesuit clergy at large decide to acknowledge the professional authority of their lay colleagues, American Catholic thought will not advance, or even reach a level of competence, outside the limits of Theology and Philosophy. Until then a flicker of intellectual life may flash up here or there about the country, but no climate will exist to nourish that spark into a truly illuminating flame.

Perhaps the colleague who saw this situation as “intolerable and absurd” was right in the conclusion to his letter. He recommended that the situation would be improved if all lay faculty would leave Jesuit universities so as to bring a little attention to the matter.



IV

THE JESUIT DISCIPLINE OF INQUIRY

by James A. Gowen

JAMES A. GOWEN, a 1956 graduate of the University of San Francisco, is presently studying for his doctorate at Stanford University. He is the author of several textbooks on Freshman Composition, scheduled to be published by McGraw-Hill during 1963: *Accounting Process*; *English Review*; and *College Rhetoric*.

THE FAILURE OF JESUIT UNIVERSITIES and colleges—in fact, all Catholic institutions—to graduate a proportionate share of intellectual leaders has embarrassed Catholic educators for a long time. Popular national magazines have recently publicized this failure, together with the self-criticizing remarks of noted Catholic educators, and all the old contentions which have for years sputtered and flared among those concerned with this condition have been publicly renewed and intensified. That the severest criticism of Catholic educational philosophy should come from those responsible for its implementation is a perverse testament to the good faith of these educators; and although the apologists for Catholic higher education have labeled such criticism breast-thumping, those concerned cannot afford to ignore the valid suggestions for modification which the critics and the facts have demonstrated are necessary.

The charge most frequently leveled at the Jesuits—chiefly because they dominate the scene—is that they are philosophical and moral pedagogues, that they permit inquiry only within areas which they themselves have fixed and circumscribed. It is further charged that they are oblivious to advances in learning and consequently do not prepare their students to accept responsibility in a changing and demanding age. These charges are not easily refuted, and if true even in part, reflect a weakness in the educational system. But they are true to a far smaller degree than those critics believe who advise the Jesuits to efface the charges by throwing open their doors indiscrimi-

nately to all the possibilities of inquiry and expression. These critics too often have failed to observe that Jesuit universities have been historically far more intellectual in certain crucial respects than their secular counterparts. Before suggesting stringent modifications, critics would do well to consider the effect of such modifications on the truly unique intellectual qualities which Jesuit education in its better expression possesses now and which it must preserve and extend.

Yet we have ample evidence that opening the disciplines of learning indiscriminately to all the possibilities of inquiry and expression can lead to a more pernicious kind of anti-intellectualism than that removed. The evidence lies in the common intellectual experiences of those attending secular universities, and since this experience is the basis for a good many of the unfavorable judgments concerning the Jesuits, we would do well to examine its conditions in detail.

THE EDUCATION OFFERED in all but a few non-Catholic universities in America is anti-intellectual in respect to three crucial areas of inquiry: theology, metaphysics, and ethics. This assertion may seem unwarranted in the face of the obvious freedom with which teachers and students in secular universities discuss questions related to these subjects. Certainly the educational philosophies of these institutions offer no restraint. Certainly neither the psychologist nor the sociologist is accused of bringing religion into the classroom when he broaches theological or ethical questions connected to his study, nor the physicist of straying from the point when he pauses in his lecture to examine the metaphysical aspect of a problem under discussion. It is the natural bent of the inquiring mind to trace all implications to their logical conclusions, and we respect such inquiry as the mark of an alert and aggressive intellect.

However, these questions are seldom asked