

# THE UNIVERSITY CONCOURSE

*An Independent Journal of Opinion*

Volume I, Issue 1

February 13, 1996

## Shouldn't we have a real core curriculum at Franciscan University?

by Dr. John Crosby

I am at present hard at work with my colleagues on the question of the core curriculum: do we have one? should we have one? which one? Let me tell you how I answer these questions.

You may wonder why I address the larger University community with my thoughts on the core curriculum. Is this not a matter for the faculty and its committees? By no means! We of the faculty need to know how the core curriculum has been working for students and alumni. I chair the Educational Planning Committee, which is supposed to lead the faculty examination of the core curriculum, and eventually to bring some proposal to the faculty for a vote. Your reactions to the argument that I am about to make would be extremely helpful to us in our deliberations.

The following remarks are bound to seem too negative, but I have a reason for taking this approach. I have found that most students and alumni will not, on their own initiative, voice any concern with the core curriculum, but I have also found that, *once certain problems are pointed out*, most of them will agree that the core curriculum is indeed seriously deficient. So I see no point in speaking for the status quo, which most are content with anyway; I want instead to issue a challenge to the status quo, and to see if I am right in thinking that most students are very receptive to this challenge.

Let me say right from the start that I do not see it as the *main* deficiency of our general education requirements that we require only 48 hours. You may be surprised to know that this is below the national average of 52 and is also well below our sister institution, St. Francis College in Loretto, which has a core curriculum of 60 hours. But my concern at present is only with the *coherence* of the 48 that we offer.

From now on I will in these remarks make a point of not speaking of our *core curriculum*, for I do not think that we have

a core curriculum. In my opinion this term should be reserved for a system of designated courses required of all students in a definite sequence. Franciscan University once had a core curriculum; core curricula are being restored in many universities at present; but we do not have one in this sense of the term. What we have is general education based on distribution requirements.

Let me draw attention to what seem to me four main deficiencies in our present system of general education.

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## NFP, by itself, does not compromise the marriage vocation

by Kathleen van Schaijik

Not so long ago I read (in a *Couple-to-Couple League* newsletter) an interview with a Catholic gynecologist who had decided to stop prescribing artificial birth control to his clients and move his practice to an area with a large Catholic population. It was a moving testimony of personal courage and integrity, and of the

moral and spiritual benefits of avoiding birth control.

In the course of the interview this doctor made a broad distinction between two types of Catholic families he encountered in his practice: those who, he said, use Natural Family Planning (with serious reason) and had small families, and those he called "providentialists", that is,

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# EDITOR'S PAGE

## Why the *Concourse*; Why now?

It doesn't take a long acquaintance with Franciscan University to notice the unusually high degree of interest people associated with her take in her welfare. Consider, for example, the intensity and variety of *opinions* continually whirling in the atmosphere here: we should become more serious academically; we should be careful not to lose our distinct emphasis on Student Life; we should be loyal to our "charismatic roots"; we should move toward a more traditional spirituality; we should be more Thomistic in our Philosophy Department; we should make our Philosophy Department the American center of Realist Phenomenology; graduation should be in the tent; graduation ought not to be in a tent; secular rock music has no place here; we have too many rules stifling students' individuality; we should expand our outreach ministries; we should cutback on outreach and re-focus on academics...And the list goes.

We think it high time the University had an open forum for the intelligent and courteous discussion of these and other issues affecting our life—and not only our life here, but issues concerning Catholic culture in general, such as the role of the fine arts in human civilization, or the place of religion "in the marketplace". As we see it, such a forum is an integral part of the mission of any university, and of a Catholic university in particular.

Accordingly, we proudly launch this, *the University Concourse*, an independent, bi-monthly journal of opinion, designed to encourage fruitful discourse among the members of our University community.

One of the principles undergirding the *Concourse* endeavor is the idea that the truth about the mission and identity of our University (or about Catholic culture) is not the property of any particular "party" on the campus or in the Church; it is not something simply revealed and then either revered or resisted. Rather, it is, at least in part, something *forged*, by the coming together (even the occasional butting together!) of many minds, and by the exertions of individuals acting more or less in concert with the Divine Will, and according to their own "best lights". Even the doctrines of our Faith, though given to the Church once and for all, were not given in finished form, but rather as "seeds", so that our understanding of them has been emerging only gradually across centuries of Christian experience and through the medium of human reflection and debate. Even more, then, will more properly "human truths" need to be hammered out in "the arena of ideas."

Needless to say, it is inevitable that even the most loyal and respected members of our community will disagree with each other on occasion and on various matters—even passionately disagree. But disagreement need not imply discord; nor does it entail a betrayal of our Christian duty to "be of one mind". We think rather that honest debate, provided it is carried on in a spirit of charity, is one of the natural ways that unity of mind is achieved. Furthermore, if our disagreements are *not* worked out in an upright, university-like manner, they will tend to fester, creating a spirit of mistrust and prejudice in our midst, polarizing the campus, and undermining our communion.

With this in mind, and in keeping with the "communio" theme selected by our President, Father Michael Scanlan, for this year, we have named our journal *the University Concourse*, denoting a place where minds can meet, where thoughts can be aired, where particular views can be expressed and challenged, where understanding can be expanded and deepened, and where consensus can be built—all for the sake of cooperating with each other in advancing the Kingdom and the welfare of this marvelous University

Let ideas converge and Truth emerge! And to God be all the glory.

# THE UNIVERSITY CONCOURSE

An Independent Journal of Opinion

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### Editorial Policy

*The University Concourse* is a bi-monthly, independent journal of opinion, put together by alumni and students of Franciscan University of Steubenville, and designed to encourage fruitful discourse among members of the University community. The views expressed in this journal do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, nor those of the Franciscan TORs or other University officials.

We welcome submissions from faculty, students, administrators, staff, alumni, parents, trustees, benefactors and friends of the University, on any topic of interest to a general university readership, provided they are:

- of a certain intellectual caliber
- courteously expressed
- framed with a view to advancing the welfare of the University and/or Catholic culture at large

Priority will be given to timely issues, and to opinions which advance a discussion already underway.

Contributions should be submitted on a 3.5" disk, either to the faculty office of Mr. Jules van Schaijik in Egan Hall, or to the van Schaijik home at 915 Bellevue Blvd.; Steubenville, OH; 43952, or sent to e-mail address "TheConcourse@eworld.com".

Articles must be submitted no later than Tuesday noon, one week prior to publication.

We recommend opinions be kept to fewer than 1,500 words.

Please include your full name, phone-number, and relation to the University. We will consider printing submissions anonymously or under a pen-name, however, in general we wish to encourage open, "face to face" discussion. In either case, the editors require the full name and phone-number of the author of each opinion.

# What is Opus Dei and What Role Does It Play at Franciscan University?

by Richard Gordon

FOUR YEARS AGO, WHILE A FRESHMAN AT FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY, A FRIEND INTRODUCED ME TO THE SPIRITUALITY OF OPUS DEI, AND THIS WAS UNQUESTIONABLY FOR ME A MOST PROVIDENTIAL ENCOUNTER.

I have kept in close contact with “the Work” (as it is often called by many of its members and associates) ever since my first formal introduction. Subsequently, I have developed close friendships with many members of Opus Dei and even closer friendships with fellow students at the University through this common interest in a common, some might say a quite “ordinary”, spirituality.

Nevertheless, despite the numerous spiritual benefits it confers on so many, there is perhaps no organization within the Church today that has been the focus of as much confusion and misunderstanding as Opus Dei has been in its short 68 year history.

On the one hand, Opus Dei has received the unabashed praise of every pope since Pius XII. In May of 1992, Pope John Paul II beatified its founder, Blessed Josemaria Escriva before some 300,000 people in St. Peter’s Square, and on numerous occasions he has praised “the Work” for its service to the Church in fostering the dignity of the lay vocation as a genuine and authentic path to sanctity.

At the same time, Opus Dei has had its share of detractors. The vast majority of these come “from without”, i.e. from people outside the heart of the Church, who ridicule Opus Dei simply because of its doctrinal orthodoxy and its more traditional type of Catholic piety. This form of “bad press” does not concern me. Any person or community who lives out the Gospel faithfully will inevitably become a “sign of contradiction”. Franciscan University is itself a sign of contradiction for the very same reason. In this we find a point of common ground (at least a ground for common critics) between the spirit of Opus Dei and

the mission of our University.

There are, however, other murmurings against Opus Dei, coming not from those disgruntled about the demands of orthodoxy, but rather from faithful Catholics. Even at this University, I have seen people react with hesitation or suspicion at the mere mention of Opus Dei. This is somewhat understandable. Opus Dei has often been accused of being a clandestine organization; of being elitist in nature; of ambitiously seeking positions of power within the Church and in the world.

Had I heard such accusations before experiencing it for myself, I too would have approached it with greater caution and reservation. However, having come to it with an unprejudiced point of view, I can now see that such notions are rooted in misunderstanding about what Opus Dei really is. It is my hope in this article, first, to clarify some of the confusion surrounding this unique organization, so that it might be recognized as a work of the Spirit and as a gift of God to the Church in the twentieth century, and secondly to comment on the role Opus Dei plays on our campus and in the lives of those students who participate in the spiritual formation which it offers.

## What Is Opus Dei?

In answering this question I find it

most helpful to say that, fundamentally, Opus Dei is a “spirit”, a spirit which animates all that a member does in his life. There is nothing so mundane about our day to day lives that can’t, with a supernatural purpose, be made holy. An hour of study, a game of football, cleaning dishes—the small sufferings of each day done or endured with love, provide us with the means for our own sanctification. It is not just the expressly religious dimension of our lives (attending Mass, praying the rosary, doing spiritual reading etc.) which makes us holy, but rather everything, every minute of our day provides us with a new opportunity to serve and to please God. In short, the spirit of Opus Dei is a quest for sanctity, achieved not by leaving the world, but by working, suffering and persevering in the world; loving it so much as to transform it for the glory of Christ. Blessed Josemaria puts it this way:

*...the small sufferings of each day done or endured with love provide us with the means for our own sanctification.*

“God is calling you to serve Him in and from the ordinary, material, and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day in the laboratory, in the operating room, in the army barracks, in the university, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in the immense panorama of work. Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”

## A Lay Spirituality

Opus Dei is not a religious order, but a lay spirituality. Today, to speak of a lay spirituality seems like nothing extraordinary, but in 1928, when Blessed Josemaria founded Opus Dei amidst a climate of severe Spanish clericalism, to speak of a “lay spirituality” was very close to speaking heresy.

Many feel that one of the most significant achievements of the Second Vatican Council was its recognition of the universal call to holiness. All people in virtue of their baptism are called to sanctity, “to be holy as your heavenly Father is holy”. The lay person’s path to sanctity is different from a priest’s or religious person’s, but we are all called to the same end, which is holiness of life.

One of the first things that impressed me about Opus Dei is the seriousness with which it takes this universal call to sanctity. So much of the spiritual formation one receives in Opus Dei is directed along these lines. It is very simple and very practical. How can I improve in this area of my life or in that relationship or in my work as a student? In short, how can I better achieve sanctity of life within the circumstances in which God has placed me?

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council seemed to confirm what had been the teaching of Opus Dei since 1928: The lay vocation is a vocation to holiness; a holiness attained in the middle of the world through the ordinary perfection of one’s duties in a true spirit of Christian optimism and joy.

It is the distinctly lay character of Opus Dei’s spirituality that has, at the same time, been the cause of some of the misunderstandings about the Work. So much is written about Opus Dei in the Catholic press that some might expect its members

to be more public about their association with the Work. They certainly do not hide their affiliation, but they wear no religious habit or any outward sign announcing their membership. They see a less ostensible but a no less zealous apostolate as being more proper to their particular vocation.

Their’s is, as the founder expressed it, “an apostolate of holy friendship”. By first becoming a friend to their co-workers, the apostolate can proceed in a very natu-

ral manner. As a friend, your very life will become a witness to them; you will be called upon for help in a time of need; you will be asked for advice in uncertainty. It is by such simple and unassuming means that souls are led closer to Christ. This is how the apostolate of Opus Dei is carried out. It is very much a grassroots organization spread by word of mouth from one friend to another. A friend of mine once mentioned the following as a certain motto for members of the Work, namely, “to do the work of 3,000 and to make the noise of 3.” In other words, Opus Dei seeks to be like “leaven” in the midst of the world, itself going almost unnoticed, while bearing great fruit for the service of God and His Church.

### Opus Dei and Franciscan University

What has Opus Dei to do with the Franciscan

University of Steubenville? In addition to misunderstandings about what Opus Dei is in general, there are a number of misunderstandings about why Opus Dei is on our campus at all, and questions about its “hidden agenda”.

First, it should be said that Opus Dei is *not* here for the sake of bolstering its own enrollment. If vocations sometimes arise as a result of the spiritual formation

students receive, this should come as no surprise. But the notion that its *purpose* in coming here is to recruit new members is simply erroneous. Opus Dei is here primarily to serve those students who find its spiritual guidance beneficial, and to assist them in their efforts to sanctify their daily life. Nothing more, nothing less.

It first came here six years ago at the invitation of several students who had encountered the Work at home or in other places, and who felt that the spiritual guidance it offers would be useful to them personally. After going through all the proper channels, (including a meeting with Fr. Michael), the Work began its apostolate at Franciscan University, and it has been here ever since.

A second misunderstanding comes from those who would place Opus Dei’s reason for being at the University within the context of the charismatic/traditionalist debate. Opus Dei is not here to be pitted against Campus Ministry. It is not here to be a balancing traditionalist influence on an otherwise charismatic campus. To suggest this is to seek controversy where controversy doesn’t lie. It is true that Opus Dei’s liturgical piety is not charismatic. It is more subdued and much less expressive, but the whole question of liturgical practice is not really germane to what Opus Dei is in fact doing on campus.

An Opus Dei priest has said two masses at the University during its six year apostolate here. These masses were not offered in any way as acts of protest to the masses being offered on campus. Rather, they were offered simply to form a certain continuity between the priest of Opus Dei and the students he would meet regularly in spiritual direction. Opus Dei’s activities on campus have always been pastoral and not liturgical in nature.

Furthermore, the presence of Opus Dei on our campus should in no way be construed as being in opposition to the work of the Franciscan TORs, who have been placed in charge of the spiritual dimension of our campus life. The members of Opus Dei who come here to give spiritual direction see their role as one of cooperation with the spiritual formation already being accomplished here. I know how

*Opus Dei’s presence can...help stimulate the academic fervor of the students, serving as a kind of catalyst...as the University continues to grow into a true center of Catholic intellectual life in this country.*

# To Systematize or Not to Systematize: Philosophy at a Catholic University

by Rebecca Bratten

OF LATE THERE HAS BEEN MUCH DISCUSSION GOING ON, REGARDING WHETHER FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY SHOULD FLY THE BANNER OF PHENOMENOLOGY OR THOMISM IN ITS PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT. THIS

is not merely a debate about particular theses held by these respective schools of thought; it is as much a question of which of these two schools deserves a position of primacy at a Catholic institution. I do not intend to deal here with the Thomistic theory of the convertibility of being and good, nor with the Phenomenological notion of value, nor with any of the other significant topics which are, quite rightly, uppermost in current philosophical discussions on campus. I prefer here to touch on the broader, more general (and consequently less clear) aspect of the debate.

This aspect can be considered in terms of two questions: the first involves the tendency of many participants in the debate to focus on the *systems* rather than on the particular *issues* involved; the second is the question of whether there exists such a thing as a specifically Catholic philosophy and, if so, what that thing might be like.

Apart from their particular disputes with Phenomenologists, Thomists will typically argue that, as St. Thomas Aquinas has been the preeminent Catholic philosopher for over 600 years, and as many popes have declared the study of his thought essential to any truly Catholic education, Catholics who replace his ideas with those of more recent thinkers, do so at the peril of both their philosophy and their faith.

The philosophy of St. Thomas has certainly been the loyal handmaid of the Church for ages, and, it may well appear that the Phenomenologists are irresponsibly and improperly disregarding him. To many Thomists it seems that the Phenomenologists—adhering to a phi-

losophy which has not even been around for a hundred years, and was founded, not by a Catholic, but a secular Jew—are, as it were, displaying a pernicious irreverence towards what Chesterton dubbed “the democracy of the dead.”

But, Phenomenology, which was founded by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of this century, is not so much a system as it is a method. Thus, Phenomenologists argue, they are not attempting to dispose of or replace St. Thomas, but only to study his thought in a more philosophical manner—for it is not legitimate, philosophically, to accept unquestioningly the premises of any philosopher, however great he may be.

Among Phenomenologists can be named such great thinkers as Max Scheler—whose moral philosophy influenced the thought of John Paul II—and Dietrich von Hildebrand, who is considered by many a twentieth-century Doctor of the Church.

What I have frequently heard proposed by Thomists, as what is intended to be a liberal and open-minded compromise, is that while the duty of a Catholic university is to teach St. Thomas’ thought as a fundamental basis for further philosophizing, it is also legitimate to study other philosophies—after the young mind has been made secure against their fallacies.

This position I find almost absurdly unphilosophical. It presupposes that everything Thomistic is the truth, and the only reason for studying other philosophers is to refute them. Had St. Thomas taken such an approach—regarding St. Augustine, perhaps, as the quintessential philosopher, and never daring to touch

upon the dangerous pagan manuscripts, except to refute them—he would never have been “the Angelic Doctor”, but merely another staid medieval commentator.

The fact is, that in philosophy, it is not good scholarship to accept uncritically the work of any thinker—however great he may be. Even if a thesis has been held for centuries as true, it would be irresponsible for a scholar (though not necessarily for a layman) to accept it until he sees the truth of it for himself.

Regarding the study of St. Thomas, it is not a thing that can be managed in a short time, so that a freshman after a semester of indoctrination can say glibly, “Oh yes, I’m a Thomist.” And regarding the study of other philosophers, there is no reason for a scholar to suppose that they are wrong unless he can be certain of it himself. Sometimes it is very easy to see the truth or falsity of a given position; sometimes it is quite difficult. In the case of St. Thomas, a tremendous amount of what he has written appears to be undeniably true; however, I would say the same of von Hildebrand. I would predicate infallibility of neither.

I would not, however, take the position of some Phenomenologists, who scorn all systematizing and regard Thomism as outdated. Such a position, while perhaps more conducive to original thinking, is nearly as unphilosophical as that of the encyclopedic Thomists. It, too, is decidedly irresponsible, and denotes a lack of sobriety which does not befit the scholar. If the other position tries to find an easy way out by getting rid of original thought, this position tries to find an easy

way out by getting rid of the drudgery of research. I have often seen instances of students—generally former Thomists—who cling to the thought of von Hildebrand with as much unreasoning dogmatism as that which they displayed in their rejected philosophical past. I doubt whether either St. Thomas or von Hildebrand would take much delight in this situation

As is often the case, the correct position is the happy medium. It is unphilosophical to indulge in premature systematizing, and dangerous to assume that system has no place in philosophy. Philosophy begins, not with the memorization of a system, but with the wonder at and openness to reality—the willingness to let things be themselves, and to unfold their inner wealth and significance. It is only afterwards that one may begin to synthesize, in the realization that all truths are compatible with one another, and that thus there already exists— independent of all our considerations—a kind of eternal system, the entirety of which can only be known by God.

If ever a philosopher has come to the point where he thinks he has seen and comprehended infinity, let him be reminded of that famous and true statement from Shakespeare’s Hamlet: “there are more things in heaven and on earth...than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

In response to this, a Thomist might answer that my observations are all very well for a mere secular student of philosophy, but that our duty as Catholic philosophers is rather different. He might remind me that in his encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris*, Pope Leo XIII urges Catholic philosophers to “restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas, and to spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith...”<sup>1</sup>

Now, this is strictly speaking an

exhortation which bears much weight in the field of theology, but as regards philosophy, the distinction between disciplines will be destroyed if premises are brought in that are not supported by reason or experience. However, philosophy has as its object pretty much everything, so there is no reason why we may not philosophize about what has been said in the field of theology.

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As Catholics, we are more keenly aware of the importance and significance of these matters, and thus can see quite clearly their worthiness as philosophical objects. Therefore, I answer to the aforementioned objection: 1) Insofar as St. Thomas is a great philosopher, he deserves to be studied, and insofar as he is a great Catholic philosopher, we as Catholics ought to have a particular interest in him. 2) At the time of Leo XIII, the predominant philosophical schools were those of Kant and Hegel; Phenomenology had not yet come into existence. Surely the Pope would have been no less pleased with the efforts of von Hildebrand than he was with those of Thomas. Therefore, I do not see that we as Catholic philosophers have to regard our duty as being fundamentally distinct from those of other philosophers, although it does not follow from this that they are on all levels identical.

This brings us to the second topic of discussion: whether there is such a thing as a specifically Catholic philosophy. I would answer that, in the primary sense of philosophy, there is not. There is *philosophy*—an autonomous discipline the object of which is all of reality, and the final end of which is truth; it is carried out according to its own methods and laws—and there are *philosophers*. Philosophers have their particular systems, schools, methods, or ideas, which may or may not be in accordance with the truths

of the Catholic Faith. Thus we call von Hildebrand and St. Thomas Catholic philosophers, in the secondary sense of the term.

A Catholic who philosophizes has a particular understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology, which a secular philosopher might not have. He is aware of a whole realm of reality, available for philosophical analysis—the realm of faith and religion. He also understands philosophy in light of its secondary role as handmaid of theology—not as a slave, who is defined as a mere extension of his master’s will, but as a handmaid, who serves freely, and yet has a life and independence of her own, apart from that of her mistress. A Catholic who philosophizes will allow himself to be guided, personally, by the truths of his faith, but will never blur the distinction between the disciplines. This is not a wild and daring flight beyond the bounds of orthodoxy: we know that all truths are in harmony, and thus need not fear that our philosophizing will yield anything which does damage to our faith.

As long as Franciscan University is true to this understanding of philosophy, it will err neither on the side of extreme conservatism nor that of extreme liberalism. Those who are involved in the debate over Thomism and Phenomenology should continue to discuss problems and exchange ideas, in order to sift out the truths from the falsehoods, and to do all in a mature and charitable manner.

Moreover, it is important that we remember philosophy is not a quest for a system, but a quest for Truth. In the words of the Angelic Doctor: “The intellect’s end and good are the true, and its last end is the first truth. Therefore the last end of the whole man and of all his deeds and desires is to know the first truth, namely, God.”<sup>2</sup>

*Rebecca Bratten is a graduate student in the University’s MA Philosophy program.*

<sup>1</sup> Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII *Aeterni Patris*, St. Paul Books and Media

<sup>2</sup> *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Volume II, Ed. Anton C. Pegis, Copyright 1945, Random House

# “Preach Out” beats out prejudice

by Katherine E.M. DeLine

I WAS RAISED IN A STAUNCHLY CATHOLIC FAMILY. OUR FRIENDS WERE CATHOLIC, MY SCHOOL WAS CATHOLIC, EVEN MY DENTIST WAS CATHOLIC. MY LIFE GROWING UP WAS FILLED WITH THINGS LIKE MORNING

prayers on the way to school, writing reports on the saints for my religion classes, family rosaries beneath the crucifix and pictures of our Lady and the Holy Father, and eating Sunday dinner with our parish priest.

I had virtually no contact with Christians outside the Catholic Church. Whenever someone would say they were Methodist or Lutheran I would picture cold, proud looking ministers preaching fire and brimstone to their congregations, and when someone would say they were Baptist I would think of a fiery minister preaching to shouts of “Amen brother!” and the Gospel Choir in the background starting up choruses of Amazing Grace.

No surprise, therefore, that when I heard that there was to be a “Preach Out” on campus featuring two Protestant ministers along with Father Michael, I was not inclined to go. What could I learn from them, I thought? I’m Catholic, they’re Protestant. End of discussion. (I had heard of “Ecumenism”, of course, but I always regarded it as something priests need to be concerned with, not I.)

As the date came closer the subject came up often in conversation, and I heard various views on it (both positive and

negative). Several students expressed reservations about the appropriateness of having Protestants preaching on a Catholic campus. This attitude fit in with my own initial feelings, and I resolved not to go.

But when the night arrived I realized I *had* to go. I had to go for the precise reason that I did not *want* to go. I realized I had been forming opinions based on somebody else’s critique, rather than on my own experience. I did not even know what they were going to say, so what right did I have to object?

When the night arrived I headed over to Christ the King Chapel, late. I walked in just as Marcus Grodi had introduced the first speaker (a Methodist). He spoke, followed by a Baptist minister, and finally Fr. Michael. Their message was passionate, moving and very clear. It was a call for us to become more closely united with Jesus; to make Him our personal Savior. They bore beautiful witness to the power of Christ in their own lives and of the work He had done in and through them. They shared with the whole assembly their deep

love of God, and in so doing shattered all my prejudicial illusions about their faith.

There I was, realizing that not only was their faith real, it was greater than my own. What was all my proud attachment to Catholic Culture worth, I thought, unless I too have true faith in Christ?

These Protestants opened my eyes to the beauty of faith, and to how much I can learn from a true follower of the Messiah. At the same time I recognized how a deepened faith in Christ increases my understanding of and devotion to the Church, and enriches my experience of the Sacraments. Without knowing it, those Protestant ministers (and Fr. Michael) helped me gain a greater appreciation of the gifts of the Church.

I now have a different view of Ecumenism. Prejudice and misunderstanding no longer cloud my perception of our brothers in Christ. I do not pretend to know much about Protestantism, but having learned at least something, I can say I will celebrate the similarities we share, while I appreciate the differences.

The differences are important, and we can only pray to Mary and the saints that someday all our “separated bretheren” will share in the fulness of our Faith. But, until then, we can and should have “communio” with these brothers.

Thank you, Fr. Mike, for inviting these ministers to our University, for your leadership, and for your words of wisdom.

*What could I learn from them, I thought? I’m Catholic, they’re Protestant. End of discussion.*



*Katherine DeLine is a sophomore in Humanities and Catholic Culture.*

# Core curriculum

Continued from page 1

## 1. Fundamental knowledge.

I take it for granted that the courses that make up a student's general education, or liberal arts education, should convey *fundamental human knowledge*. These courses should center around the knowledge of "first things" in the various disciplines, otherwise they will never serve to promote a sense for the unity of all truth. But at present we let count as fulfilling the general education requirements all kinds of courses that can in no way be interpreted as fundamental or liberal. According to the Catalogue and the official lists of courses published in recent semesters, courses such as Youth Ministry, Administrative Law, Radio Production, Gerontology, Stagecraft can all be taken in fulfillment of the 48 hours required of every student in general education.

These are all important courses, especially for majors, and I am not proposing that any of them not be offered. *The question is why any of them should be reckoned to the general liberal education of a student.* According to my analysis of the list of courses for the Spring of 1996 (excluding the education courses), 76% of all courses offered can be taken in fulfillment of the general education requirement! We seem to have gone so far in promoting diversity and choice that we have forgotten to provide adequately for truly foundational knowledge, knowledge that has some chance of forming a unity in the mind of the student.

## 2. Building

Within any given course, one unit builds on the previous units. It is the same within any major program, where one course typically builds on another. But this so meaningful principle of letting one thing build upon another is discarded when it comes to the general education of our students. When an instructor teaches a course falling within one of the five areas of our general education requirements, there is not a single book or idea that he or she can presuppose. Some of the students may have almost completed the 16

courses required of them, but not even in their case can we teachers presuppose anything. There is quite possibly not a single course that all of these students have had. We never have the opportunity of picking up where our colleagues left off, but are always beginning from the beginning.

The result is devastating for understanding the unity of all truth, which has always been recognized as one of the great achievements of liberal education. (Besides, the faculty committed itself to promoting a sense of this unity when it passed last year its Philosophy of the Curriculum, an important university document that the readers of the *Concourse* should get acquainted with.) And why this loss of unity? *Because all the work of integrating what is learned is thrown on to the student.* We faculty cannot help the students because, beyond the content of our own course, we do not know what it is they are trying to integrate. Each student has a different body of knowledge that he or she struggles to understand in terms of first principles. Thus as teachers we teach only parts. The lack of any sequencing in the curriculum, as well as the lack of any designated courses, prevents us from teaching about the whole that the parts form.

## 3. Communio

Since everyone can do his own thing in the area of general education, the students do not have a *common* experience of learning in this area. They have a strong common experience in all that concerns religious life (liturgies, Life in the Spirit seminars, households); they have a common experience in Gaming; they have it in most major programs. It is being strongly stressed in this year's theme of *communio*. But in general education we allow each

student almost to be a law unto himself; here *communio* gives way to rugged individualism.

People argue in behalf of the present regime of general requirements saying that it allows for diversity. But would it be a good idea if, for the sake of diversity in the European experience, we sent some students to Oxford, some to Florence, some to Salzburg, some to Madrid—instead of having our own Austrian campus where all our students in Europe are together?

You may ask at this point: but what exactly is the educational advantage of a common learning experience? I would think that, just as we are social beings in so many other respects, so also in learning and understanding. When students have a common ground for conversation and debate, they can teach each other. We all know how this works in the setting of a single class. C.S. Lewis remarks in one place that students can sometimes teach each other more effectively than the teacher can teach them. They can help each other to find the unity of truth—as long as it is in the same materials that they are looking for unity. Of course it is true that students studying different things can also promote fruitful discussion. But with only 48 out of 124 hours being available for general education, there will in any case be plenty of diversity in the studies of

our students, no matter how tightly we structure those 48 hours. The question is whether we have a reasonable balance between diversity and unity.

## 4. Catholic culture

Franciscan University prides itself on standing in the Catholic tradition of

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liberal learning, the tradition of Catholic thought and letters and art. It is one of our identifying marks in the Mission Statement. This tradition is embodied in works such as the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, the *Summa* of St. Thomas, the Cathedral of Chartres, *The Divine Comedy* of Dante, the B-minor Mass of Bach. The way the curriculum works now, only a small fraction of our students will ever encounter even one of these works and grapple with its content. How many of our graduates, if asked what Catholic culture is, would be able to explain it? How many could explain how it grows out of classical Greek and Roman culture? We strongly stress Catholic doctrine and Catholic practice, and rightly so; but we do not show any kind of comparable concern for Catholic thought, Catholic imagination, Catholic sensibilities. Otherwise the general education requirements would not allow students to elect around the courses presenting some aspect of Catholic culture.

You see the common denominator of these concerns: general education at Franciscan University lacks coherence; it does not promote effectively the unity of truth in the minds of our students; it does not initiate students integrally into Catholic culture. It is often said that our age is marked by a fragmentation of knowledge, by a specialization that creates many spheres of knowledge apparently having nothing to do with each other. In #16 of *Ex corde ecclesiae* John Paul calls upon Catholic universities to resist this disintegration of knowledge. It is above all in our general education that we would have the opportunity to resist: but who can seriously claim that our present general education requirements succeed in offering much resistance to it?

Look at the general education requirements at other universities, and try to find one where general education is *even less structured* than it is here. All the ones I have looked at have four or five general areas within which students must choose, and these areas commonly resemble some of our five. Many secular universities have more structure and order in their general requirements than we do. St. Francis in Loretto has considerably more. We

strive for the highest excellence in the religious commitment of the University; but we remain completely undistinguished in the way we do general education. Of course, many individual courses offered here are excellent and compare favorably with the best that might be found within the general requirements at other universities; but I speak now not of individual courses, but of the curriculum, of the coherence of our general education courses, which is where we can contribute to recovering a sense of the unity of knowledge.

That general education is at present not effectively organized at Franciscan University, is clearly reflected in the way in which it is received by the students. As far as I can see, it does not make a strong impression on them; they do not experience it as one of the great events of their learning experience at Franciscan University. What they remember when they leave is, first of all, the intense religious life of the University; after that they are liable to remember their major program. Though they are enthused about particular courses and particular teachers in general education, they show no grateful recognition that the program of general education as a whole has been a decisive learning experience.

Just look at the way general education can affect the students at universities where a real core curriculum is in place. I spoke recently with a woman who graduated with a major in nursing from the St. Ignatius Institute at the University of San Francisco. She said that the liberal arts core was an unforgettable learning experience, and that 15 years later she is still drawing on what she learned in that core as she teaches her own children. As I listened to her it struck me that I have never heard one of our students or alumni speak like this about our general education requirements. When a well-crafted core curriculum works, students gratefully recognize that it is working, and they experience themselves being educated and enlarged precisely by the core. This grateful recognition does not exist here, and perhaps my four points above give a good part of the reason why it cannot exist.

The alumni at Columbia University

apparently feel so indebted to Columbia's core that, when changes to it were recently proposed, the alumni revolted and stopped the changes. If word gets out to our alumni that our general education requirements are going to be changed, I feel sure that we will not hear a peep, not a whimper from them. They will not even remember what the requirements were.

The student representative on the Educational Planning Committee, Lisa Gulino, agrees with my assessment. I asked her to take soundings among the students on the general education requirements, and she reported back to me in writing as follows: "In speaking to many of the students from a wide range of majors and ages, I find that they come to the conclusion 1) that there is a weakness in the cohesiveness of the core curriculum, and 2) that students feel that they lack a way of getting a foundational overview of the liberal arts."

Finally, I think we should let ourselves be challenged by the fact that universities and colleges and even community colleges are everywhere restoring a real core curriculum, a fact that is well documented in the National Endowment for the Humanities study, "Fifty Hours: a Core Curriculum for College Students." No one wants to follow slavishly the latest trends in education, but after all, the great curricular changes here at Steubenville of 1974 were strongly conditioned by the trends of that time. Sometimes there is good sense expressed in these trends; sometimes they bring some needed corrective. It should in any case give us pause that, for example, Piedmont Virginia Community College has far more of a core curriculum than we have. Perhaps it should give us greater pause that St. Francis College has recently restored something of a core curriculum.

But what do you, the readers of the *Concourse*, think about all of this? As I said, you should have a large voice in the faculty deliberations that are now going on. One way of raising your voice is to respond to what I have written.

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families who “let God decide” how many children they will have and when they will come. Without judging the *legitimacy* of the first group’s choice, the doctor was decidedly more impressed with the second—in general, he said, they were the more generous, joy-filled and well-adjusted families—the better representatives (he implied) of the true Catholic ethos.

I bring up this article because it provides a clear case in point of an attitude I think is rather prevalent among serious Catholics (though not always stated so forthrightly), and which I wish to challenge.

There is no question that the sort of families named “providentialists” by the doctor are worthy of our admiration. To be willing to endure the sacrifices and trials today’s “culture of death” make inevitable for large families, out of love for children and commitment to Faith, is to be at least a hero, if not a saint.

I question instead his portrait of the first group, and the way he draws the line between the two.

Without presuming that the interview adequately expresses the doctor’s real views on the matter, I can still say that, as it is, it leaves the reader with the impression that he thinks Catholic couples who practice NFP, *by the fact of their practicing it*, are somehow more worldly—less radical in their commitment to the faith—than couples who choose not to practice it. He does not at all suggest that they *sin* in using NFP—he deliberately speaks of those who use NFP *legitimately*—only he wants to say that (in his opinion) the testimony of their lives is not so inspiring as that of the providentialists.

Thus the line is drawn not between those who have sold out to the culture of death and bought into the contraceptive mentality, and those who love life and respect the moral law, but *within* this second group between those who use NFP and those who choose to let God decide how many children they will have.

And this is a very persuasive distinction. Who of us does not know of and immediately recognize the difference be-

tween families of both these types—families with numerous small children and hardly any money, whose generosity and courage and sacrifice deeply impress us; and then families who adhere to the teaching of the Church against artificial contraception, but who have only two or three children and seem to live rather mediocre lives, from a religious point of view, hardly distinguishable from the culture at large.

But, persuasive as it is, here’s my problem with it: it is misleading; it is not fully consistent with the teaching of the Church; it tends to foster a spirit of judgmentalism, and to create false consciences among the faithful.

Consider, for instance, how the distinction does not account for the all-important fact that among those who practice NFP, there are at least two critically different types. There are those who do so because they think that to keep their family small is a better way to realize their material goals in life, while avoiding too much unpleasant stress and strain. These may well appear to be compromising with the world and only lukewarm in their religious commitment. But then there are also those who, with great gratitude to God for His generous and loving Providence, and with prayer and serious discernment about His will for their lives, make use of the means He has provided to space their children, in order to better live out their vocation as a married couple and their duty to educate each child who comes. *These use NFP, not as a way of avoiding or mitigating the demands of their vocation, but rather as an instrument for living it out more perfectly.*

And this distinction is echoed among the so-called providentialists. There certainly are some who, with clear minds and full knowledge and deep prayer, joyfully open their hearts and their home to receive as many children as the Lord sees fit to

send them—these freely and generously choose not to practice NFP. But there are also those who, either through ignorance of NFP, or because they interpret “serious reasons” to mean “dire straits”, or because they have been taught to consider *any* family planning a “compromise” or “less holy”, find themselves having baby after baby while they are feeling more and more strung out and less and less in control of their lives.

Thus, we have a new line to draw, which cuts across the two groups described by the doctor. It lies between those who live out their married vocation only partially, or half-heartedly and largely in the dark, and those who approach it prayerfully, with a sense of religious seriousness, commitment and sacrifice. There are users of NFP in both groups.

Drawing the line this way assists us in avoiding the chronic sin of judgmentalism, since it makes it much harder for anyone “on the outside” of a particular couple to discern to which category they belong.

Now, some may object that my distinction assumes that NFP *can* be used in this way. True, but it seems to me this is an assumption amply justified by the teachings of the Church (*Humanae Vitae* as well as more recent statements by our Pope) as well as by the experience of countless faithful. I myself am acquainted with many “NFP families”, whose lives are pervaded with faith—with a profound consciousness of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the possibility of being able “to discern His most holy and perfect will”, who openly profess their desire to live wholly for God, who seek Him and His will for them daily in prayer, whose love for their children is manifest, whose children are beautifully raised—full of confidence and simple, joyful faith.

Who are we (who is anyone?) to suggest that, since they use NFP in

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less-than-dire-straits, they have compromised in this most serious area of their moral lives? How could we even *hint* that although their *professed* desire is to become holy and to raise saints for the Church, in truth they have neglected to “take up their cross” and *really* lay down their lives; they’ve kept something back. Why would anyone insist that those (and there are some) who have children without ever really *considering* never mind prayerfully discerning God’s will for their families, are living “more Catholicly”, simply because they have not made use of an instrument the Church has fully and repeatedly sanctioned?

I realize that many couples practice

NFP selfishly, without understanding the essential ordination toward children in marriage, and without openness to God’s will. This is real cause for concern among Christian leaders and teachers, and I applaud efforts to encourage such couples to live more generously—to deepen their religious seriousness, to examine their motivations, and (perhaps) to expand the borders of their families by being open to more children.

My complaint is that zeal for this cause often runs to the excess of unjustified generalizations, or interpretations of Church teaching that are unwarrantedly particular. Such are encroachments on the sovereign right (and sacred duty) of

individual consciences to discern the Divine Will for their families. Besides that such excesses frequently harm the very people they were designed to encourage, they tempt us to pride and self-righteousness—to the sense that we are among the rare few who are “radically” living out the teachings of the Church.

Let us encourage Catholic families to live more completely for God, but let us do it with profound reverence, with humility, and without being “more Catholic than the Pope”.

*Kathleen van Schaijik is an alumna of the class of ‘88, and Editor of the Concourse*

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## Opus Dei

*continued from page 4*

refreshing and encouraging it is for them to see a Catholic university where the spiritual life is alive and well; where the truths of the faith are proclaimed unabashedly in homilies and in classrooms; where the Blessed Sacrament can be adored at any time of the day or night. On most of the other campuses where Opus Dei has a college apostolate, this is simply not the case.

Still, having granted all this, one may still ask what specifically Opus Dei has to offer to the University and its student body, who already receive so much great teaching and formation?

In my opinion, Opus Dei brings a new dimension to the spiritual life on campus in its distinctively “lay spirituality”. Most of us students will be called to the lay life, either married or single. Not every religious community made up of lay people (third orders, for instance) practice and foster a distinctly “lay spirituality”. More often than not, certain devotions and practices proper to the religious life are simply adapted and applied to the life of a lay person. There is certainly nothing wrong with such an approach, but it is something different than what Msgr. Escriva had in mind in founding Opus Dei. He had in mind a “lay spirituality” where the principal means to sanctity was not adapted religious practices but ordinary secular activities carried out with a supernatural pur-

pose; material work itself is transformed into prayer. This is Opus Dei’s unique charism—to help people transform their work into prayer.

In order for work to become a prayer, it must be taken seriously, it must be done well, because it is being done for God. As students, the work which we must sanctify is our study. There is still a strong tendency among some students here to separate their life of prayer from their life as a student. Those who participate in the spiritual formation of Opus Dei often hear that study is a serious obligation for them. We want to study hard and well, not just to receive a good grade, but above all to please God who allows this work to be the means of our sanctification.

The seriousness of the academic life and its intimate connection with the spiritual life is a message that needs to be heard more at the University. Opus Dei’s presence can, (and already does) help stimulate the academic fervor of the students, serving as a kind of catalyst in this regard as the University continues to grow into a true center of Catholic intellectual life in this country.

Perhaps the greatest benefit I have received through my contact with Opus Dei has been the personal spiritual direction offered to me by their priests. Now spiritual direction is nothing unique to Opus Dei. It is just that for the priests of Opus Dei, spiritual direction is one of their primary forms of apostolate; it is something

they want to do; it is something that they are very good at doing.

I know that some of the friars and priests on campus give spiritual direction to many students, but they are so often busy with other obligations that it would be impossible for them to give regular spiritual direction to all who desire it. I do not know the extent to which it is true on our campus, but often regular spiritual direction is a thing reserved for seminarians or those in religious formation. Those without a religious vocation are usually left to the ordinary means of spiritual direction, namely, the Mass and the counsel given through the sacrament of Penance. Thanks to Opus Dei, many more students have the opportunity to receive regular and solid spiritual direction. This, I think, can only be seen as an asset to the spiritual opportunities offered to the students at Franciscan University.

Opus Dei is primarily a personal apostolate. Its real fruit and what it most authentically has to offer the university is hidden within the heart of each person who has come in contact with it. If but one person has become holier and has fallen deeper in love with Christ and the Church through the apostolate of Opus Dei, then the Franciscan University should see Opus Dei only as a close friend and a collaborator with her in the fulfillment of her mission.

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