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## **“A GREAT AND LASTING BEGINNING”: BISHOP JOHN MCMULLEN’S EDUCATIONAL VISION AND THE FOUNDING OF ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY**

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*Catholic education surfaces as a focus and concern in every age of the U.S. Catholic experience. This article examines the struggles in one, small Midwestern diocese surrounding the establishment and advancement of Catholic education. Personal rivalries, relationship with Rome, local politics, finances, responding to broader social challenges, and the leadership of clergy were prominent themes then, as they are now. Numerous historical insights detailed here help to explain the abiding liberal character of Catholicism in the Midwestern United States.*

**I**n the spring of 1882, Bishop John McMullen, who had been in the new Diocese of Davenport for about 6 months, met with Father Henry Cosgrove, the pastor of St. Marguerite’s (later Sacred Heart) Cathedral. “Where shall we find a place to give a beginning to a college?” McMullen asked. Cosgrove’s response was immediate: “Bishop, I will give you two rooms in my school building.” “All right,” McMullen said, “let us start at once” (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1904; Farrell, 1982, p. iii; McGovern, 1888, p. 256; Schmidt, 1981, p. 111).

McMullen’s desire to found a university was not as impetuous as it may have seemed. Like many American Catholic leaders in the 19th century, McMullen viewed education as a way for a growing immigrant Catholic population to advance in their new country. Catholic education would also serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of Protestant ideas that formed the foundation of public education in the United States. And finally, Catholic higher education would educate future lay Catholic leaders for both church and society, and provide for an American-trained clergy to serve Catholic parishes. From 1861 to 1866, as president of St. Mary of the Lake University in Chicago, McMullen had worked to make that institution a means to

achieve those goals. But when it was abruptly closed in 1866, his vision was shattered. Now, as Bishop of Davenport, he had the authority and the opportunity to begin again to realize his vision (Gleason, 1995; Hassenger, 1967; O'Brien, 1994; Power, 1958; Rudolph, 1990).

## EARLY LIFE

John McMullen was born on January 8, 1832, in Ballynahinch, County Down, Ireland, the sixth of 12 children of James and Alice McMullen (Clarke, 1888; McGovern, 1888; Shea, 1886; Starr, 1884). The next year James McMullen and his family left Ireland and moved first to Megantic County in southern Quebec, Canada, and then, after 3 years to Prescott, Ontario, on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. But a fire soon destroyed their house, so James McMullen sold the land, and in early 1837, moved his family across the St. Lawrence River to Ogdensburg, New York. Here young John McMullen began to attend the local public school and quickly developed a love of learning; he even refused to go out to recess, preferring to spend the time reading. Young John attended public school only because there was no Catholic parish or school in the community. To remedy this situation, James McMullen's neighbors sent him to New York City to ask Bishop John Hughes for a priest to serve the growing Catholic community at Ogdensburg.

In 1843, James McMullen moved his family once again, this time to Joliet, Illinois. Here the McMullens became members of St. Patrick Parish and on Christmas Day, 1843, John McMullen made his first communion (Cathedral of the Holy Name, 1949). Within a year, however, the McMullens moved to Chicago, where James became a hotel keeper (*The Iowa Messenger*, 1883b). Once in Chicago, young John became an altar boy at St. Mary's Cathedral. It was there that he first met the new Bishop of Chicago, William Quarter (Starr, 1883). Born in Ireland, Quarter had studied at St. Patrick's Seminary, Maynooth, and finished his education at Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, Maryland. He was ordained in 1829 and served in parishes in New York. In 1843, he was named the first bishop of the new diocese of Chicago which encompassed the entire state of Illinois (Code, 1964).

Bishop Quarter arrived in Chicago in May 1844, and immediately began to recruit candidates for the priesthood to come to Chicago. Quarter felt a real urgency to find priests. When he became bishop there were 24 priests in Illinois, but when the new diocese of Chicago was created, most of these returned to their own dioceses in Indiana and Missouri. Within a short time Bishop Quarter and his brother, Rev. Walter Quarter who came with him from New York, were the only two priests in the city of Chicago (Cathedral

of the Holy Name, 1949). Although an immigrant himself, Quarter realized that American Catholics would be served best by American priests, trained in the United States. On June 3, he opened St. Mary's College in his own house where he taught his first six recruits and ordained them as quickly as possible. This "school" became the "germ" of St. Mary of the Lake College, which Quarter formally organized that same year (Gleason, 1985; McGovern, 1891; Monaco, 1941; Riordan, 1919; Thompson, 1920).

## **CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION AND SEMINARIES**

The first Catholic college in the United States was Georgetown, founded in 1789 by Bishop John Carroll. Carroll hoped that Georgetown would "unite the means of communicating Science with an effectual provision for guarding and preserving the Morals of Youth" ("Proposals," 1956, p. 172). Although Georgetown was open for all students, Carroll hoped that it would be a "nursery for the seminary" (Dolan, 1985, p. 249).

There were 16 Catholic colleges for men when the bishops of the United States met at their Second Provincial Council in 1833. There they declared that Catholic education for the "rising generation" was a "subject of first importance." Catholic colleges would give them the "best opportunities of literature and science, united to strict protection of their morals and the best safeguards of their faith" ("Pastoral Letter of 1833," 1954, p. 74). Moreover, at the Provincial Council the bishops reinforced a directive of the 16th century Council of Trent which called for a seminary under the direction of the bishop in every diocese (White, 1989).

Two trends that began in the 1830s and 1840s, increased the need for Catholic education to safeguard the faith of the "rising generation." The first was a program of education reforms that encouraged the formation of a public school system. Many of these education reformers came from a Protestant reforming tradition, so these schools frequently used the King James Bible as a principal text. Not surprisingly, Catholics viewed this public education system as a threat to the faith of their children and so they formed their own schools.

The second trend was the flood of immigrants, many of whom Catholic, that began to enter the United States in the mid-1840s. The church would have to expand rapidly to take care of the religious needs of these new Americans. Moreover, the response by non-Catholic Americans to these immigrants was a virulent nativism that in its extreme forms led to scurrilous literature and church and convent burnings.

These two trends made the preparation of American priests even more urgent. The "rising generation" of Catholics needed to be ready to take their place in a more hostile society; priests would show them the way. These two

trends also tended to isolate Catholic higher education from the remainder of higher education in the United States. Charged with defending the Catholic faith, educating priests, and committing its resources to care for immigrants, American Catholic higher education became more polemical than intellectual. Moreover, once the nativist attacks of the 1840s and 1850s subsided, Catholic education maintained what the historian John Tracy Ellis has called, a "self-imposed ghetto mentality" (as cited in Hofstadter, 1963, p. 137). The long-term consequence to Catholic higher education was what historian Hofstadter has called "its cultural impoverishment, its non-intellectualism" (1963, p. 140).

These trends were even more obvious in seminary education. When the Council of Trent called for a seminary in every diocese, the purpose, in part, was to take seminary education away from the large universities of the day and place it directly under the supervision of the local bishop (Poole, 1965). These episcopal seminaries were to provide pastoral education to aspiring priests and while "literary education seems to have been presupposed," it was "not demanded" (p. 41). Finally, in these seminaries the seminarian would be isolated from the temptations that were present in the more open atmosphere of the universities.

This model of a separate seminary was introduced in the United States when Bishop John Carroll invited priests of the Society of St. Sulpice to begin St. Mary's College in Baltimore (Kauffman, 1988). The Sulpicians had been founded a century after Trent by Jean-Jacques Olier for the sole purpose of the education of seminarians. Olier had been influenced by St. Vincent de Paul who thought that priests ought to be "men of zeal and flaming charity" but nevertheless should have "minimal" contact with the laity (Poole, 1965, p. 46). Like Vincent, Olier wanted to limit the contact of priests with the world and thought that the seminary would be the "hedge which separates the Vineyard of the Lord from the World" (Kauffman, 1988, p. 17). Moreover, like Vincent, Olier was "suspicious of intellectualism" and thought that the education of priests should be "pragmatic and pastoral, confined solely to what was useful for his vocation and ministry" (Poole, 1965, p. 46).

At the beginning St. Mary's was a mixed college and seminary, but in 1804, a new building was erected for the seminary which separated the college and the seminary. In time the college closed, and for the next 40 years St. Mary's Seminary was the only seminary for the exclusive training of priests in the United States (Kauffman, 1988). Other institutions opened that were a combined college and seminary, but that was not the preferred model. One bishop wrote that he preferred that his seminarians go to an exclusive seminary where they would be "free of the distractions so characteristic of the mixed college-seminary" (as cited in Kauffman, 1988, p. 84). This attitude would remain an important influence in American seminary education (Poole, 1965).

## QUARTER'S INFLUENCE ON MCMULLEN

St. Mary of the Lake was the 30th Catholic college for men in the United States (Power, 1958). Quarter rejected the exclusivity of the Sulpician model for the training of seminarians. Rather, he said, that it was a "small college" begun in a "very humble way," but he hoped to find the means to have it "carry...on more extensively" (Garraghan, 1921, p. 112) to educate Catholic men for whatever career path they chose, including the priesthood. And Quarter hoped the school would be much more than a small college and seminary. Quarter had what one historian has called a "far-eyed vision" that Chicago could become the center of Catholicism in the growing Midwestern states (Garraghan, 1921).

Quarter traveled throughout Illinois and as far as New York to raise funds for a building to accommodate what he hoped would be a growing student body. His persistence paid off and classes began in the new building on July 4, 1846 (Cathedral of the Holy Name, 1949; Garraghan, 1921; McGovern, 1891; Sanders, 1977). Still the school continued to struggle for funds, so in December 1846, he wrote a pastoral letter to the people of the diocese. He painted a stark picture of what the consequences would be to their families if there were not enough priests to serve them: no religious instruction for their children, no one to administer the sacraments, the poor would be neglected, and the faith would not be handed down. To prevent that, he urged each Catholic family to contribute one dollar a year to the school. In a separate letter to the priests, he asked them to form devotional societies among the people to encourage vocations to the priesthood (McGovern, 1888).

Fourteen-year-old John McMullen was serving Mass in December 1846, when he heard Bishop Quarter's pastoral letter read from the pulpit. From his family's experience in New York he knew the importance of a priest and parish for the Catholic immigrant. He said it was at that moment that he determined to become a priest, so he entered St. Mary of the Lake and began his studies for the priesthood (McGovern, 1888; Monaco, 1941).

McMullen excelled in school and soon became a tutor for the younger students. He was a study hall monitor, taught religion classes to the elementary students in the parish school, and continued to serve Mass in the parish church. Moreover, during these years McMullen began what would be a life-long commitment to publish when he and another student began the publication of a campus newspaper, the "St. Mary's Weekly Collegiate" (McGovern, 1888; Riordan, 1919).

With the founding of St. Mary of the Lake, Bishop Quarter seemed to be on his way to realizing his "far-eyed vision," when in April 1848, he died suddenly. Even in death, however, Quarter continued to serve the needs of

his fledgling university when he left his estate to the school (Skerrett, 1987). Bishop Quarter and his ideas about education had a lasting impact on the young John McMullen. Thirty-four years later, when Bishop John McMullen would put his own vision for a university into action, he never forgot Bishop Quarter's hopes of building an institution that would play an important role in the life of Catholics of his state and the Midwest (McGovern, 1888; Skerrett, 1987).

## EARLY WRITINGS

In the meantime, McMullen continued his education at St. Mary of the Lake. He graduated in 1852 and was ready to begin the study of theology that fall, but he was forced to suspend his studies because of illness (McGovern, 1888). He was not idle, however, and he used his time away from his studies to write regular articles for Catholic newspapers. He published a few articles in the New York *Truth Teller*, but most of his writing was for the *Western Tablet*, a diocesan newspaper founded by Quarter's successor, Bishop James Van de Velde (Clarke, 1888; McGovern, 1888).

Some of these articles reported on events around the diocese or on national issues such as anti-Catholicism, the church and the state, and attempts to control the sale of alcohol (McGovern, 1888). But two articles on Catholic education are of special interest. In one article, "Why Do Not the Sects Object to the Common School System?" McMullen (1888c) inveighed against the public schools as exponents of Protestantism. In the other, "Catholic Education in Illinois – The Beginning of the End" (McMullen, 1888a) he discussed the campaigns waged by Catholics in other parts of the country against the use of their tax monies to support the objectionable public schools.

## STUDIES ABROAD

Meanwhile, his own education was about to resume. He had expected to return to St. Mary of the Lake in the fall of 1853. Instead Bishop Van de Velde told him he would be going to study at the Urban College of the Propaganda in Rome (McGovern, 1888). So John McMullen, with his friend and eventual biographer James McGovern, left Chicago in August. After the Atlantic crossing, and a long journey across Europe, the two Chicago students arrived in Rome on October 15, 1853, and began their studies 2 days later (*Pontificio Collegio Urbano di Propaganda Fide*, 1853, 1854, 1855, 1856, 1857, 1858; McGovern, 1888).

The Rome in which McMullen and McGovern arrived was an extraordinary place. John Lancaster Spalding, the bishop of Peoria, wrote that during those years, "the Pope was also king, Rome was still the city of the soul, and

religion there was clothed in power, in majesty, in splendor and beauty, such as elsewhere it has never worn" (1888, p. xviii). Spalding continued that

to live in such environment, to kneel at the tombs of saints, to dwell amid the ruins of the mightiest works of man, to look on the face of pure religion illumined by whatever of most divine human genius has wrought, is to have all that is noblest in one's being, stirred and thrilled; and they who return from this fountainhead of what on earth is greatest and most holy, unregenerate and unraised, must surely be hopelessly common or altogether frivolous. (p. xix)

McMullen was taken with this power of the Roman church. After witnessing the Holy Week ceremonies in Rome he wrote that he "indulged in a secret inexpressible joy" as he realized that "the true religion must yet reign triumphant in the new world" (*The American Celt*, 1854e).

The next year Chicago's new bishop, Anthony O'Regan, came to Rome and met with his students. O'Regan told McMullen to study church history, which he said was the "indispensable key" to the rest of his studies. He urged McMullen to visit the Christian antiquities around Rome which he said would give him "a broader and clearer light to the history of the Church and her doctrines" (McGovern, 1888, p. 122). McMullen took his bishop's advice and began to visit religious and historical sites. He said he found in the Christian antiquities "a fund of theological lore in the original expressions of the early christians [sic]" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 122). McMullen used his research to write a major work that was reportedly a "summary of the rites and institutions of the Church" (McGovern, 1888, p. 122). He also began to build his own theological library which McGovern said was McMullen's "great treasure, his only earthly possession" (1888, p. 117).

While in Rome, McMullen continued to send articles to Catholic newspapers in the United States (McGovern, 1888). He also found a new outlet for his writings when Thomas Darcy McGee, the publisher of *The American Celt*, an American newspaper which was directed to Irish and Irish-American audiences, asked McMullen to write letters from Rome. McGee asked McMullen for "fortnightly" letters and he said that "everything that happens in Rome is of interest to us" (T. D. McGee, personal communication, March 28, 1854; McGovern, 1888, p. 118). McGee claimed to have a circulation of 10,000 subscribers in North America, so McMullen was now writing for a much wider audience than in the past (Phelan, 1951).

The letters were published as "Our Roman Correspondence" and talked about a wide variety of subjects. He wrote about the renovation of Roman churches, as well as excavations around Rome and the discovery of Roman antiquities. He told his readers about the celebration of Lent and Holy Week



in Rome, as well as the celebration of St. Patrick's Day at the Irish College. He cultivated an interest in Roman art and wrote to express a concern that so much of it was being sold out of the country. He described the beatification and canonization of saints and talked about life in his college. He wrote about the political climate of Rome and the presence of the French army in the city, as well as the failure of the Rothschild family to repay a loan (*The American Celt*, 1854a, 1854b, 1854c, 1854d, 1854e, 1854f, 1854g).

During McMullen's years in Rome he grew to understand the universality of the church. At the Urban College he studied with men from all over the world. Early in his years there, he attended a series of lectures given at the Academy of Languages where he heard presentations in 44 different languages (*The American Celt*, 1854a). Moreover, he learned to appreciate the long history of Rome. As someone from a frontier community that was receiving hundreds of immigrants each month and where its oldest residents could remember when it was a small village, the antiquity and continuity of Rome was a profound lesson.

## **ORDINATION**

On June 20, 1858, following 5 years of study, John McMullen was ordained a priest (Clarke, 1888; McGovern, 1888). Walking back to his rooms at the college following the ordination ceremony, he said, "I thought I should feel like quite another person after ordination, but I am still only John McMullen" (as cited in Starr, 1883, p. 595). McMullen and the other newly ordained priests then observed the custom of the Urban College and celebrated Mass for the community, each in his own "peculiar rite." Then, over the next few days each student changed "his college habit...for the secular dress of the country for which he [was] destined" and departed "to struggle in the great cause in which each is enlisted" (*The American Celt*, 1854f).

McMullen's "struggle" in the cause would have to wait, however, because Bishop O'Regan asked him to remain in Rome to take the examinations for the Doctor of Divinity degree. He passed the examinations in July with the highest praise; one examiner called him a "great theologian" (McGovern, 1888, p. 124). Now, finally, Dr. McMullen could return to Chicago. When he arrived home in October, he learned that a new bishop for Chicago, James Duggan, was about to be installed.

## **PRIESTLY MINISTRY**

McMullen's first assignment was as an assistant pastor at his old parish, St. Mary's. He was delighted to offer Mass on the altar where he had first served as an altar boy, and to preach from the same pulpit used by his mentor,

Bishop Quarter. After a few months at St. Mary's he was moved to St. Louis parish (Koenig, 1980). He plunged into the work of being a parish priest. He celebrated the sacraments and preached regularly. In addition to his regular sermons he also delivered a series of lectures about the church (McGovern, 1888). He visited the sick and took care of the poor, often out of his own pocket. Later, when his friends presented him with two new suits, he immediately gave one away to a priest who had none (Clarke, 1888).

McMullen visited the local prisons to take books and newspapers to the prisoners. One prison, the City Bridewell, housed prostitutes, many of whom were Irish and Catholic (Hoy, 1997). Concerned about the fate of these women once they left Bridewell, McMullen borrowed money from his brother James, and used it to start a shelter called The House of the Good Shepherd (Koenig, 1981). McMullen said it would be a place for women to return to a more productive life, as well as a place of refuge for women in "danger of entering upon such a career" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 129). He also wanted to build a Catholic reform school for boys, but that effort was met with strong opposition by proponents of the reform school already being run by the city of Chicago.

McMullen's efforts were not without critics. In August 1859, the building that was under construction for The House of the Good Shepherd, burned in a fire that McMullen suspected was arson. Nevertheless, he redoubled his fundraising efforts in Chicago and throughout Illinois, and began to build again (Hoy, 1997; McGovern, 1888). Other critics of his efforts said that the Church should just build churches and teach catechism. McMullen said that while, for Catholics, those were "the greatest works of our day," institutions such as "Colleges, Orphan Asylums, Reform Schools" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 134), benefited the whole community, not just Catholics. "The rising generation of American Catholics," he wrote in words that could describe himself, "are a hardy, stalwart, labor-loving race, with as much talent and ingenuity as were ever possessed by the youth of any other country" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 135). He continued:

This is the age of founding institutions, of building Churches, and providing for the religious wants of a Catholic people. The time which requires the greatest exertion is upon us, and if we have done much, we cannot cease from the great work before us. More remains to be done. . . . Let us push forward the great enterprise. . . . for the innumerable blessings that through our labors of the present, will be perpetuated to remote generations. (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 142)

McMullen soon found himself building other institutions. In early 1861, he was assigned to be the rector of Holy Name Cathedral. At the same time, he also served mission parishes in Sycamore, Lodi, where he built the first

church, DeKalb, and Arlington Heights (Kirkfleet, 1924; E. McDonald, 1958; McGovern, 1888; Miller, 1976). Later in the spring of 1861, the appointment as the president of St. Mary of the Lake University was added to his other duties (Koenig, n.d.). It seemed as if his whole life had been a preparation for this assignment. "Here is the place of my work," he said. His delight in being back at his old college was evident when he declared, "if Saint Mary of the Lake is worth anything, she shall have all I can bestow upon her" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, pp. 144).

The university had fallen on hard times since McMullen had graduated 9 years before. In 1856, Bishop O'Regan had asked members of the Congregation of the Holy Cross to operate the school. The agreement between the bishop and the Holy Cross fathers required them to invest money in repairs to the two buildings that comprised the school. But the Panic of 1857, and the depression that followed it, had made it difficult to find the resources to maintain the school. So at the end of the school year in 1861, they left, and McMullen became president (Riordan, 1919).

One historian said that with McMullen's appointment, "a second spring appeared to dawn on the sorely tried institution" (Garraghan, 1921, p. 213). When McMullen took over the school in the summer of 1861, only 37 of 156 students were classified as collegiate; it was essentially an advanced high school with courses in the classics and natural sciences (Sanders, 1977). The faculty consisted of four laymen and McMullen, who taught metaphysics and history, in addition to his duties as president (McGovern, 1888; Riordan, 1919). The following January, McMullen reported to his friend, James McGovern who was still in Rome, that he was beginning to make improvements so it could open with decency (McGovern, 1888). His long-term goal was to enlarge the university and recapture Bishop Quarter's "far-eyed vision" of a great university for the Midwestern states.

## THE MOVE TO ADMINISTRATION

When McMullen took charge of St. Mary of the Lake, most Catholic colleges were little more than high schools. One critic doubted whether any Catholic college existed whose "sole object...was to impart a collegiate education, in its strictest sense" ("Public Instruction," 1857, p. 378). The writer admitted that the need for a "numerous and well-educated clergy" remained, but that a "large class of educated seculars" (p. 379) was also needed. He continued that "for this we need colleges devoted primarily to secular studies, to the rearing and training of a generation of scholars that can more than match, in all the branches of a liberal education, the best scholars educated in the country" (p. 388).

One consequence of these challenges was an expansion of the curricu-

lum into separate ecclesiastical, classical, commercial, and scientific courses, and the addition of professional curricula such as medicine and law (Gleason, 1967; Power, 1958). According to Orestes Brownson, a leading Catholic layman and publisher, these reforms would enable Catholic universities to “send out living men...inspired with faith and genius, who will take the command of their age...inform it with their own love of truth, and raise it to the level of their own high and noble aspirations” (Brownson, 1862, p. 84).

That kind of university became McMullen’s goal. He issued a prospectus for the university which noted the necessity for knowledge to meet the challenges of the “vast...complicated commercial transactions” demanded by a growing city like Chicago. He said that St. Mary of the Lake would provide a “thorough...education” to prepare its graduates to meet those challenges. Moreover, its faculty would “leave nothing undone to lay a basis of religious, mental, and physical education which will render the pursuits of the sciences and the arts both easy and pleasant” in the years after graduation (Monaco, 1941, p. 38).

When McMullen became president the university was housed in two, inadequate buildings. Now he began to raise funds to erect a new, larger building for the school. He contributed all of his own financial assets to the project. The cornerstone was laid in July 1863 and the first wing of the new building was put into use the following January (Clarke, 1888; McGovern, 1888; Riordan, 1919).

McMullen also began to enlarge the faculty and the curriculum. He secured several more faculty members with doctorates who could teach courses in business and the sciences (Riordan, 1919). He established a medical school where St. Mary of the Lake students would be taught by the faculty of Rush Medical School. And he began a law school in a lecture hall close to the courthouse (McGovern, 1888; Riordan, 1919).

Next he turned his attention to the seminary, which had been Bishop Quarter’s first school and the “germ” of the university. By the time McMullen became president, financial pressures and the difficulty of finding a faculty had forced many American bishops to close their diocesan seminaries (Ellis, 1967a). At Provincial Councils in 1829 and 1833, United States bishops had discussed the formation of a national seminary (Guilday, 1932; L. McDonald, 1927). When that plan failed, some bishops relied on newly formed regional seminaries, many of which were put in rural settings that the bishops believed would serve as “buffers to the lay culture beyond the seminary” (White, 1989, pp. 84). Other American bishops began to send their seminarians to the new American College in Rome, or the American College in Louvain, Belgium (White, 1989). Still others sent their men to the scholasticates of various religious orders in the United States (Ellis, 1967a).

McMullen rejected these alternative models and the idea that seminari-

ans should be isolated from lay students and the rest of society. In an essay entitled "Clerical Seminaries" he said that seminarians should be educated in their own diocese and alongside non-seminary students (McMullen, 1888b). He wrote that being "educated with the youth of his own country," and coming into "contact with the prevalent opinions and modes of thinking of the people," was the best preparation for a seminarian (pp. cxv-cxvi).

McMullen also had plans to add to the seminary curriculum. Like Catholic colleges, American seminaries were perceived to be of inferior quality. Nevertheless, McMullen wanted to try to raise the bar. In 1863, his friend Fr. James McGovern returned from Rome with a Doctor of Divinity degree and was placed in charge of the seminary (McGovern, 1895; Riordan, 1919). With the addition of a third priest with a doctorate, the Rev. Thaddeus Butler, McMullen hoped to have St. Mary of the Lake declared a pontifical university so it could grant degrees in theology. But when he wrote to Rome to ask for the degree-granting authority, the Roman Congregation denied his request (J. McMullen, personal correspondence, July 20, 1864; Roman Congregation, personal correspondence, September 1, 1864).

McMullen wanted his students to be exposed to the issues of their own time, as well as the classics. Previously, he had encouraged the activities of the university discussion club, The Lyceum (Monaco, 1941). Now, in January 1865, he began to publish *The Monthly*, whose prospectus described a journal to be "a magazine of Literature, Science, and Art" ("Prospectus," 1971, p. 57) for Catholics throughout the country. Each issue of *The Monthly* contained essays on various topics, poetry, short news items about the Catholic church and religion in general, and fiction that was serialized over several issues. McMullen wrote a major essay for nearly every issue on such diverse topics as slavery, the Missouri Compromise, the Fenian Society, the Catholic Church and the Civil War, a recent papal encyclical on church and state, and the Christian missions. The journal was well-received and apparently had enough subscribers to meet its expenses. Because of a growing dispute with Bishop James Duggan, however, McMullen suspended publication of *The Monthly* after only 12 issues (McGovern, 1888).

Another important part of the intellectual climate of the university came through McMullen's friendship with Eliza Allen Starr, a poet and an artist who regularly lectured on art (McGovern, 1913). In 1859, Starr had moved to a house near the university where she found "loyal friends" in the clergy of St. Mary of the Lake (McGovern, 1895, p. 39). McMullen had developed an interest in art during his years in Rome. Now, Starr's home became a salon where McMullen, McGovern, Butler, and others from the university would come to discuss art, as well as a wide variety of other subjects. Moreover, McMullen encouraged Starr's lecture and publishing career, attending her lectures whenever he could. According to Starr, McMullen,

Butler, and a “few others like them, are the leaven of literature in this country” (as cited in McGovern, 1895, p. 272). Starr and McMullen remained friends until his death.

By 1866, McMullen would need all of his friends to support him in increasingly difficult times. Although the number of students at the university continued to grow, there were still financial problems. The diocese had been carrying a debt of \$6,000 on the university, and in January 1866, Bishop Duggan, who was already showing signs of the mental illness that would eventually hospitalize him, told McMullen that he would no longer carry the debt. A tearful McMullen informed the faculty of the bishop’s decision, and a few days later Duggan closed the university (Garraghan, 1921; McGovern, 1888). Two years later, Duggan would just as suddenly close the seminary, marking what the historian John Tracy Ellis has called an “inglorious end” to the “only viable effort during the last century to make theological training for the diocesan clergy an integral part of university education” (1967a, p. 162)

It is difficult to find a precise reason why Duggan abruptly closed the university. The debt of \$6,000 does not seem to be a great amount of money and the bishop had been carrying that debt for several years. Some commentators suggest that there was a growing tension between the bishop and the priests at St. Mary of the Lake, in part because of the independence of the university. Thus, this was the latest episode in the struggle between bishops of Chicago and the university that had contributed, in part, to the departure of Bishops Van de Velde and O’Regan (Gaffey, 1973; Riordan, 1919; Walch, 1988). In addition, Walch suggests that “some unrevealed trouble between Duggan and McMullen” had led to the closure (1988, p. 83).

The abrupt closing of St. Mary of the Lake was a blow to McMullen. His friend Eliza Allen Starr said it was not a “personal disappointment” but rather that McMullen felt the closing was a “loss to religion and education” (as cited in Clarke, 1888, p. 600). James McGovern, however, was probably closer to the mark when he noted McMullen’s tears, and said that for the “first time” in McMullen’s life he “was disappointed in his hopes” (1888, p. 160).

McMullen had made Bishop Quarter’s “far-eyed vision” of a Catholic university in Chicago his own. It would educate men for service as priests, prepare many more Catholic men to take their places in society, and it would serve as a place where ideas could be debated. One historian of the church in Chicago noted McMullen’s “vision of the magnificence of the field which Chicago offered” (Garraghan, 1921, p. 216) for such a university. But McMullen’s own “vision,” and his desire to carry out Quarter’s “far-eyed vision,” would have to wait.

## TRANSITIONS

In the next few years, McMullen tried to put aside his disappointment about the university. He continued to teach at the seminary until it was closed in 1868. As chancellor of the diocese he accompanied Bishop Duggan to the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, a meeting of all the bishops in the United States in 1866. Here, once again, the bishops urged the formation of schools in every parish and urged parents to prepare their "children for the duties of the state or condition of life they are likely to be engaged in" ("Pastoral Letter of 1866," 1954, p. 215).

McMullen also served in a number of parishes in Chicago. His first post-university assignment was as pastor of St. Paul's Parish in Chicago (McGovern, 1888; Riordan, 1919). The church was located in the "most unpromising" part of the city and the appointment was widely viewed as Duggan's way of "degrading the doctor" (Koenig, 1981, p. 1670).

These were also years of more conflict with Bishop Duggan. The bishop's mental health continued to decline, and there were questions about his ability to continue to serve as bishop. In the hopes of regaining his health, Bishop Duggan went to Europe for a rest, and while he was away, McMullen and three other priests pressed Rome for his removal as bishop. When Duggan returned from Europe and discovered their actions, he suspended the four priests. McMullen went to Rome himself to present the evidence directly to the appropriate officials. While he was there, Duggan had a complete breakdown and was taken to a mental institution in St. Louis, where he would remain until his death in 1899 (Gaffey, 1973).

When McMullen returned from Rome in July 1869, he was sent to St. Rose of Lima parish in Wilmington, south of Joliet (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1883; McGovern, 1888; Thompson, 1920). While he was there he began a new parish at Braidwood, a coal mining community nearby (Thompson, 1920). He continued to write articles about church history and polity. He also traveled around northern Illinois, and as far west as Rock Island, to deliver lectures (McGovern, 1888). McMullen believed that priests should continue their intellectual pursuits. He lamented that too often priests were "engrossed in the temporal progress" of their ministry and that there was a "great deal of intellectual ability lying torpid which ought to be brought out" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 182).

In 1870, Duggan's successor, Bishop Thomas Foley, vindicated McMullen by appointing him rector of Holy Name Cathedral and later, the vicar general of the diocese (McGovern, 1888, 1891; Thompson, 1920). Any joy he felt at returning to the cathedral, however, was dashed in October 1871, when Holy Name Cathedral, the buildings that had housed the university, his earlier parishes, Eliza Starr's home, and the Good Shepherd home,

were among the thousands of buildings lost in the Chicago fire. McMullen also lost all of his personal belongings, including the library he had begun to build when he was a student in Rome, and the manuscript he had written in Rome about the early church.

The next few years saw McMullen attend to the needs of his parishioners who had lost their homes and businesses in the fire. He lived and ministered in the “Shanty Cathedral,” a temporary wooden structure erected soon after the fire, while he oversaw the plans to build a new Holy Name Cathedral (Thompson, 1920). To ensure that the educational needs of the parish were met, he built a new grade school. Later, when he was the administrator of the diocese following the death of Bishop Foley in 1879, he urged all pastors in Chicago to build parish schools (Clarke, 1888; Koenig, 1980).

With the death of Bishop Foley, Chicagoans began to wonder who their next bishop would be. Earlier, following the removal of Bishop Duggan, McMullen had been frequently named as a likely successor (Gaffey, 1973). Now he was once again mentioned as the next bishop (“Personal,” 1879). But he was not destined to remain in Chicago. Instead, on May 9, 1881, it was announced that there would be a new diocese of Davenport, Iowa, and that John McMullen would be the first bishop (Griffith, 1932).

Over the next few weeks, McMullen busied himself with winding up his affairs in Chicago and preparing to become the Bishop of Davenport. However, soon the time came for McMullen to leave the Chicago in which he had grown up, been educated, and served as a priest for 23 years. McMullen endured a round of farewell celebrations, the most poignant of which was from his parishioners at Holy Name which was held in the new school building McMullen had built. The man chosen to speak for the parish told him it was appropriate to have the event in the parish school, which would “stand as an enduring monument to [McMullen’s] untiring energy, unyielding perseverance, and determined Christian spirit” (as cited in *The Davenport Democrat*, 1881c). As a parting gift, the priests of Chicago gave him a purse of \$4,000 in gold (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1881b; McGovern, 1888).

## **FIRST BISHOP OF DAVENPORT**

McMullen arrived in Davenport on July 30 and was greeted with similarly effusive speeches and gifts. He would live at St. Marguerite’s parish, which he had named his cathedral, until a permanent residence could be found (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1881a; Greer, 1956). The following Sunday he presided at his first pontifical Mass in his cathedral. He preached the sermon on the gospel text about the unjust steward. He may have been speaking to himself, when he reminded the people that they would all be held accountable for their stewardship of the goods they had been given. McMullen



seemed to enjoy the day, in spite of the pomp of the ceremonies, but he took special delight in the Gregorian chant that the church choir sang (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1881d).

In his first weeks in Davenport, he visited the churches and institutions of the city. One of his first visits came at the end of August when he laid the cornerstone of the new St. Joseph's Church. He spoke briefly and told the people that this was the "day of Church building," a time for the parish to "renew the faith cherished in the schools and exhibited in the generosity of Christian charity" (as cited in *The Davenport Democrat*, 1881e). He reinforced this message in early September, when he sent a pastoral letter to the priests of the diocese and told them that he had already accepted several students to study for the priesthood and that he expected to accept more soon. He urged the priests to ask the people to contribute to the support of these seminarians (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1881f). Then, on September 20, 1881, the Bishop began a 6-week trip through his diocese which included the four lower tiers of Iowa counties and stretched from the Mississippi River to the Missouri River. He met his priests and people and administered the sacrament of Confirmation to nearly 2,900 of them ("Confirmation Ledger," 1883).

In every parish he visited, he asked the pastor how the parish school was doing. Nearly 30 years earlier he had written that all Catholic parents should "provide a sound and adequate Catholic education" which would prepare their children "for intellectual contact with their fellow-men in the sphere of life they may be called to occupy" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 91). If the pastor replied that he had no school, McMullen would suggest that he start a school. If he sensed some reluctance the bishop would say, "well, try, there is no harm in trying" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 256). If there was a school, he met with the students and praised the efforts of the people to maintain it (*Daily Gate City*, 1881a, 1881b). Throughout his travels, he also expressed a concern about the number of boys not continuing beyond grade school and he talked about starting a "boys school for them" (McGovern, 1888, p. 256; O'Connor, 1932). His efforts to encourage education were already being noticed. When he arrived in Council Bluffs at the end of October, the mayor welcomed him and commented on McMullen's "zeal and efficiency in the course of Catholic education" (*Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 1881; as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 261).

In subsequent trips around the diocese his message remained the same: try to start a school. Then in the spring of 1882, he took his own advice and had his conversation with Father Cosgrove about where to locate his school. Now he could take Bishop Quarter's "far-eyed vision," and his own dashed hopes that St. Mary of the Lake would be a great Catholic university for the Midwest, and make them a reality in his own diocese.

## **ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY**

Although McMullen and Cosgrove quickly agreed on the location of the school, they disagreed on its name. Cosgrove suggested that it be named St. John's in honor of the bishop. McMullen objected, saying that while St. John was a great apostle, he was not an educator. Since this would be an educational institution, McMullen said "I think we shall call it St. Ambrose" (as cited in Schmidt, 1981, p. 111) for the 4th century Bishop of Milan and Doctor of the Church.

McMullen seems to have chosen St. Ambrose because he embodied McMullen's ideas of education and the role he wanted the graduates of his school to assume. When Ambrose became Bishop of Milan in 373, he was responsible for the Church in all of northern Italy as far south as Pisa and Ravenna (Dudden, 1935). He celebrated the liturgy and preached daily with an eloquence presaged when, according to legend, a swarm of bees had settled on his face when he was an infant (Paulinus of Milan, 1952; Ramsey, 1997). He rebuked the rich for ignoring the poor with an intensity that was rare in the other Western fathers, and he reportedly gave away all his personal wealth when he became bishop (Dudden, 1935; Ramsey, 1997).

Ambrose wrote commentaries on the scriptures, introduced congregational singing to the liturgy, and maintained a wide correspondence (Ramsey, 1997). He began to build a series of large basilicas outside the walls of the city in an architectural style that became known as Ambrosian (McLynn, 1994). He defended the divinity of Jesus against the Arians. And in what one historian has called "perhaps his most striking contribution" he challenged the emperor and defined a "distinction between Church and state where one had hardly existed before" (Ramsey, 1997, p. 48).

As bishop, teacher, administrator, educator, church builder, musician, scholar, and preacher, Ambrose "engaged the world" and in the process became "the outstanding figure of his time – respected, consulted, and obeyed, as no bishop of the period" had been (Dudden, 1935, pp. 495-496). It was this Ambrose that Bishop McMullen saw as a model for the students of his university. And, in important ways, as an educator, a church builder, a preacher, a writer, a commentator on his times, and with a deep concern for the poor, it was also the kind of man McMullen had been.

## **ATTRACTING A FACULTY**

Now that he had a place for his school and a name, McMullen could put together a faculty and appointed the Rev. A. J. Schulte to serve as president. Born in 1858 in Fort Madison, Iowa, Schulte had attended seminaries in Milwaukee, Collegeville, and Dubuque and had been ordained as the first priest of the new diocese the previous December (Farrell, 1982; Fuhrmann,

1916). Schulte has been described as “apt in his studies...adding a fine mind to an exquisitely good character, he evinced that rarest of all acquisitions, sagacity and good common sense” (Fuhrmann, 1916, p. 76). Schulte taught the classics, but he also taught geology and worked hard to find other science teachers (Hauber, 1951). Moreover, Schulte understood McMullen’s vision for St. Ambrose. Speaking in 1901, he said:

Religious teaching, impressions, and observances should penetrate all branches of education and instruction, of which they are not merely a part among other parts, but the soul and spirit diffused through the whole system. Religion does not merely run parallel to the course of secular studies, but like a vitalizing sap, should enter into and pervade every fiber of them. (as cited in Farrell, 1982, p. 20)

The other member of the faculty was Joseph Halligan who taught the commercial courses. Born in Davenport in 1862, Halligan graduated from St. Marguerite’s School and then earned a bachelor of arts degree from St. Vincent’s College in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. During Halligan’s years there, St. Vincent’s admitted lay and seminary students in three courses of study: classical, commercial, and theological (Cassidy, 1924; Power, 1958). Like Schulte, Halligan understood that St. Ambrose was a place where “every element of secular education is thoroughly imparted and in addition that preeminent element of moral training” is available (Farrell, 1982, p. 21).

St. Ambrose Seminary opened on September 4, 1882 in two rooms in St. Marguerite’s school. There were 33 students most of whom were in their early to mid-teens, fulfilling McMullen’s hopes to give an opportunity for further education to boys after grade school (“Cash Ledger,” 1881). The students had a choice of two courses of study: a 5-year classical course and a 2-year commercial course (*The Iowa Messenger*, 1883a). Most of the students were high school aged, and it was not uncommon for these students to stay only a year or two until they had finished a course of study or a good job became available.

The name of the school was St. Ambrose Seminary, but only a few of the older students were actually studying to be priests. But this too fulfilled McMullen’s vision. According to its prospectus, the mission of St. Ambrose was to “impart to its students a thorough mental and moral culture, so as to enable them to fill any position in life” (*Fourth Annual Catalogue*, 1886, p. 7). Nevertheless, the education of priests remained an important part of that mission. In his earlier essay, “Clerical Seminaries,” McMullen (1888b) had advocated the view that it was important that seminary students study alongside students preparing for other careers. He had put that into practice at St. Mary of the Lake, and now he continued that model of a diocesan seminary-

university at St. Ambrose.

A later president of St. Ambrose, Monsignor Ulrich A. Hauber, commended McMullen's vision. Hauber wrote that it was good when future priests "rubbed shoulders" with lay students and he said that St. Ambrose "may be proud of the fact that it pioneered in this policy of coeducating priests and laymen" (Hauber, 1950, p. 7). Later, Fr. Walter J. Burghardt, a Jesuit educator, suggested that seminaries should be established on university campuses, where seminarians, whose education was usually subsidized by their bishop, could see "how lay people sacrifice for an education" (1964, p. 67). He urged that seminarians "come into personal contact with atheism and agnosticism and existentialism and positivism, with technology and science – even with women!" (p. 67). In that way, he said, seminarians could see that "the life of the intellect is not simply theory," and that while ideas can "move the world" they must "first move" the seminarian (p. 67). Commenting on Burghardt's suggestion, John Tracy Ellis observed that at St. Ambrose, this had been the practice "for some years" (Ellis, 1967b, p. 208).

## DECLINING HEALTH

Thus, McMullen's school began as simply as Quarter's had 36 years before, as a combination of preparatory school, college, and seminary. Unfortunately, however, McMullen, like his mentor Bishop Quarter, lived just long enough to see his vision begin. At the time McMullen and Cosgrove had their conversation in the spring of 1882, the bishop had already contracted cancer. The previous fall, just before the bishop's long diocesan tour, Cosgrove had commented that McMullen's "health seems not to be good" (as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 253). Writing a friend in January 1882, McMullen admitted that

I find that I have no longer the vigor of other days. At times I feel that my earthly pilgrimage is coming to a close....This winter has been very severe on me....Pray that I may bear patiently whatever comes in the way of bodily infirmities and accept all with sincere resignation. (J. McMullen, personal communication, January 24, 1882; as cited in McGovern, 1888, p. 266)

By August, his health had declined so much that his doctors prescribed an ocean voyage and a visit to the spas of Europe. So McMullen left in mid-August and was in New York City on the day classes began at St. Ambrose. When he arrived in New York, however, he realized that an ocean voyage would be too much for him, and so he stayed in the East and finally returned to Davenport at the end of September (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1882a, 1882b).

When he returned, he was able to visit his school for the first time. In a newspaper interview a few days after his return, he described the career of St.

Ambrose as a "patron of education" and a "writer, architect and composer." He also said that within the next year he hoped to find a larger, more centrally located site on which to erect a new building that would, with additions, accommodate hundreds of students (*The Davenport Democrat*, 1882c).

He left Davenport again in mid-December for the desert West where he remained until the beginning of March. When he returned to Davenport, he told his doctor that he knew he was dying, but, he said, "my books are balanced and I am ready for the journey....My time is now devoted to the entertainment and instruction of my friends" (as cited in *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 1883). He visited St. Ambrose when he could and enjoyed talking with the students and listening to their papers and examinations. But his health declined rapidly, and he died on July 4, 1883, at age 51.

## CONCLUSION

Within 3 years, St. Ambrose had grown to 46 students and a faculty of six, and it had outgrown its quarters at St. Marguerite's. So in 1885, Bishop Henry Cosgrove, who had succeeded McMullen, purchased 10 acres of land on West Locust Street for \$6,800 and began the construction of the first section of Ambrose Hall. The move and the building were made possible, in part, by using the \$4,000 in gold that the priests of Chicago had given McMullen as a gift when he left Chicago and which he had saved for his school (Hauber, 1954).

McMullen was gone, but his vision for his school continued. When the cornerstone for the new building on Locust Street was laid in July 1885, the speaker of the day said that St. Ambrose was

to be a Catholic College where secular and religious education will go hand in hand. We look forward with hope and confidence to the time when this institution will send forth from its halls thorough going scholars, thorough going Americans, and above all, thorough going Catholics. (*The Iowa Messenger*, 1885)

In 1892, the name of McMullen's school was changed to St. Ambrose College, but by 1915, only 14 of 230 students were above the high school level (Hauber, 1955). Following World War I, however, more students came for college, and the 1922 catalog was the first to describe the college and academy curricula separately (Hauber, 1955). In 1929, the high school students and the college students would separate into two distinct institutions, St. Ambrose College and St. Ambrose Academy, which now had its own faculty, curriculum, and principal. In 1958, the Academy merged with a girl's academy, Immaculate Conception, to form Assumption High School.

We cannot know for certain what McMullen would have made of the St. Ambrose University of today, but we do know his vision for the school.

McMullen wanted St. Ambrose to be a place where ideas were important and the life of the mind was valued; a place where the classics, the arts, the humanities, and commerce informed each other; a place where its graduates were encouraged to engage their world as moral, faith-filled people; a place where seminarians and lay students could “rub shoulders”; and finally, a place from which its graduates were challenged to resist torpidity and continue to learn throughout their lives. Through his teaching, lectures, articles, his interest in the arts, and his ministry, Bishop McMullen, like Bishop Ambrose, embodied that vision. He had wanted St. Mary of the Lake to be that kind of university, and when that failed, those hopes became St. Ambrose University.

Catholic higher education has evolved considerably in the nearly 125 years since McMullen founded St. Ambrose (Gleason, 1995), but his ideas still have application today. He believed in a broad, liberal education, where the basic courses were important, as were courses to prepare one for a career, but so were art and music. His goal was to make education the means for the sons of immigrants to prepare themselves to take leadership roles in the emerging middle class of the mid-19th century.

A central component of his vision was a Catholic education that would be more than merely learning the tenets of one’s faith. Rather, that faith should be a lived faith and the graduate should be prepared to carry that faith into whatever profession he or she would follow. As a pastor, McMullen had built orphanages and half-way houses and found homes for the homeless, often in spite of criticism from the larger community. As the president of St. Mary of the Lake, he formed literary societies and discussion clubs. If the content of his journal, *The Monthly*, is any indication, he would have encouraged the members of those groups to debate the controversial issues of the day: slavery, abolition, the Civil War, anti-Catholicism, the problems of immigrants. Thus, his curriculum was never an “ivory tower” curriculum, but one that encouraged his students to engage their world, even when that became controversial. When he chose Ambrose of Milan as the patron for his school, he chose someone who was an advocate for the poor and a leading political figure of his age, as well as a musician, scholar, and architect, which reinforced his belief that what happens at a university should relate to its neighborhood.

Although McMullen lived just long enough to see his vision begin, he knew that he had begun something important. In December 1881, when he had been in Davenport for only 5 months, McMullen had written Eliza Allen Starr to tell her about his long autumn of visits throughout his diocese. “This is a great country,” he wrote, “and when I am gone, will be a great Catholic country, for a great and lasting beginning is already here” (J. McMullen, personal communication, December 27, 1881; as cited in McGovern, 1888, p.

255). Within a few weeks of that letter, Bishop McMullen and Father Cosgrove would have their conversation, and St. Ambrose University would become part of McMullen's "great and lasting" contribution to the Diocese of Davenport and Catholicism in the Midwest.

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