



Providence

VOLUME VI, NO. 3

JULY 1970

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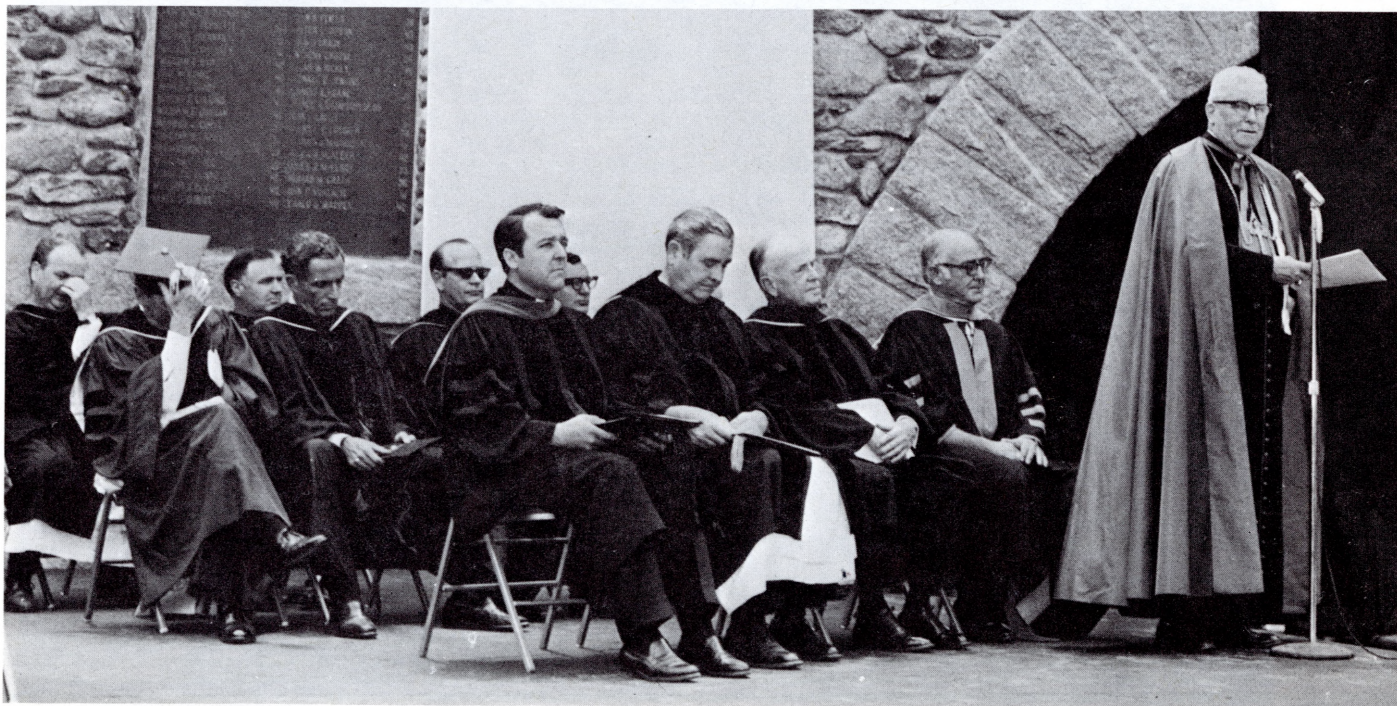
Providence is published quarterly by Providence College, Providence, Rhode Island 02918 for the Alumni and Friends of Providence College. Second-class postage rates paid at Providence, Rhode Island, July 1970, Volume VI, No. 3.

The cover photo and the photos of Art Buchwald are by George Rooney and reproduced by permission of the Providence Journal Bulletin Company.

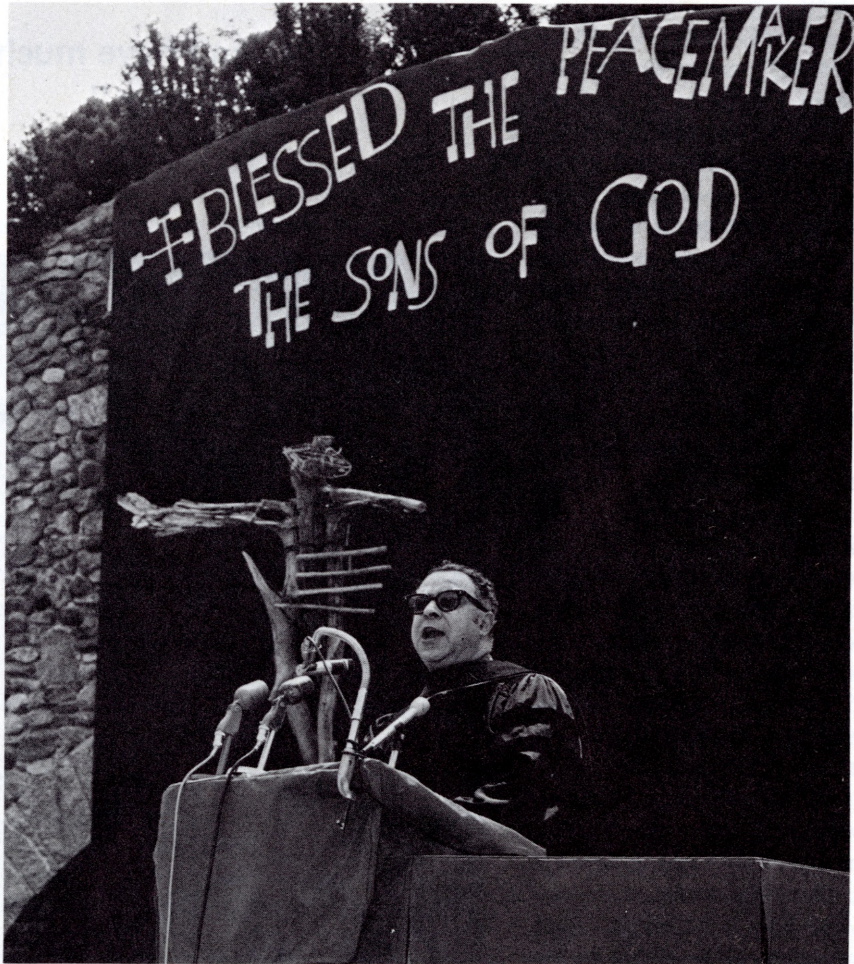
The Commencement Exercises



Commencement 1970 at colleges and universities across the nation reflected the tensions occasioned by Kent State and Cambodia. Providence College, too, approached commencement with more solemnity than normal and that in itself is usually very solemn. There is, however, some divine law of compensation that blesses troubled people with the great gift of a sense of humor. The Commencement speaker, Art Buchwald, addressed himself to that gift and the 1970 Commencement Exercises were a triumphant success with parents, students, alumni, friends and relatives.







Commencement 1970

Thank you very much. This is really a wonderful day. As I looked out at all these parents today, the only thought that passed through my mind was why didn't I buy Eastman Kodak stock last week. I get very embarrassed about getting an honorary degree because I don't have much use for education and I'll explain why.

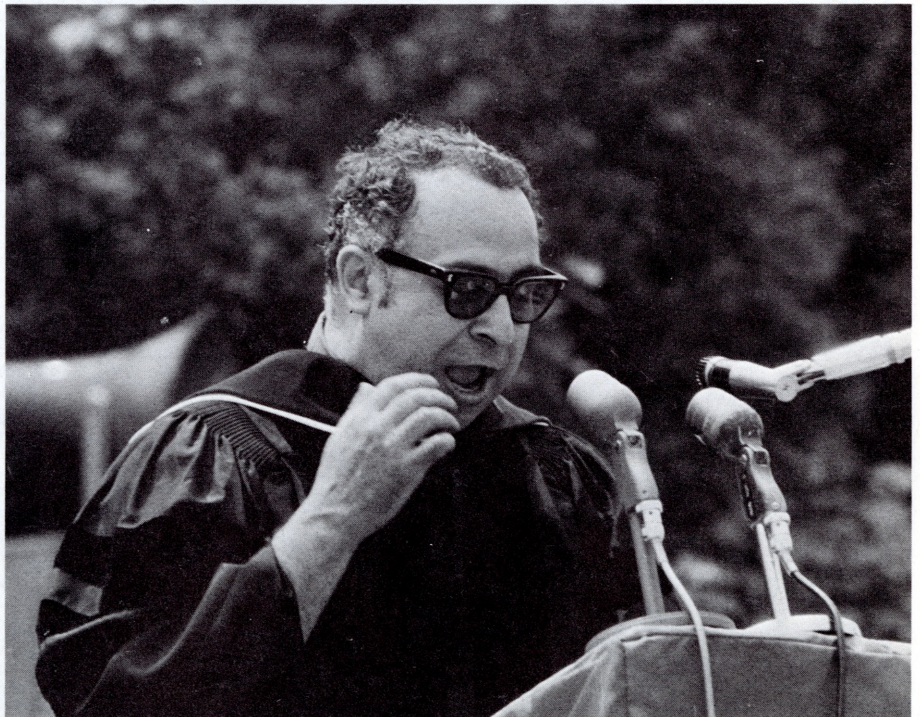
When I was sixteen years old, World War II started and I was afraid it would be over before I got into it, so I ran away from high school and joined the Marine Corps. But while I was in the Marines, I realized if I ever hoped to get out I better go to college. So I decided to go to night high school to make up the credits and then go to college. But I didn't know what I had to take so I went down to the University of Southern California and got in line with 4,000 ex-GI's and it took about four hours to get up to the head of the line. When I finally got up there, I said, "I would like . . ." and the woman said, "Fill this out." I said, "Yes, Mam." She said, "What do you want to take?" I said, "I don't care." She said, "English?" I said, "That's good." She said, "Math?" I said, "That's fine." She said, "French?" I said, "O.K." She said, "Have it stamped over there." I went to the next desk and the man stamped it and I was in college.

Well, a year went by and they called me in and they said, "You don't have a high school diploma." I said, "I know." They said, "And you are not supposed to be in college." I said, "I know," and I said, "What do you want me to do

"I Laughed"

Art Buchwald, Honorary 1970

"I don't have much use for education and I'll explain why."



“If you are looking for a name for this country right now, you’d have to call it ‘The Uptight Society’.”



now?” They said, “We will make you a special student.” I said, “What does that mean?” They said, “You can’t work for a degree.” So I said, “I don’t care about that, I don’t have a high school diploma so there’s no sense having a college degree.” I went for three years and had a ball but I had my revenge. Last year the University of Southern California made me *Alumnus of the Year* so all of you have wasted your time.

Now you couldn’t have chosen a more ecumenical speaker today for your commencement. I’m Jewish, my wife is Catholic, and last week my sixteen-year-old son announced he was an atheist.

These are very difficult times for a commencement speaker. If he addresses himself to what the students want to hear, the parents will walk out on him and if he tells the parents what they want to hear, the students will walk out on him. Now I don’t want anyone to

walk out on me because I have written a very good speech. I am here today to speak not for the radical left nor the radical right. I am here today to speak for the radical middle. Any country that has to choose between Judge Julius Hoffman and Yippie Abbie Hoffman is really in trouble. I have not come here to bring you a message of doom. I have been studying the situation very closely in Washington, and I have come to the conclusion that the Class of 1970 is the luckiest class to have ever graduated from college — and probably the last.

If you are looking for a name for this country right now you’d have to call it “The Uptight Society.” Everyone seems uptight about something. The white students want out of our system, the black students want in. The people are mad at the cops. The priests aren’t talking to the cardinals, and President Nixon refuses to see anyone in his Cabinet. And I discovered writing a

column that for every uptight person in this country there is an uptight organization to back him, and I discovered one of the most uptight organizations in this country is the National Rifle Association. Now before you get to like me, I’m for gun registration and it’s very personal with me. My neighbor has a gun and he can’t even water his lawn straight. Every time I run an article on gun registration I get hundreds of letters all neatly typewritten trying to tell me that I’m trying to destroy the Constitution. I discovered that everybody that owns a gun also owns a typewriter, so my solution to the gun registration problem is to make everybody register their typewriter.

Everybody seems very uptight about pornography these days. Now I have to be very honest with you. I have always wanted to write a pornographic book but I get so excited doing the research that I can never get around to doing the

“I dreamed that Mayor Daley was President of the United States and Judge Julius Hoffman was Attorney General.”

book. Everybody is very uptight about sex education, and this seems to be a big thing — next to Vietnam — this seems to be the thing that everybody seems very upset about, teaching sex education in the schools. I have to be for sex education in the schools because I had no formal sex education, and look at the mess I'm in. If there had been a “head-start program,” I wouldn't be where I am today.

People are very upset and uptight about Vietnam. I was in a bar the other night and there were two men talking and one said to the other, “What do you think we ought to do about Vietnam?” and the other man said, “A-why w-we g-g-ggot to get out of t-t-there b-b-bec because it's s-s-s-such a-a-m-mess and if we d-d-don't g-get o-out of of there we a-a-are g-g-go-going to be in se-serious t-trouble.” And the other man said, “That's easy for you to say.”

Now people are very uptight about their leaders these days, and I had a nightmare the other night, and I dreamed that Mayor Daley was President of the United States, and Judge Julius Hoffman was Attorney General, and I woke up in a cold sweat. Then I remembered that Richard Nixon was President and John Mitchell was Attorney General so I didn't know whether to go back to sleep again or stay awake.

Now I know you are all wondering is this guy a Democrat or a Republican, so to put your mind at ease I am against who ever is in power. People want to know what I try to do with my column.

Well it's quite simple: I consider myself the cruise director on the Andrea Doria. We may not get there, but I'm going first class.

I had the good fortune of covering three presidents in the White House, each one with a different style and a different way of doing things. President Nixon is fascinating and I have a great deal of respect for him. As a matter of fact, I worship the very quicksand he walks on.

You know when a man becomes President you no longer can refer to him as you did in the past. You have to show respect. You can no longer call President Nixon, “Tricky Dick.” If you disagree with him now, you must call him “Crafty Richard.” Mr. Nixon has selected a fine Cabinet — there isn't one member of it that I would be ashamed to take to a good country club providing they would let me in. Mr. Nixon has three White Houses now. He has one foot in San Clemente and one foot in Key Biscayne. It's no wonder he feels the strain around Mississippi. You know, we don't know much about President Nixon. He was our Vice-President for eight years and now he is President, and the only thing we know about him was during the campaign Billy Graham said that he trusted Richard Nixon because he played golf with him and Nixon never cheated on his golf score. Now this says more about Billy Graham than it does about Nixon. What is Billy Graham doing checking Nixon's golf card? There is a lot of criticism

about Billy Graham switching Presidents. But I don't think he should be criticized for this — Billy Graham's job is saving souls and he has to go where the business is.

You know you get discouraged with college students these days. They are always cooking up a storm. But every once in a while something happens which gives you new faith in them again. And this faith was restored to me not long ago when I was at George Washington University, and I was in the washroom and I went to dry my hands and instead of paper towels there was a hot-air blower, and I went over to it and written on top of it was “Press this button and you will hear a recorded message from Vice-President Spiro Agnew.”

Everyone seems to be uptight about the students and what they are doing, and I have my own theory about what to do when the students take over a building or a president's office. I say instead of trying to kick them out you brick them in. (Applause) The parents have just been heard from. Now it takes about three days to brick in a student, and he can decide by then if he wants to stay in there forever or come out. And I was very proud of this suggestion, and I sent it to the National Association for Higher Education, who sent me back a letter that they were appalled by it. They said, “Don't you know what bricklayers are getting paid these days?”

People ask where is the humor coming from in the United States and I



discovered a lot of the new humor is coming from graffiti. Things that are being written on walls in office buildings and on buttons and bumper stickers . . . and here are some of my favorite graffiti:

Goodnight, David; Goodnight, Goliath.

Xerox never comes up with anything original.

Xerox never comes up with anything original.

Xerox never comes up with anything original.

Re-elect LBJ, he kept us out of Cambodia.

Vietnam, love it or leave it.

Drink Canada Dry, Visit Montreal.

Aunt Jemima is an Uncle Tom.

Cardinal O'Boyle takes pills.

Thank God, it's Friday, Robinson Crusoe.

Did you make New York dirty today? No, New York made me dirty today.

Secretary of the Interior, Walter Hickel, wears alligator shoes.

Nixon has the answer. What was the question?

You have had readings today and the Class of '70 asked me if I would give a reading myself on anything I wanted, on any subject to do with what's going on today, and I selected my reading. I did a little research, I had someone else do it for me. I selected all the optimistic phrases that have been said about the Vietnam War, starting with Richard Nixon and going back to General Navarre of the French Army. And I would like to read them to you today.

Richard Nixon: We have now reached a point where we confidently move from a period of cut and dry to a longer range replacement of Americans by South Vietnamese troops, April 20, 1970.

Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird: I think we have certainly turned the corner towards peace in Vietnam, July 15, 1969.

Walt Rostow: So I think we can leave in January 1969 an Asia of some promise, July 4, 1969.

General William C. Westmoreland: I have never been more encouraged in my four years in Vietnam, Nov. 15, 1967.

President Lyndon Johnson: We feel refreshed by the conviction that on every front, military and political and social, we and our allies are making substantial progress, March 21, 1967.

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge: By the end of 1967 there might be light at the end of the tunnel and everybody will get the feeling that things are much better, Dec. 16, 1966.

Vice-President Hubert Humphrey: Mr. President, we returned from this journey with renewed confidence and with determination and renewed encouragement. I am encouraged because the tide of battle in Vietnam has turned in our favor, Feb. 23, 1966.

President Lyndon Johnson: We are



not about to send our boys nine or ten thousand miles from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves, Oct. 21, 1964.

Secretary of Defense, McNamara: I think the number of United States personnel in Vietnam is not likely to increase substantially, May 14, 1964.

Secretary of State, Dean Rusk: The Vietnamese themselves can handle this problem, primarily with their own efforts, Feb. 21, 1964.

Secretary of Defense, McNamara: The United States still hopes to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam by the end of 1965. That was written Feb. 3, 1964.

General Tran van Don, General of South Vietnam Army: I feel we shall achieve victory in 1964, Oct. 1, 1963.

Admiral Harry C. Phelps: I think I can predict victory, Jan. 30, 1963.

Secretary of Defense, McNamara: Every quantitative measure shows we are winning the war, March 1962.

General Maxwell Taylor: South Vietnam is on the road to victory in its war with communist guerrillas. The Viet-

namese government is making enormous progress combating the Vietcong guerrillas. I was very much impressed with what I saw, Sept. 19, 1962.

Secretary of the Army, Wilbur Brucker: With a little more training, the Vietnamese Army will be the equal of any other army, Dec. 15, 1955.

And finally, General Henry Eugene Navarre, Chief of Staff, the French Army: I fully expect only six more months of hard fighting, January 1, 1954.

Now those of you who read my column know I write quite a bit about my wife and my children, and if they don't supply me with two or three articles a week, they go. And one my son supplied me with a few years ago, and it shows what a crazy mixed-up world we live in; had to do with when I took him to a movie about World War II. In the movie the Japanese were very cruel to the Americans, and when we came out of the movie, he said to me: "The Japanese were very bad people during the war, weren't they, Daddy?" I said, "Yes, but they are not bad people now." And he said, "Why, are they

different people?" I said, "No, they are the same people." He said, "Then why do they do bad things?" I said, "They probably didn't know they were doing bad things." He said, "Why didn't someone tell them?" I said, "We tried but they wouldn't listen." He said, "Remember the war picture about World War II and the Germans beat up the people in concentration camps?" I said, "Yes." He said, "The Germans are bad people, aren't they?" I said, "No, they were bad people but now they are good people." I said, "You see once you start a war you can't stay mad at the people after the war is over because if you did, there would be another war." "But," he said "in the movie they're still bad people. But we're supposed to forget it." And he said to me, "How many Russians did you kill during the war?" I said, "I didn't kill any Russians during the war, during the war they were good people." He said, "But if they were good people during the war why are they bad people now?" I said, "The Russians aren't bad people; their leaders are bad people, and their leaders are giving us trouble all the time over Germany." And he said, "With the bad Germans?" And I said, "No, with the good Germans." I said, "You see, the bad Germans want to get the good Germans out of Berlin." He said, "Why didn't the Russians kill the bad Germans?" I said, "They don't think their Germans are bad. They think our Germans are bad and their Germans are good, and we think their Germans are bad and our Germans are good." I said, "Now do you understand?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, it doesn't make any difference if you do or not, everyone else does."

My original intention was to say something very profound and enlightening today. But you would have forgotten that in no time, so I have chosen to give this kind of speech in hope that in future years to come when your children ask you what you did on graduation day, you can proudly reply, "I laughed." Thank you.

"They think our Germans are bad and their Germans are good and we think their Germans are bad and our Germans are good."



Honorary Degrees

Given at Commencement, June 2, 1970

& Alumni Awards

Given at Alumni Awards Dinner, May 29, 1970



William David McElroy
Doctor of Public Service

What distinguishes your life as a scientist is not only your stature as a biologist, but your commitment to making scientific knowledge available to all citizens on all

levels of education. Teaching and research have been your first instruments, to which you have added service to educational foundations and associations, school boards and trusteeships, but most importantly the directorship of the National Science Foundation. In honoring you we pay a debt of gratitude to those many enlightened scientists who continue to work for the advancement and dissemination of scientific knowledge not as the exclusive possession of an elite, but for institutions such as Providence College which might assimilate such knowledge into a broad humanistic view of life.



Art Buchwald
Doctor of Journalism

The pen can be a sword to defend the injured or to maintain justice. It can be a dagger used to assassinate. Or it can be a prod, to move and urge. It was once a feather

that tickled. In your wielding of this potent instrument, you have surely prodded us to look at ourselves for what we really are, and tickled us out of our lethargy. You have spared no one but have never assassinated anyone. You have made fun of what was genuinely funny because human, but you have avoided cynicism and bitterness. At a time of such tensions, more than ever we need to smile at our precious incongruities. For your contribution to national sanity we confer upon you this degree.



Ernest J. Primeau
Doctor of Religious
Education

The fear is abroad that anyone who gives his life to an institution such as the Church must surrender his individuality and freedom. Your life has proven to the

contrary that the Church has always needed and benefited from individual initiative, and does so now especially. Since quieter days you have served the Church in transition as a seminary teacher, as a member of the Roman Curia, on the International Secretariat for Christian Unity and on the Bishop's Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices. In honoring you, your Excellency, we commit ourselves to the ideals you have espoused, namely, the unity of all separated Christians and enlightened progress within the Church.



William M. Hoban
Doctor of Laws

While still an undergraduate member of the Class of 1924, you began a business career which became the foundation of extensive and distinguished service to every

aspect of community life in Fall River and Little Compton. However extensive your involvements, you have served the College with ceaseless attention. Your effectiveness as a leader in the health and welfare services of your community, as a businessman and banker and in all levels of alumni activity, has been marked by an unselfish, quiet intelligence and dignity which gives your Alma Mater every reason to be proud of what you have accomplished and the manner in which you did it.



Nicholas H. Serror, O.P. '29

Your devotion to scholarship has inspired three generations of Providence College men to work for the achievement of their aspirations.

Through a lifetime of distinguished teaching and research, you have brilliantly illuminated the sciences at Providence but your greatest contribution has been your personal example of character and courage. Priest, teacher, scientist and, above all, a warm human being, you have brought both cheer and spiritual renewal to everyone who has known you. It is an honor to present to you the Providence College Alumni Association's 1970 Faculty Award.



John F. Cavanagh '35

When the Providence College Alumni Association established the Bishop Harkins Award for service to the Church, it was determined that it would not be given

annually but only on those occasions when in the judgment of the Awards Committee it was clearly merited. Tonight marks the fourth time this award has been presented and the first time it has been awarded to a layman. In these turbulent times you have been a voice of reason, an example of quiet faith and confidence. An informed interpreter of Thomistic philosophy, you have helped many to a better understanding of the Church in a changing world. We hail you, too, as a generous benefactor of both the Church and the College. It is a privilege to present to you the Providence College Alumni Association's Bishop Harkins Award.



Alfred J. Blake '36

Few alumni have served a college as well as you have served Providence College through your lifetime of unremitting effort on behalf of the New York Club, one of

the strongest of all our territorial chapters. You have served as its president, as Secretary for more than ten years, a member

of its Board of Governors for twenty years, and as trustee of its scholarship program for the past eight years. You initiated its undergraduate program whereby "Big Brothers" assist and counsel students from the Metropolitan area and you have served as chairman of that activity for the last sixteen years. In grateful appreciation of this remarkable record of devotion, we present to you the Providence College Alumni Association's 1970 Distinguished Service Award.



William Morton '41

It has often been said that Providence College's foremost distinction is that so many of her sons have risen from humble beginnings to positions of great prominence. Your brilliant career in the hotel field is a living testimonial to the efficacy of a liberal arts education. To climb the long road from publicist for the Providence Biltmore to Vice President, Director of Marketing, for the world-wide ITT-Sheraton Corporation required wisdom, knowledge, leadership, perseverance and business acumen. We salute you for these qualities and we honor you tonight because the eminence of your career has honored the college. With pride and pleasure we present to you the Providence College Alumni Association's 1970 Personal Achievement Award.

of its Board of Governors for twenty years, and as trustee of its scholarship program for the past eight years. You initiated its undergraduate program whereby "Big Brothers" assist and counsel students from the Metropolitan area and you have served as chairman of that activity for the last sixteen years. In grateful appreciation of this remarkable record of devotion, we present to you the Providence College Alumni Association's 1970 Distinguished Service Award.



John R. Thompson '64

The stated objective of Providence College is to develop intelligent, productive and responsible citizens of a democratic society, with a mature sense of social responsibility.

In you the College has achieved this objective in the highest degree. Your intense concern for the children of the poor caused you to give up a lucrative career in professional basketball to work in the ghettos of the District of Columbia. You are completely dedicating your life to the vision that education, health, sports and nutrition programs, together with the creation of job opportunities, will boost these youngsters over the wall of poverty and discrimination that separates them from the rest of society. If Providence College had done nothing else but produce you, her first fifty years would have been worth while. We rejoice in presenting to you the Providence College Alumni Association's 1970 Exemplary Citizenship Award.

Alumni Participation- Active or Passive

Very Rev. William Paul Haas, O.P.

“It will always remain an ongoing challenge to the administration to find ways of converting alumni experience into a dynamic force in the academic, economic and community growth of the College.”

If there has been any policy which I have pursued consistently for the past five years it has been that of developing a sense of shared responsibility. A sharing of freedom and initiative must follow also. I have learned, as much by failure as by success, that this requires a broadly based representation of all legitimate interests in the College. If any element — students, faculty, alumni or administrators — lays claim to a disproportionate share of the freedom and determining initiative, the College, like any institution, will suffer in the long run. It is for this reason that I have encouraged alumni to participate in the direction of Providence College as a proper balance to the participation of others. The alumni have much more to contribute to the life of the College than their financial support, important and indispensable as that is. The graduates of the College are the only ones who have tested the value of their education and have found it wanting or fruitful in every aspect of their lives. As in any experiment, it is necessary to review constantly the result of every change or modification. It will always remain an ongoing challenge to the administration to find ways of converting alumni experience into a dynamic force in the academic, economic and community growth of the College. I hope to give you some idea of what efforts have been made in this con-

nection and some idea of what needs yet to be done.

The alumni have been close to the College through all of its developments and over the years have had a major part in its internal operations. At present the majority of the members of the Corporation are alumni; the majority of the administration, including the Chancellor and President, are alumni, and close to half of the faculty are graduates of the College. Notwithstanding the dangers of inbreeding, there has been a certain advantage in this, especially when the College was still totally identified with the immediate community it served. As the alumni have branched out into all parts of the world and to all professions, the College has also had to think in broader terms of national resources, movements and interests.

With these developments, the financial picture is much larger and more complex, the management is more highly structured, the curriculum is more diversified, the faculty is more specialized, the public relations more subtle and demanding.

There is no single consistent image of the typical Providence College man. It is interesting to note that about half of the total alumni have graduated in the past ten years and that younger alumni are quick to assume important alumni posts along with their fellows of



longer service. Here is one place where the generation gap has been bridged. Our alumni reflect a wide variety of attitudes and interests. They represent all geographic, economic, ethnic, political and economic positions. This rich diversity is as natural for our alumni as it is for our country, and it is of particular value to the College as it evolves into areas of greater service to the Church and to the nation.

From this view of the parallel developments in the College and in the Alumni Association, I conclude that the alumni who are a part of the internal operation of the College need very much the assistance of the other alumni not professionally associated with the institution. There are several areas where that assistance can be put to obvious good use. The most obvious one is financial. Some graduates are in the professions of accounting, management, banking and investing. These specialists have much to offer, particularly in budget planning and long-term economic projection. There have been alumni on the Budget Committee since it was established in 1966 and now there is a formal representative of the Association. The Building Committee, responsible for much of the long term and short range planning of construction in the past five years, has always had alumni members; it will now have members directly representing official

alumni policy. The President's Council, established by Father Dore and continuing effectively to date, has always had a strong alumni representation and now includes the President of the Alumni Association.

A vital function of the College is the recruitment of qualified students. Our Admissions Office is completely staffed by graduates of Providence College. They are anxious to coordinate their efforts with representatives of the alumni interested in admissions policies and procedures. Hence, steps are underway to broaden membership on the admissions policy committee and to involve and to train graduates in other regions in admissions programs out of state. To the extent that the future of the College is bound up with the type of student accepted, alumni understanding and work in this area assure a significant role in fashioning the future. The recruitment of qualified women students presents a special challenge to all. In this enterprise also, alumni will play a part as members of the Task Force recently formed to supervise the preparations for the first co-ed class in 1971.

Among all the efforts to bring the talents of alumni to the aid of their Alma Mater, none is more important than the alumni role encouraged by the restructuring of the Corporation approved on June 2, 1970. Although the new By-Laws call for only one member to be elected by the Alumni Association, it allows for much greater alumni membership through nomination to the Standing Committee on Membership. This committee is commissioned by the By-Laws to propose new members from the natural constituencies of the institution: benefactors, alumni, administration, faculty, students and the civic community. It will be up to this committee to maintain the proper balance of experience, expertise and special interest.

Alumni expression on the question of coeducation proved very helpful in

arriving at a final decision in this matter. The poll conducted among alumni revealed a broad distribution of opinion and proved a valuable instrument of communication between the alumni and administration of the College.

Every large business must rely on data processing these days and Providence College is no exception. To guide the development of our computer capabilities, a special board has been established which has three alumni members with high professional qualifications.

This summer the administration once again met with the 1970-71 student leaders in an effort to get to know them personally and to identify areas of mutual concern. Alumni Association officers were able to join in the exchange with a view to extending contacts between students and graduates.

There is still much more to be worked out, for example, in the area of curriculum development. This is of course the prerogative of the faculty and administration, but should naturally involve the wise counsel of alumni. We have a model already in the polling of alumni done by the Religious Studies Department and in the Business Department's establishment of a group of professional businessmen to advise on plans of the Department. The Economics Department recently had an alumnus return for a review of the Department's progress. The Biology Department has been most thorough in following the careers of its graduates, especially those in medical schools. It may prove that this kind of department-centered initiative is the most effective form of alumni participation in curriculum evaluation and development.

A very sensitive decision to be made every year is that pertaining to honorary degrees. Naturally all associated with the college have a direct interest in the suitability of persons to be honored. To insure a direct representation of alumni thinking, there is now a

member of the Association on the honorary degree committee.

For this past year efforts have been made to establish an Urban Affairs Council. There are still some aspects of this undertaking to be resolved. It was certain, however, from the beginning that the council should have alumni participation. Eventually, I anticipate that the council will become one of the most effective instruments for bringing the resources of the College, including alumni talent and energy, to bear on the most pressing problems of our cities in Rhode Island.

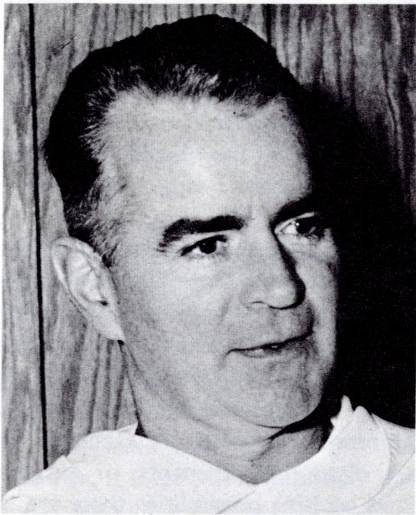
The Athletic Council, one of the earliest college structures involving alumni, is presently being reviewed in the interest of strengthening the athletic program.

One area of deep concern to me is that of student life on and off campus. For some years I have been talking about and exploring ways of involving alumni more intimately in the apostolic work of creating Christian communities among our undergraduates, communities which will be experimental models of what they will be called upon to create in their neighborhoods, among business and professional associates, for the disengaged elements of society. What exciting possibilities there are in the collaboration of priests, lay faculty, alumni and students in small cells of shared contemporary spiritual and secular experience. This is the stuff of which today's dreams and tomorrow's reality is composed. Here is where the rich diversity of alumni talent and vision can make its greatest contribution. But this is a work yet to be done.

Providence College needs and will continue to need all the brain power, experience, skill and vision it can muster as it steers its course through the turbulent waters ahead. The 1970's are uncharted waters, the winds are unpredictable, the depth unknown, the shoreline irregular. But the purpose of the journey is certain, that is, to discover what there is of the truth on the other side of the horizon.

Lord Acton, 100 Years Later

Rev. Cornelius P. Forster, O.P.
(First of a two-part article)



The Franco-Prussian War broke out on Bastille Day, July 1870 and caused the suspension of Vatican Council One. It was never resumed. In this article Father Forster examines the most controversial figure at the Council.

A review of any phase of Lord Acton's life is an interesting study because of the vastness of his learning. However, the attitude of Acton toward the Papacy is an especially interesting study. Two of the most significant currents of the nineteenth century stream of thought flowed deeply through Acton's mind. The one was liberalism, the other Catholicism. Acton was one of the leading Catholic laymen and he was keenly interested in intellectual problems. During his early journalistic career with the *Rambler*, it is said that Acton considered himself as a leader more or less of official Catholic thought.

Acton was also a liberal. He confessed that he was at the same time, "a sincere Catholic and a sincere Liberal; who, therefore, renounced everything in Catholicism which was not compatible with Liberty, and everything in Politics which was not compatible with Catholicity." Acton referred to himself as "an English Liberal." Devoted to the liberal ideal, he wrote, "I carried farther than others the Doctrinaire belief in mere Liberalism". One of the centers of opposition to Liberalism was the Papacy. Several of the notions cherished by liberals were rejected by the Syllabus of Pope Pius IX. Many liberal hopes were dashed on the rocks of Roman conservatism.

In order to uphold the liberal tradition in Catholicism, Acton believed passionately that it was imperative to block the efforts underway in 1869-1870 within the Church to prepare for a declaration of the dogma of Papal Infallibility by the Vatican Council. Acton's total commitment for several months was to "prevent, by hook or crook the definition of Infallibility."

It is just about a hundred years ago (Sept. 1869) that Lord Acton went to Rome with the intention of rallying support for the opposition to the declaration of Papal Infallibility by the Vatican Council.

Acton was an opponent of absolute power and he feared that the Council . . . would give absolute power to the Papacy. Further, while the doctrine of Infallibility was still developing, he imagined that a Council would bind the ideas of the Syllabus Errorum upon the consciences of the Catholic world. It seems that this fear was germinating behind all that he wrote, while the Council was developing and in its course. — David Mathew, Lord Acton and His Times.

His efforts in the fall and spring were not particularly successful. Despite his discouragement around March 1870 he launched what proved to be his final effort for the anti-infallible cause. In general, the last attempts to obstruct the

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preparations for the definition may be divided into those which were intrinsic and those which were extrinsic to the Council. The campaign was carried on both in Rome and in England.

One of Acton's last efforts at Rome for the minority cause was made near the end of February. It was in the nature of a vigorous protest against the new program which governed the procedure of the Council. On February 22 a new regulation had been introduced. Among other provisions, it stipulated that decrees could be defined when they enjoyed the support of a majority of the Fathers of the Council. The minority was greatly dismayed by the new plan. They protested over what they regarded as a policy which "threatened the authority and the oecumenicity of the Council."

In contesting the principle of a majority vote, the opposition declared that "a dogmatic decree required virtual unanimity."

In a letter to Gladstone, Acton revealed his own personal contribution to protest.

The last paragraph of IX, where the bishops say that the claim to make dogmas in spite of minority endangers the authority, liberty and oecumenicity of the Council was inserted by me. — John Acton, Selections from the Correspondence of the First Lord Acton.

Acton further revealed that he had proposed . . .

a declaration in which the bishops would say that they cannot admit this topic for discussion until the doubts they have just expressed as to the authority and legitimacy of the Council, in the eyes of the world and of posterity, are removed by an explicit explanation of the points which are ambiguous in the new Regulation. — John Acton, Correspondence.

Acton's efforts in behalf of the opposition were sustained, zealous and diversified. According to Odo Russell, British chargé d'affaires in Rome, many of the minority leaders including Dupanloup and Strossmayer

admit that the opposition could not have been organized without Lord Acton whose marvellous knowledge . . . and powers of organization have rendered possible what appeared at first impossible. The party he has so powerfully helped to create is filled with respect and admiration for him. On the other hand the Infallibilists think him the Devil! — Odo Russell, The Roman Question.

He had contributed to the diplomatic effort, collaborating in the drafting of the protest against the new Regulations. He also wrote on the theological aspect of Papal Infallibility in launching his final extrinsic effort in support of the opposition. In a letter to Gladstone he developed a theological argument which was designed to prod the secular powers into at least a defensive move against the proposed dogma. Acton argued that the decree would give to the Pope the prerogative of inerrancy "in all questions of morals, that is, in all questions of conscience. This would place in the hands of the Holy



“. . . the proposed dogma would transform Catholics into irreconcilable enemies of civil and religious liberties.”

Father the "ultimate control over the actions of Catholics, in politics and society." From this general principle, Acton reasoned that in virtue of the *Schema de Ecclesia* the absolute papal power would be most comprehensive. He drew a picture which would most effectively play upon the fears of the secular power affirming that "they will not be at liberty to reject the deposing power." He contended that the absolute papal authority would deny to the Catholic conscience the freedom of rejecting the "system of the Inquisition, or any other criminal practice or idea which has been established under the penalty of excommunication."

The conclusions which Acton drew from his own subjective concept of the dogma of infallibility are most revealing. They were designedly challenging to the position of non-interference which many of the European Powers had adopted. In fact these conclusions could be directed at all who maintained that the question of Papal Infallibility was purely and simply a spiritual affair. Acton held that the proposed dogma would transform Catholics into "irreconcilable enemies of civil and religious liberty." A false system of morality would be forced on men. They would be constrained to "repudiate literary and scientific sincerity." Acton's theological evaluation of the

proposed dogma led him to prophesy that Catholics would be "as dangerous to civilized society in the school as in the State."

Grave and menacing consequences to the State were envisioned by Acton, when he explained to the English leader the objects susceptible of an infallible definition. Since the infallibility of the Pope would include whatever the infallibility of the Church included, he reasoned that everything necessary for the preservation of the Faith would be included within the legitimate scope of a papal definition. Acton contended that in practice this would mean that everything was capable of being defined as infallible by the Pope. He explained to Gladstone that "what is necessary for the preservation of the Faith" was an elastic clause and its precise meaning would be decided only by the Holy Father. "The infallibility of the Pope would, therefore, be unconditional and unlimited." Acton buttressed his conclusions by citing the authority of Hefele, Bishop of Rottenburg, who was in his opinion "the most learned prelate in Rome." Hefele, who dropped in to see Acton while he was writing this letter, was quoted as saying distinctly that "the Pope would have no limits to his infallibility, and, therefore, to his authority." The only restraint would be the Pope's own personal inclination and will.

"If such proposals should be defined an impassable gulf would be dug between the laws of the church and the laws that govern modern society."

A direct appeal for state intervention was not included in this letter to Gladstone on March 10, 1870. Nevertheless it might be said to be contained in it implicitly insofar as Acton's theory of the meaning and the extent of Papal Infallibility presumed that some secular interference was mandatory. However, for the first time Acton included an appeal of much different nature. In leading up to his request Acton alluded to the consequences of the doctrine for the particular situation in England.

There was no exaggeration in that which I wrote to you last December of the political dangers involved in this insane enterprise. Its bearing on English affairs and on some of the measures which you have in hand, especially its consequences for the conflict against sin and unbelief, are incalculable. — John Acton, Correspondence.

Then Acton urged the Prime Minister to speak out in Parliament against the Vatican decrees because he imagined that such a speech would have a tremendous effect. It would be read not only in England but also on the continent. However, if the Prime Minister did not deem a Parliamentary

statement of policy to be advisable, Acton appealed to him to write "a letter that might sound the alarm far and wide." This was deemed essential by Acton to sustain the anti-infallible forces at the Council. Its object was to arouse secular interest and indignation over the work of the Vatican Council which was publicized by Acton as a "great calamity" for the Church.

The interpretation of infallibility which Acton entertained was not unique. Others over-reacted and took an alarmist view of the social and political consequences of the doctrine. Von Beust, the Austrian Chancellor, protested to Cardinal Antonelli, Papal Secretary of State, because he feared that the doctrine of infallibility included the *Schema de Ecclesia*. His protest warned:

if such proposals should be defined an impassable gulf would be dug between the laws of the Church and the laws that govern modern society. In particular, many of the canons are of a nature to paralyse the civil legislative power, and threaten to destroy the respect all citizens should have for the laws of their country. The Austrian Government could not allow the promulgation of decrees of that kind. — Cuthbert Butler, Vatican Council.

The reassurances which Cardinal Antonelli gave to the Austrian Government did not change Acton's opinions. He would not be convinced that it was "merely a matter of dogmatic theology." Acton attempted to refute the position of the majority concerning the objects capable of definition. Probably this was done to supply Gladstone with the material designed to handle objections against the Actonian concept of the dogma. He wrote to the Prime Minister regarding the assertion that the whole question was a matter of dogmatic theology, that the minority bishops say this is quite untrue because they hold that the

Schema bears on politics in many ways, that the Canons, giving infallible authority to the Pope in all matters needful for the preservation of faith and in questions of morality, gave him an arbitrary power of the most unlimited kind in everything with which he chooses to deal. — John Acton, Correspondence.

Acton predicted that one of the effects of the dogma would be to place an obstacle in the way of Catholic loyalty to the fatherland. He imagined the consequences would be "entirely in contradiction with the conditions of allegiance which the Catholics formerly accepted in England." Although he did not want Gladstone to quote the bishops regarding this last conclusion, nevertheless Acton assured the Liberal Leader that this was the consensus of episcopal opinion as far as the minority was concerned.

After presenting his refutation to the position of the papal party, Acton again appealed to the Prime Minister for support. He related to him that the minority bishops when asked about the utility of a public utterance by Gladstone in Parliament, replied that "it would be the greatest use; that it would make a

deep impression if you spoke of the danger to the interests of religion in the legislative questions . . ." This appeal was somewhat different from anything Acton had suggested before inasmuch as he wanted Gladstone to allude to the religious-political situation in the British Isles. He urged the Prime Minister to include in his remarks a "confident belief that the English and Irish bishops would be careful not to renounce the principles by virtue of which their toleration was obtained."

Acton was convinced that if Gladstone included a note of warning in the proposed speech, it would greatly enhance the efficacy of such a statement. The Irish and English bishops should be reminded not to support any decree which would militate against legislation in Parliament of a "liberal, tolerant and remedial nature." There was to be a veiled threat that if the prelates supported the Vatican decrees, then they could not count on any British legislation which would ameliorate the Catholic or the Irish position in the British Isles. This suggestion was thought by Acton and his advisors to be of "the highest practical importance." If Gladstone made such a speech, Acton believed it "would have great weight among the Irish bishops in particular." To his way of thinking this approach was the most efficacious under the circumstances, and he recommended it to Gladstone with great conviction.

I am persuaded that nothing would have greater effect here than some declaration of that kind, made in Parliament and not diplomatically. — John Acton, Correspondence.

Acton evidently hoped that an aroused and hostile public opinion, together with the threat of possible sanctions in the future, might have some effect on the outcome of the Vatican deliberations.

Ideas which were very similar to those expressed by Acton to Gladstone were incorporated into a protest against Papal Infallibility which some of the bishops of the United Kingdom delivered on March 15. Acton conveyed to the Prime Minister the substance of the protest. It declared that Emancipation and full rights of citizenship were granted to Catholics in England and Ireland only after "solemn and repeated declarations that their religion did not teach the dogma now proposed." The protest stated:

these declarations, made by the bishops and permitted by Rome, are in fact the conditions under which Catholics are allowed to sit in Parliament and to hold offices of trust and responsibility under the Crown; and they cannot be overlooked or forgotten by us without dishonor. — John Acton, Correspondence.

The last paragraph of the letter which advised the Prime Minister of the protest is significant because it shows the importance which Acton and others attached to the basis for the protest. For some it was of sufficient gravity to justify opposition to the decree, even though they completely agreed with the doctrinal content of the concept of Papal Infallibility. Acton wrote to Gladstone that "this consideration of morality and public integrity" was an "insuperable barrier" to those who shared in the benefits of the Acts of Emancipation. This, of course, could not be dismissed nor passed over lightly by the Prime Minister of the country where a great number of the citizens would be affected.

[To be concluded in the next issue]

COMING NEXT – THE COED STORY

The Providence College Corporation announced through the news media on June 3, 1970 that the College would become codeucational in the Fall of 1971. The action followed recommendations made by a special committee after a two-year study. The study included a poll of alumni on the question and they favored the change by a 3-2 margin.

The next issue of PROVIDENCE will contain an in-depth interview with Dr. Paul van K. Thomson, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, on the reasons behind the decision and the anticipated effects it will have on the future of Providence College.