

Religion Today
May 23-29, 2004
A New College for Wyoming
Paul V.M. Flesher

As the only four-year educational institution in Wyoming, the University of Wyoming has long addressed the many varied needs and interests of the state. It teaches students about everything from ranching to nursing, from English literature to sociology, from engineering to pharmacy, and too many other areas to even hint at. Furthermore, the University's faculty strive to teach these areas while working on the cutting edge of scholarship and contributing to humanity's advancement of knowledge. With so many activities going on, the University does well to keep them all going.

The University of Wyoming is a wonderful resource of knowledge and wisdom for Wyoming. UW trains students for a profession or educates them to do well in graduate school, but it doesn't emphasize teaching students to think about how they should live their lives.

Wyoming's Catholic diocese proposes to address this void by founding the Wyoming Catholic College. While it will not compete with UW's strengths, this small college will help students integrate the resources of the Western intellectual tradition into the way they will live their lives. Since this will be a Catholic school, that intellectual tradition will also be set in the context of the Church's faith and teachings. Since this will be a Wyoming school, it will be located in an outdoor setting and its activities will bring students into contact with the natural environment that we in Wyoming consider an integral aspect of our lives.

Should this college be established--a committee is now trying to find a location for the college and to raise the funding--it will bring together three main streams of influence. The first stream, of course, will be Catholicism, in particular, Catholic thought and practice. This will enable students to consider what it means to be a person "made in the image and likeness of God" and to develop a moral life reflecting "a state of practiced dignity and worth." By developing the foundation for this Christian journey, the students

will face their futures guided by the 2000 years of the Church's walk with the divine.

The second stream will be that of a "liberal education" focused on "The Great Books of Western Civilization" that are the "rightful legacy of any liberally educated man or woman." This is a good choice that indicates the College's intellectual aspirations. Indeed, UW's Honors Program has a similar focus. I do not know which books will be included in the curriculum but I imagine that it will include some of the great thinkers of the ancient and medieval worlds (perhaps Plato and Aristotle, as well as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Dante) as well as Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke and Hobbes, Freud and Darwin. These are just some of the intellectuals who have made the Western world what it is today, for better or worse, and with which a modern Catholic vision must reckon.

The third and final stream is that of Wyoming's natural world and the agriculturally-oriented life that has been lived here. Far too often, this kind of intellectual and spiritual project has taken place in urban settings, where humans seek to interact with God in circumstances removed from the rest of God's creation. In the Catholic College's vision, its integration will take place in Wyoming's wild, with not just student access to unspoiled country, but with outdoor experiences incorporated into required student activities.

By bringing together these three streams, Wyoming's Catholic Diocese hopes to provide students a holistic education that enables them to blend their lives and interests with their academic and spiritual pursuits. It will be interesting to see how the Wyoming Catholic College progresses toward its goals.