

## CONTENDING WITH MODERNITY: CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

PHILIP GLEASON. OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1995.

*Reviewed by Timothy E. Eden, S.M.*

Since its 1995 publication, Philip Gleason's *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* has gathered well deserved praise for the monumental task that it accomplishes. In laying out the complex history of Catholic higher education in America in the 20th-century, Dr. Gleason gives us not only the rich story with its well-stocked cast of characters, he also offers us an interpretive instrument for viewing the interaction of Catholic education with 20th-century national culture. He argues that the history of Catholic higher education in this century can essentially be seen within the framework of a continuation of the Americanist conflict of the 1890s.

Gleason identifies four distinct periods of development in 20th-century Catholic higher education. The first, running from the founding of the Catholic University of America in 1899 to the end of World War I in 1919, is marked by the massive restructuring of secondary and higher education to match the structures and curriculum of the public and non-Catholic educational establishment. Gleason highlights the fears of some who saw in the changes a loss of the intellectual and moral focus of Catholic education, but no vehicle was available for a constructive conversation on the issues.

In the second period, the Post-War and Depression era (1919-1939), Catholics continued to live in a strange seesaw arrangement of acceptance and non-acceptance in and of America. Having contributed greatly to the War effort on individual and institutional levels, Catholics believed that they had put to rest the old accusation of divided loyalty and questionable patriotism.

By the end of World War II, the third section of Gleason's schema, there were clear signs of another period of great change for Catholic colleges. For instance, there were the huge numbers of returning soldiers who took advantage of the GI Bill to enroll in colleges. Many returnees had been deeply affected by what they had witnessed in the theaters of war, and many came back with a belief in the need for international peace and cooperation. Those were attitudes that would affect American Catholic university life.

For many Catholic colleges the War years brought major internal changes as well. Catholic colleges found their involvement in officer training programs and government and industrial war-related research projects a new and complicating factor in the ongoing debate over the assimilation of Catholic institutions into purely secular and business models. Before the

Vatican Council there were already forces at work in Catholic higher education that challenged the vision of a Catholic culture and a single system of Catholic thought.

Dr. Gleason's view of the post-Conciliar years, however, seems somewhat limited in time and scope. His focus on the conflicts over academic freedom in Catholic universities created by the experimentation and thinking of progressive theologians leaves out a great part of the achievement of those years. A fuller view of those decades would also help us see the areas of responsibility that need continued work. The question of Catholic identity is one of those areas, as Dr. Gleason insists, but it cannot be asked profitably unless we have a clearer view of the circumstances that make the question legitimate today.

This fine and insightful history focuses entirely on the Midwest and Eastern experience of Catholic collegiate life. There are other regions of the country where the Catholic community supported colleges and universities, regions where the Catholic experience in higher education was different and unique. For the sake of understanding the pluralism within American Catholicism and creating a broader picture of the whole, it would have been beneficial if the West and the South had been acknowledged in their differences.

Dr. Gleason has written a penetrating and packed history of an important aspect of Catholic communal life in the 20th-century. It is well worth reading.

*Timothy Eden, S.M., recently completed two terms as provincial of the Pacific Province of the Marianists and is currently on sabbatical at the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership, University of San Francisco.*

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