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Ecumenism and the Rochester Center for Theological Studies

by Rev. Robert F. McNamara

A Nun's View of Rochester, 1848

by Rev. Robert F. McNamara





Above: Colgate Rochester Divinity School evolved in 1931 from a merger with Colgate Theological Seminary which had merged three years earlier with Rochester Theological Seminary.

Cover: The tower of Colgate Rochester Divinity School is visible from many parts of the city. The site offers one of the best panoramic views of the city.

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An aerial view of St. Bernard's Seminary reveals magnificent architecture in a restful setting.

The Rochester Center For Theological Studies

Surely the ecumenical movement, that earnest effort to unite a divided Christianity not only in good deeds, but even through patient dialogue, in faith, has been one of the great harmonizing forces of the twentieth century.

Anglicans and Protestants, later joined by the Eastern Orthodox, were trail blazers in this effort, which began in 1910 and in 1948 was institutionalized in the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Roman Catholic Church was at first dubious, on doctrinal grounds, about the undertaking, believing that the movement's aims could only be "indifferentist." In 1950 and 1961, however, the World Council clarified its self-concept. Reassured, the Catholic Church, at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) spoke in praise of the ecumenical program; and while it did not choose to join the WCC, it urged all Catholics "to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism."

Official cooperation in the quest for unity, admittedly a long-term enterprise, has already brought a rapprochement between Trinitarian Christians that could scarcely have been anticipated fifty years ago. In Rochester, Catholics, Episcopalians, Protestants and Orthodox are already cooperating in many significant ways, particularly in social and pastoral ministry.

Unique among these joint efforts is the Rochester Center for Theological Studies (RCTS). Founded in 1968, it boldly sought to

unite into an academic consortium three local Christian seminaries, with the proviso that others might later join the cluster. The RCTS achieved its aim fully in 1981, although in a manner somewhat different from that originally conceived.

The history deserves to be recorded because, in my opinion, the confederation of St. Bernard's and Colgate Rochester (familiarily known as "The Hill") epitomizes the general betterment of interdenominational relations in Rochester over the past five decades. The word "betterment" naturally implies that there had been strained relations in the past, and this must be candidly recalled in order to bring out the final contrast.

The City and the Seminaries

The rapid growth of Rochester's Catholic population in the last century was a result of the vast transatlantic immigration. Before the Civil War the newcomers came principally from a famished Ireland and a blighted, turbulent south Germany. In the post-Civil War era the Catholic immigrants were mainly from the Slavic nations and from Italy.

As the vast influx peaked at the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxon Americans of longer residence often became disturbed about the immigrants. Prior to the Civil War, there were repeated efforts to stem this pell-mell tide of foreigners who severely taxed welfare funds and seemed to threaten the routines of the American lifestyle. In the 1850s a panic "nativism" prompted some (though always a minority) to read into the immigrant "invasion," especially that from Ireland, a Roman Catholic plot against a largely Protestant America. Although bias against Catholicism has by no means disappeared in America, the anti-Catholic type of nativism subsided considerably after the Civil War, and when evoked in later decades it won a diminishing audience.

Rochester was not immune to nativism, even the anti-Catholic sort. Here the Catholic population reached what seems to be a fixed minority ratio of around 35 percent. Those who had founded Rochester and formed its folkways were principally New England Calvinists raised in strong "no popery" traditions imported from old England. Hence, in the mid-1850s the "Flour City" had its "Know-Nothing" Mayor, Maltby Strong. A few of the local Protestant pastors preached against Romanism; and

"ex-priests," "ex-nuns," and exotic anti-Catholic demagogues like "Angel Gabriel" Orr, paused in their tours to address curious Rochester audiences, titillating the lewd and inciting the fearful. Yet there was in Rochester none of the violence that sometimes occurred elsewhere. Locally, the chief discrimination practiced against the Catholic Church was a stubborn refusal of penal and welfare institutions to permit Catholic priests to minister to their Catholic inmates.

In 1884, however, Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, the head of the Rochester Catholic diocese, was called on to respond to a toast to all the local clergy on the occasion of Rochester's municipal semicentennial. He praised these clergymen for their notable abstinence from "the fierce onslaughts of polemics which hurt and never help." Times were changing.

But restraint from polemics did not mean that the Rochester Catholic community, or its clergy, felt any sense of, or desire for, intimacy with the local Anglican and Protestant communities and their clergy. There were certainly personal contacts between members of the groups. (One thinks of the lifelong friendship of Father Edward J. Hanna, social-minded professor of theology at St. Bernard's Seminary and later archbishop of San Francisco, and Walter Rauschenbusch, the internationally noted professor of social doctrine at the Divinity School.) Corporately, however, apart from civic interaction, the communities remained basically out of contact. In Rochester, as elsewhere, there was a widespread presumption that loyalty to the pope prevented Catholics from being whole-hearted Americans: a view that the Catholics found tediously unfair.

Rochester's two major seminaries, Colgate Rochester, which represented the "Free-Church" tradition, and St. Bernard's Seminary, which represented the Roman Catholic, can be viewed as imaging, at least in a general way, this earlier non-communication of Rochester's non-Catholic and Catholic bodies. Yet it was precisely these two major theological schools that undertook to establish together in 1968 the Rochester Center, an important expression and agent of local interdenominational dialogue.

Colgate Rochester was the elder of the two. Baptists founded it in 1850 as Rochester Theological Seminary (RTS). Over the years, RTS was to be involved in several mergers. In 1928, it united (or rather, reunited) with Colgate Theological Seminary of

Hamilton, New York (1817); and in 1931, under the serviceable title of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, it occupied its handsome "collegiate Gothic" plant on the southeast fringe of the city. Thirty years later Colgate Rochester assimilated another institution, the Baptist Missionary Training School, which had been founded in Chicago in 1881 to prepare women for church service. Although officially affiliated with the Baptist Church, CRDS has chosen professors and welcomed students from various denominations and has developed close ties with many of the local Protestant churches and church movements. Its student body has normally numbered around 150.

St. Bernard's Seminary opened in 1893 on the northwest fringe of Rochester, and continued to function there until 1981. Its founder was Bernard John McQuaid, the founding bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester. Although a diocesan institution whose principal purpose was to train priests for the Rochester diocese, St. Bernard's early became interdiocesan in its student body, preparing seminarians from dioceses across America and even from some foreign dioceses and religious orders. Its peak enrollment was 275. The educational plan it followed was that typical of Roman Catholic seminaries: two years of senior college with a major in philosophy, and four years of theology. In the earliest years St. Bernard's offered no academic degrees. Between 1901 and 1932, however, it enjoyed the privilege, granted by Pope Leo XIII, of conferring degrees in philosophy and theology in a special honors program. When that privilege lapsed, the school sought authorization in 1931 from the New York State Board of Regents to bestow the baccalaureate of arts at the end of the senior college years.

During the early decades of their coexistence, Colgate Rochester and St. Bernard's like the local non-Catholic and Catholic bodies they serviced, had no formal association. In one sense this was quite understandable. As churches, Roman Catholics and Baptists are at opposite ends of the denominational spectrum. Catholic church polity is episcopal and papal; its creedal requirements are graduated but strict; its worship makes ample allowance for the senses as well as the intellect. Baptist church polity, on the other hand, is congregational; its creedal requirements are liberally Calvinistic; its worship, in Catholic eyes, is stark. But added to this denominational contrast there was also, I judge, a certain reticence between the two institutions. What the

people at The Hill thought of St. Bernard's, I cannot say. I can say that we at St. Bernard's considered CRDS vaguely aloof, and, at all events, too diverse in outlook to invite closer acquaintance.

An effort was made, in connection with Rochester's municipal centennial of 1934, to bring the local faiths together by forming an Inter-Faith Goodwill Committee (IGC). The leading Protestant representative on this committee was a clergyman closely connected with Colgate Rochester, the optimistic and dynamic Dr. Justin Wroe Nixon. Local Anglicans were represented by the first bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Rochester, David L. Ferris. The Jewish committeeman was an upcoming young rabbi of Congregation B'rith Kodesh, Philip S. Bernstein. The delegate of the Catholic diocese, Monsignor William M. Hart, the diocesan vicar general, was chosen chairman. Having brought the various faiths and their clergy into centennial conversation, the Goodwill Committee considered itself successful enough to continue on a permanent basis. For the next fourteen years the genial Monsignor Hart was reelected to its chair. The Committee's sole activity, however, was its annual interfaith "brotherhood" dinner; and IGC's popularity decreased as time passed, despite the efforts of the chairman and Dr. Nixon to keep it creative.

The organization, in 1948, of Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU), threatened for the nonce any hope of bringing Rochester Christians and their two seminaries into closer rapport. POAU, a national lobbying agency located in Washington, announced its birth on January 11, 1948. It issued a "Manifesto" declaring as its purpose (laudable, of course) a constant vigilance for the preservation of America's constitutional separation of church and state. In setting forth this aim, however, the Manifesto, while declaring itself not to be anti-Catholic, spoke as if the Catholic Church alone was the enemy of church-state separation, and practically charged the American Catholic hierarchy with a palpable conspiracy to subvert the First Amendment.

POAU's proclamation caused a nationwide flurry of excitement. Catholics feared that it signalled a new onslaught on their patriotism. Catholic alarms in Rochester were especially strong, for the newly chosen head of POAU was the president of Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Dr. Edwin McNeill Poteat. The nation's Catholic bishops quickly denied the existence of the conspiracy suggested by the Manifesto. But Rochester's Catholic

leaders were doubly shocked. Msgr. Hart, chairman of the Inter-Faith Goodwill Committee, promptly declared, "Rochester, to its shame, now becomes the city of interfaith *bad* will, . . . of Dr. Edwin McNeill Poteat, leader of the newly formed society of organized bigotry." And the then bishop of Rochester, James E. Kearney, though normally restrained in his public utterances, was ready to blame "our local 'divinity' school" for the whole undertaking. Dr. Justin Wroe Nixon and Rabbi Bernstein urged a calm approach. But the action taken on January 26 by the Protestant Pastors' Union of Rochester and Monroe County seemed to confirm the two Catholic prelates in their apprehensions. The Protestant pastors, after listening to Dr. Poteat, voted 200-1 to approve the Manifesto's "firm moderation," and to "reeducate" their people on Protestantism's distinctive contribution to the American way of life. They also defended the "Christian charity and personal integrity" of Dr. Poteat and the other national signers of the Manifesto. The sole negative vote came from Reverend Arthur H. Cowdery of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester. He took exception to some of the statements of the Manifesto.

It was not quite fair of Bishop Kearney to scold Colgate Rochester for the part that its president had played in the foundation of POAU. Although separation of church and state was a historical concern among American Protestants, especially Baptists, opinion on The Hill was certainly divided regarding Protestants United. Dr. Poteat, a Baptist minister, had been elected head of Colgate Rochester in 1943 as a liberal churchman whose talents and wide social interests were consonant with those of the divinity school's best-known professor, Walter Rauschenbusch, preacher of the Social Gospel. But Poteat's colleagues on The Hill, who respected this gentle man as an individual, considered his activity in POAU a personal avocation.

Although Dr. Poteat resigned his Colgate presidency shortly afterward, he did not yield to the criticisms voiced, and remained president of the new lobbying organization until his death. POAU set to work forthwith according to its assumptions. It strongly promoted Paul Blanshard's best seller, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (1949, 1958), an essentially secularist tract more distinguished for the quantity than the quality of its documentation. Protestants United did evoke critiques, however, from a number of distinguished Protestant commentators. Church historian

Jaroslav Pelikan, a Lutheran, saw in the original Manifesto “a polite if perhaps less honest form of anti-Catholicism.” Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary rejected its monolithic interpretation of the first amendment. Americans, said Niebuhr, should also give fair hearing to why Catholics and others were asking for a share in public benefits by parochial school children.

Fortunately, American Catholic fears that POAU might launch another APA movement proved unwarranted; and in Rochester interdenominational tensions soon relaxed.

The Bridge-Building Years: 1948-1967

Whether Dr. Poteat’s resignation as president of the Divinity School two months after the Manifesto appeared was prompted by a reaction to that document or by health reasons, the Divinity School, by naming Dr. Wilbour Eddy Saunders as his successor, freed itself from that connection.

Dr. Saunders was an excellent choice. He had long served as executive secretary of the Rochester Federation of Churches, was a good administrator, and was noted for his breadth of view and cheerful diplomacy in dealing with Rochesterians of diverse faiths. The World Council of Churches had just been created, and this past-secretary of the local Inter-Faith Goodwill Committee shared its irenic spirit. During his regime (1948-1960) The Hill began to reach out gently towards the Catholic community and the local Catholic seminary.

In the mid-1950s, for example, Dr. Oren Baker, dean of the Divinity School and professor of pastoral theology, invited Father Francis B. Burns, St. Bernard’s professor of moral theology and social ethics, to address his class at the Divinity School. Dr. Baker had made the acquaintance of Father Burns on an interfaith Probation Committee in the early 1930s. The four Catholic members of this committee had been truly impressed by its success. Indeed, this was probably the first pastoral program in which Rochester Catholics found, to their pleasure, that they could cooperate constructively in certain areas with local Protestant clergy. Interfaith ministerial contacts during World War II had also promoted a greater openness.

As Catholics became interested in the progress of the ecumenical movement, several Catholic priests developed considerable expertise. One of them was the Maryland Jesuit theologian Father Gustave Weigel. On February 1, 1960 Father Weigel was invited to address the whole Divinity School on his hopes regarding Christian unity.

The Weigel visit took place towards the end of Saunders' regime. By 1960 American Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox were beginning to watch the Catholic Church with a new interest, for Pope John XXIII had announced in 1959 the convocation three years thence of an ecumenical council. From the outset he indicated that the council would have a strong interdenominational aspect. He established a Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, one of whose duties was to invite delegates of the major Christian bodies to attend the council as official guest-observers. CRDS was pleased that one of the invitees was Rev. Dr. Stanley I. Stuber, a Baptist alumnus who was an expert in religious public relations.

During the three years in which the Council was in session (1962-1965) it promulgated two documents of particular interest to other Christian denominations. The Decree on Ecumenism of November 21, 1964, declared, as we have seen, that Catholics had a duty to participate in ecumenical activities. The Declaration on Religious Freedom of December 7, 1965, gave an official response to a question often asked by Protestants: "It is necessary," said the bishops, "that religious freedom be everywhere provided with effectual constitutional guarantees." Vatican II certainly marked a turning point in the development of interdenominational relations, in Rochester as well as in the rest of the Christian world. Religious indifferentism was now clearly excluded as the basis for Christian reunion.

Rochester Christians did not wait until the Council was over to institute freer contacts. Dr. Gene Ebert Bartlett (1910-1989), who was inaugurated as Dr. Saunders' successor on January 8, 1961, carried forward his policy of cordiality towards the local Catholic community and its seminary. Thus, in August 1963, when The Hill played host to the Central Commission of the World Council of Churches, President Bartlett and the faculty and trustees of CRDS invited the faculty of St. Bernard's to attend the sessions as observers. We of St. Bernard's were touched by the warm hospitality shown to us not only by the Divinity School personnel, but by distinguished leaders of the

World Council, like Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Dr. Willem Visser 't Hooft, and the archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey.

In the same spirit of openness, the faculties of the two schools cooperated in April 1965 in sponsoring two public lectures on the Dead Sea Scrolls, delivered by a leading Catholic expert on the subject. He was Roland DeVaux, a French Dominican priest, director of the Catholic École Biblique de Jérusalem. Part of the program was a faculty dinner given in the speaker's honor at the University Club. A novelty at the time, this was the first of what would be many joint meetings of the two faculties.

The co-sponsorship, in which the Divinity School had taken the initiative, was followed by an exchange of lecterns by the professors of matching departments. Thus I, as the teacher of church history at St. Bernard's, invited Dr. Winthrop S. Hudson to address my class; and he reciprocated. Dr. Hudson had succeeded Dr. Conrad Moehlman as James B. Colgate Professor of History of Christianity. In the very year of our first exchange, Professor Hudson published his *Religion in America*. Here was proof that the old polemical approach to post-Reformation Christian history, which Dr. Moehlman (and many Catholic writers as well) had taken, was now passé. In fact, knowledgeable and objective studies like Hudson's moved me to reexamine my own lectures for civility.

Thanks, then, to the courteous good will of Dr. Saunders and Dr. Bartlett. Rochester's twin seminaries were finally on "speaking terms." Now, on June 28, 1966, Father Joseph Patrick Brennan of St. Bernard's scripture department was appointed rector of the institution. He had been happy to collaborate in arranging the De Vaux lectures. Henceforth, the two theological schools were bound to move towards a still closer partnership.

The Center Concept: President Bartlett and Bishop Sheen

On learning of Father Brennan's promotion, President Bartlett wrote him a congratulatory letter in which he expressed the earnest hope that their two schools could find ways of closer cooperation. In a follow-up meeting, the two seminary heads discussed several possible courses of action; but they agreed to start simply with a program of faculty get-togethers.

The joint meetings had scarcely commenced when Fulton J. Sheen was installed as bishop of Rochester (December 15, 1966). Bishop Sheen, after a long academic career at the Catholic University of America, had served as national director of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the international funding organization for Catholic missionary work. But he was best known to Americans in general as a pioneer in the "electronic gospel," both in radio and in television, for over three decades. As an auxiliary bishop of New York City since 1951, Sheen took an active part in the Second Vatican Council, and returned from the Council enthusiastic about implementing its directives and its spirit. When, therefore, the bishop learned of the current efforts of St. Bernard's and Colgate Rochester to collaborate more fully, he commended the move enthusiastically.

A fire at St. Bernard's on April 11, 1967 served to accelerate the advance towards confederation. The fire was only a flash in the rubbish chute, quickly extinguished. But this accident induced the fire inspectors to make a thorough study of the capacity of the decades-old buildings to resist fire. They subsequently demanded that the seminary take fire-prevention measures that might cost as much as \$300,000.

Now, St. Bernard's had been built with great economy in a less fire-conscious age. The seminary's endowment was modest, and could not be expected to cover large emergency expenses. Father Brennan, therefore, began to wonder whether it might not be more sensible to sell the whole seminary property and spend the price on the construction of a simpler and more up-to-date plant at some other location. This was an idea all the more thinkable since the transfer of the college department to St. John Fisher campus in 1965, leaving St. Bernard's strictly a four-year theological school.

The rector presented his reflections to President Bartlett. Dr. Bartlett immediately replied, "Why not move out to our campus? We are just beginning to plan extensive changes." Out of this casual conversation sprang the idea of establishing in Rochester a coalition of interdenominational theological schools. At that very moment, Bexley Hall, a small Episcopal seminary affiliated since 1824 with Kenyon College, at Gambier, Ohio, was seriously considering the transfer of its affiliation to Colgate Rochester. Bexley made the decision to move on June 16, 1967. By that time the Bexley Hall people had already learned with pleasure that Rochester's Roman Catholic seminary might also join the cluster

on The Hill. As proposed, therefore, the consortium would be truly ecumenical, representing the "Free-Church," Anglican and Catholic traditions. Once established, it would be ready to welcome other theological schools into membership.

Father Brennan relayed this tentative suggestion to Bishop Sheen, who was *ex officio* head of the St. Bernard's Seminary corporation. The bishop then had a long talk on the subject with Dr. Bartlett. He was strongly attracted to the concept, as he called it, of an "ecumenical seminary." Of course, he said, this federation should be based on the principle of "integration with identity." In other words, St. Bernard's and the other combining members would retain their own identities: their faculties and, naturally, their theological and spiritual principles and programs. In the original thinking, the Catholic seminary would not move to the CRDS property, but to a convenient nearby location. Its independence would thus be effectively symbolized. But it would be able to profit by the group association in many ways, and, in turn, could make its own particular contribution. On this understanding, Bishop Sheen authorized Father Brennan, on June 27, 1967, to continue the discussions with President Bartlett and to draw up a specific plan.

The bishop and Father Joseph W. Dailey, his vicar for pastoral planning, also began a personal search for acreage in the neighborhood of The Hill. Sheen wanted the land to be near to the Rochester Psychiatric Center, for he intended that his seminarians do some of their field work there. However, the bishop made it clear to CRDS that relocation depended both on the acquisition of a new property and the sale of the old. No sale, no funds; hence no new construction.

The three schools, Colgate Rochester, Bexley Hall, and St. Bernard's now organized an *ad hoc* "Committee Concerning a Proposed Ecumenical Theological Center." Bishop Sheen and George W. Barrett, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, attended its initial meeting on August 15, 1967. Dr. Milton C. Froyd, as dean of the Divinity School, and the Reverend Almus M. Thorp, as dean of Bexley Hall, took an active part in the discussion. Committees were named to look into the academic, legal and financial aspects of the proposed cluster. A public relations committee was also chosen. The representatives hoped to form the corporation by 1970, but agreed to break the news of the Center project in September 1967.

It was the Rt. Rev. Nelson Burroughs, the Episcopal Bishop of Ohio and church superior of Bexley Hall, who was designated to reveal the plan for the Rochester Center. On September 20, 1967, in an address to his church's national convention in Seattle, Bishop Burroughs announced that Bexley Hall had decided to transfer to Rochester, and there become a member of a new interdenominational coalition of theological schools. The proposed coalition, said the bishop, represented "a major breakthrough in theological education." Federation would involve combining, "as far as possible," the faculties, libraries and classes of the three constituent seminaries.

The Rochester press broadcast these tidings on September 21, along with comments by representatives of the three institutions. Father Brennan of St. Bernard's pointed out the uniqueness of the consortium. Interdenominational consortia already existed in America, he said, but on a doctoral level. The Rochester Center, as envisioned, would be the first to serve candidates for the professional degree of bachelor of divinity. Bishop Sheen gave as reasons for the consortium "the needless multiplication of faculties, the need of dialogue, the recognition of sharing God's word, and the common resolve to be a spiritual leaven in the mass of society." President Bartlett explained more fully the nature of the federation. Echoing Bishop Sheen's premise, "integration with identity," he said that each member school would share in this wider relationship without losing its particularity. The news article added that the Divinity School and St. Bernard's had already begun some joint lecture programs in 1966, and that their students were working together in urban projects. (The student population affected by the projected Center in 1968 would be about 350: 150 apiece at Colgate Rochester and St. Bernard's, and 50 at Bexley Hall.)

While the preliminary study of this experimental coalition was moving slowly ahead, St. Bernard's efforts to find a good relocation property were faltering. The best of the tracts considered was the site of the old county penitentiary at South and Highland Avenues, but by the end of November 1967, Bishop Sheen learned that this could not be acquired. Eastman Kodak had meanwhile offered to buy the St. Bernard's acreage, which made the lack of a new site all the more disappointing. Despite this practical obstacle, the bishop went ahead with the negotiations.

On January 17, 1968, the *ad hoc* committee presented its findings, and offered a resolution for the naming of "A Proposed

Provisional Council for the Rochester Center of Theological Studies." Once the resolution had been approved, a council was set up representing the three institutions. Its assignment was to devise a structure for the Center, to study methods of coordinating its members, and to investigate sources of funding.

The organizational meeting took place on May 1, 1968, and as early as May 4 the provisional council secured legal status for the "Rochester Center for Theological Studies," a membership corporation. On June 17, it adopted bylaws and elected the permanent board of directors, with Almus M. Thorp of Bexley as the first president.

Bexley Hall formally amalgamated with CRDS on July 1, 1968, and spent most of the summer moving its personnel, library and other effects from Ohio to The Hill. The Rochester Center for Theological Studies made its public debut on Sunday, November 3, 1968, at a cordial ecumenical "service of recognition" held in Christ Episcopal Church, at that time the cathedral church of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester.

A fourth seminary would join the RCTS in 1970. Crozer Baptist Theological Seminary (founded in 1867) moved to the Colgate Rochester campus from Upland, Pa. Crozer was proud to count among its alumni the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

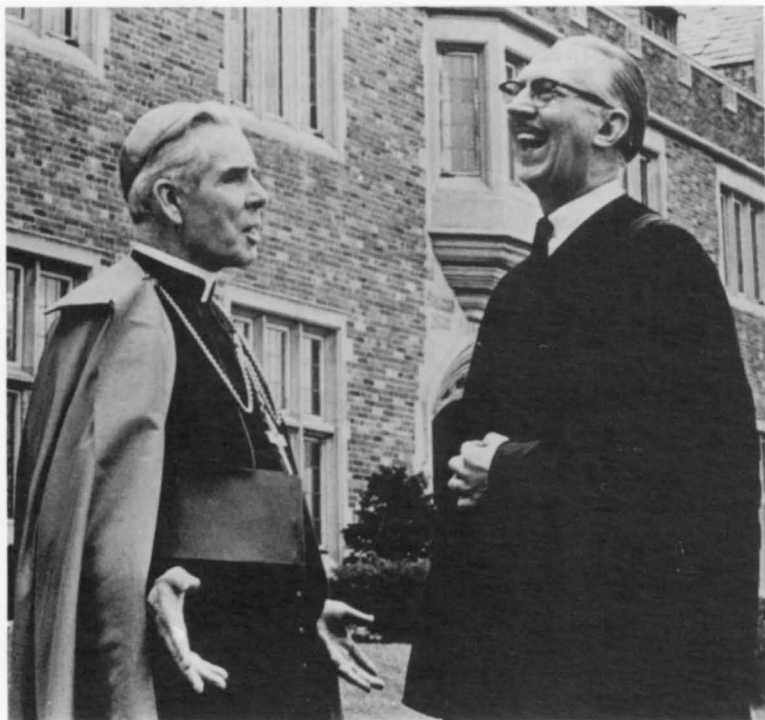
Once the Center was a reality, there was a stronger incentive to work out the areas of cooperation between the constituent institutions. Joint field work was already in process, as we have noted. Academic collaboration was facilitated for St. Bernard's on May 9, 1969, when the New York State Regents extended its 1931 degrees license to embrace the religious-studies degrees of Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology. At the same time, St. Bernard's followed the recent example of other American Catholic seminaries in seeking the endorsement of the (American) Association of Theological Schools, the accrediting agency for seminaries in the United States and Canada. After the required AATS visitation, the seminary was granted full accreditation on January 14, 1971. It took some time, of course, to iron out the snags that impeded facile collaboration between St. Bernard's Seminary (the "North Campus") and the CRDS/Bexley Hall "South Campus." Had the Seminary and The Hill not been 25 travel-minutes apart, there would surely have been more cross-registration.

However, events on The Hill in March 1969 raised some question at St. Bernard's about the proposed relocation.

The year 1969 was a troubled one in American social and political history. The Vietnam War, the feminist movement, and the racial issue, evoked strong reactions in many sectors of the country. At CRDS the racial question was brought into sharp focus. There, in 1967, the eighteen black seminarians had organized a Black Student Caucus in order to press for greater recognition of their needs. Then, on April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the charismatic black leader, was assassinated in Memphis. The murder of this "man of peace" infused still greater urgency into the Black Power movement. On December 10, 1968, the Caucus on The Hill presented to President Bartlett a letter demanding that African-Americans be appointed to the positions open on the faculty and to certain administrative offices, and that eleven Blacks be named to the board of trustees of Colgate Rochester-Bexley Hall. The petitioners peremptorily set March 1, 1969, as the deadline for compliance with their demands.

Actually, the Divinity School authorities were already working in this direction. The problem was complicated, however, and not quick of solution; and when March 1 arrived, the trustees had not yet completed the list of new nominees. Therefore on March 2, the members of the Black Caucus locked themselves into Strong Hall, the main Divinity School building, and excluded all others, interrupting the scheduled classes, meetings, and other functions. (For example, a joint meeting of the Center faculties had been scheduled at CRDS on March 3. Father Brennan invited the group to meet at St. Bernard's, and his beleaguered colleagues from The Hill were grateful for the hospitality.) The Caucus continued its lockout for seventeen days. Finally the parties reached an amicable understanding. Pressure from the Black Caucus had accelerated a process that was already seriously under way. The Divinity School administrators refrained from any punitive action, during or after the occupation. They considered this a case of confrontation between colleagues, not antagonists, and believed that patience would eventually achieve a meeting of minds. Patience did win through. Out of the dialogue came the unique and successful Colgate Rochester Program of Black Church Studies.

The March encounter and its implications nevertheless disturbed many in Rochester, among them Bishop Sheen. After the lockout his enthusiasm for the speedy relocation of St. Bernard's obviously diminished. Finally, he wrote to President Bartlett on June 5, 1969:



Bishop Fulton J. Sheen speaks with Dr. Gene Bartlett, president of Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

While the advantages of our present complex are multiple, the spirit of the nation and the mood of the student body, as well as the legislative concern with educational institutions, have convinced us that there should be no further discussion on the theological complex before another year. Perhaps by that time, through the grace of God, calmness and sound judgment will prevail again in our nation and among our people.

The adjourned discussion between the president and Bishop Sheen never did take place. On October 1, 1969, Pope Paul VI accepted the resignation of Sheen as bishop of Rochester, offered one year earlier than the mandatory retirement age of 75. Furthermore, Dr. Bartlett resigned the presidency, effective June 1, 1970, in order to accept a pastorate in Newton Centre, Mass. In the same year also, the Reverend Almus M. Thorp, dean of Bexley Hall, was appointed to the post of director of the Board of Theological Education of the Episcopal Church. Thus, within a few months' time, the Rochester Center for Theological Studies

lost three of its most dedicated founders, Father Brennan alone remaining in office.

Of course, during the mid-70s the Center continued to function at the level already achieved. Brennan and his assistant, Professor Joseph G. Kelly of St. Bernard's, working in particular with Dr. John Charles Wynn of CRDS, Dean Hays H. Rockwell and Dr. Robert J. Page of Bexley Hall, were able to keep up the joint administrative sessions, the team instruction, "Center Days," and the like. Cross-registration continued to a certain degree, but the distance between the two campuses still remained a major impediment. Shifts in the leadership of the Divinity School and the Catholic diocese also delayed solutions. Then in 1977 Joseph Brennan asked permission to resign the rectorship of St. Bernard's. Named as his successor was the seminary's assistant professor of liturgy, Father Frank Eugene Lioi. Fr. Lioi was installed in a period of declining registration and rising inflation. Nevertheless, he had a hopeful outlook on the seminary's future and a positive attitude towards RCTS.

Adversity's Silver Lining: The One-Campus Covenant of 1981

St. Bernard's Seminary had barely entered 1981 when it was confronted by the most serious crisis of its 90-year history. The rector and his board of trustees had bravely faced the diminution of seminarians and the rise of costs, optimistic that the school could somehow be kept afloat through the storm. But Bishop Matthew H. Clark, head of the Rochester diocese since 1979, now reached the conclusion that the effort was vain. He therefore announced, on January 7, 1981, that St. Bernard's would close at the end of the current semester. It had been a painful decision for Bishop Clark. He was not only, as bishop of Rochester, chairman of the seminary board; he was also an alumnus of the seminary.

The bishop's announcement, quite unexpected, caused considerable shock to both faculty and student body. The administration and the teachers were ready, of course, to accept the decision; but they were more fully aware than the bishop of the complexity of dismantlement. What was to be done with the scholastic records, which State law requires to be preserved? What was to be done with the seminary's valuable theological

library? What provision was to be made regarding severance pay and new jobs for the faculty, especially those who were not members of the Rochester clergy? Where would the present candidates for priesthood be sent to finish their theological training? And, in particular, what would become of the Rochester Center for Theological Studies if its Catholic member suddenly ceased to be?

Faculty members were loth to see St. Bernard's disappear completely. Since 1893 it had been a symbol and bulwark of the Catholic ethos in Rochester. Fortunately, there was a middle way: to cancel the priestly formation department but retain the other programs.

Since 1967, when the first student was admitted who was not preparing for the priesthood, the seminary had been developing alternate programs. Authorization in 1969 to grant the M. Th. ("Master of Theology") as well as the B.D. ("Bachelor of Divinity") had pointed in that direction, especially as the number of enrolled seminarians continued to decline and the school sought nonseminarians to fill out the student body. The raising of the B.D. to M. Div. ("Master of Divinity") on September 26, 1974, confirmed the trend; and the change in name that same fall of "Master of Theology" to "Master of Arts in Theology" broadened the appeal of this graduate degree. As it turned out, St. Bernard's was to be rescued by its nonseminarian clientele.

Not that this course of action was all perfectly clear on January 7, 1981. The board of trustees of the seminary started at once to sort out the options. St. John Fisher College showed an interest in taking over some aspects of the St. Bernard's curriculum. It was suggested that Nazareth College or the University of Rochester might be open to a similar arrangement. Bishop Clark insisted that all these avenues be explored. But it was important first of all that the seminary rector explain the whole situation to the other member institutions of the Rochester Center.

Colgate Rochester's president, Dr. Larry L. Greenfield, had written to the St. Bernard's community as soon as he learned of the closing of the seminary. He expressed both his sympathy and his readiness to be of assistance. At the next meeting of the Center board, Father Lioi gave an account of developments thus far. Naturally, the question was raised whether the suspension of St. Bernard's would suggest the termination of the Rochester Center itself. While the representatives of the three other

member seminaries did not exclude that possibility, they advised that the RCTS be continued for the present. It could serve, they thought, as a catalyst in the ongoing discussions. Father Lioi mentioned the St. John Fisher proposal and other possibilities; but he reported that the Academic Affairs Committee of the Seminary Board preferred to affiliate its graduate department with Colgate Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary, since The Hill was the only local educational complex that offered professional and graduate studies in theology and ministry. What the Academic Committee decided to favor was "the preservation in the Diocese of Rochester of a locus of Roman Catholic graduate theological and ministerial education." The Center board resolved to encourage the continuance of this Roman Catholic presence on The Hill.

When the St. Bernard's trustees voted to preserve the seminary's two degree programs, and to affiliate with The Hill, Bishop Clark acquiesced in the majority decision. It was therefore decided to seek the amendment of the St. Bernard's certificate of incorporation in order to acknowledge the new realities. The New York State Education Department issued the amended certificate of incorporation to "St. Bernard's Institute," and redefined its scope as "to educate men and women in theology and ministry according to the Roman Catholic tradition." The prerogative of granting graduate degrees would henceforth pass from the seminary to the Institute, in affiliation with the Divinity School.

St. Bernard's Seminary sped almost miraculously through the complications of closure. Title to the seminary property was transferred to the Diocese of Rochester, which sold the acreage and buildings to the Eastman Kodak Company, the highest cash bidder, for \$2,000,000. The moveables of the seminary, except for certain practical and precious items, were disposed of, and the core of the library, along with the archives, was quickly moved to the Divinity School.

On August 26, 1981, representatives of St. Bernard's and the Divinity School sealed their compact by ceremoniously signing a covenant of one-campus affiliation, valid for three years. It was agreed that the Institute would rent office space in the Divinity School buildings and be accorded the use of academic facilities and related benefits. Its library was to be placed in an area adjacent to the large and distinguished Divinity School collection. Part of the understanding was that SBI, aside from an initial grant from the diocese of \$250,000, would be self-supporting. Inscribing the

covenant for the Institute was the Reverend Sebastian A. Falcone, its newly designated president and dean. A former member of the seminary faculty, he was one of the three priests that the diocese pledged henceforth to assign to SBI. Thus the covenant of 1981 achieved with relative ease what the Rochester Center had earlier failed to accomplish. This was principally because the problem of where to relocate the whole seminary no longer existed.

Those in charge of the emerging institute had worked overtime in order that it might continue operating without interruption in the fall of 1981. Father Falcone hoped that there would be at least 28 registrants for class. To his delight, there were 54. Some were priests, but the majority were nuns and lay persons engaged in Catholic education or parish-based ministry. By the spring semester of 1984, the class enrollment had risen to 171, an increasing percentage being cross-registrants from the Divinity School. Colgate Rochester was therefore happy to renew the covenant of 1981, this time for five years. Speaking at the ceremony of the renewal on May 31, 1984, President Greenfield pointed out two of the benefits that had already accrued from the partnership. In the first place, affiliation had made for greater financial efficiency. In the second place, physical integration of the libraries (in a retrievable manner), had produced a theological collection that ranked among the top ten in North America. If some details of the collaboration were still being worked out, that was to be expected. It only proved, he said, that the Rochester ecumenical adventure was not "static and rhetorical" but "functioning and growing."

The covenant of 1981 thus brought into being the "ecumenical seminary" that the Rochester Center for Theological Studies had been organized to create, even though the Center itself had remained largely a "paper corporation." Bishop Sheen died two years before St. Bernard's Institute moved to The Hill. But his fellow-promoter of affiliation, Dr. Gene Bartlett, who had returned to the Divinity School as pastor-in-residence, was gratified to be a witness to the signing of the covenant. Commenting on the occasion he observed, "The original vision sparked by Bishop Sheen in 1968 has finally been realized. This is a day of very special blessing." Almus Thorp shared his pleasure: "The stage is now set for an even more exciting work in the education of Christian leaders." Of course, none of those who brought the Center into existence in 1968 would have dreamed

that "integration with identity" was to be achieved only through the "death" of St. Bernard's Seminary. But the end product, as Professor J. C. Wynn put it, was "something we had not precisely foreseen or planned, but for which we can thank God and take courage."

On May 31, 1989, Colgate/Bexley/Crozer and St. Bernard's Institute again renewed their covenant, this time for seven years. The Institute, with its extension courses at Horseheads and in Syracuse, and a forthcoming satellite program in Albany, seemed to have achieved recognition in the Catholic community. It had also proved to be an appreciated adjunct on The Hill. Of it Dr. Robert J. Page, who had represented Bexley Hall in the formation of the Rochester Center, said, "St. Bernard's Institute is healthy, soundly founded, and offers great promise for the future."

Has this ecumenical cluster also made a contribution to Rochester's general Christian population? Statistical proof is wanting, but the clues seem positive. In the 1960s, when the ecumenical spirit at last caught on in Rochester, CRDS historian Winthrop S. Hudson hazarded the hope that the developing friendliness of the local Christian clergy might bring about "a new climate of opinion that will affect the laity, and possibly our culture." In 1987, apparently judging that his forecast was coming true, Dr. Hudson praised the bettered relations of the city's Protestants, Anglican and Orthodox as evidence of "a happy sea change."

The foundation of the Rochester Center and the one-campus affiliation that it led to have surely helped to effect that "happy sea change."



A Nun's View of Rochester, 1848

"Rochester is the prettiest city we have seen in America." So wrote a School Sister of Notre Dame in a travel report sent in 1848 to her community headquarters in Munich. She had just completed her first visit to the Flour City, from June 20 to June 24.

If we are to appreciate the charming little account of Sister Mary Caroline Friess's Rochester sojourn, some background is necessary.

Although she was the daughter of Bavarian parents, Sister

Caroline (née Josephine) was born in Paris, France, on August 21, 1824. Having joined the "Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame" in Germany, she was one of the sisters chosen in 1847 by the foundress, Mother Mary Theresa Gerhardinger (1797-1879), to launch their pioneer school in America. After Mother Theresa had achieved that initial purpose, she and Sister Caroline set out in mid-May 1848 on a trip to the Midwest and back. They wanted to discover what other German-speaking parishes might wish to engage the School Sisters for their parochial schools. During most of this journey, their guide was Father John Nepomucene Neumann, C.Ss.R. (1811-1860). Father Neumann was at that time the superior of all the Redemptorist priests and brothers in this country. By the time the little party had swung out through Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois, and come back via Buffalo to New York, they had logged an arduous 2500 miles by stagecoach, train and boat.

The trio arrived in Buffalo by water on June 18, 1848. Although they spent only one day there, business matters did not prevent them from taking a side trip to that world-famous spectacle, Niagara Falls. Deeply impressed, like countless others, by the great double cataract, Mother Theresa called it a "wonder of creation and God's power."

The two nuns and the priest left Buffalo by train in the early evening of June 19, arriving in Rochester shortly after midnight. Here, their primary aim was to see whether the Redemptorists at St. Joseph's German church could use their services in its parish school. However, the visitors had ample time during the next five days to tour all the local Catholic churches and to take in the sights of the brisk little milling city.

Sister Caroline's narrative of their whole trip, translated from the German, was published in 1985: *Mother Mary Caroline Friess: Correspondence and Other Documents*, Barbara Brumleve, SSND and Marjorie Myers, SSND. (School Sisters of Notre Dame Heritage Research Publication #34. St. Louis, MO., 1985.)

Here is the account of their stay in Rochester.

"The feast of Corpus Christi we were to spend in Rochester. Therefore, we left Buffalo by train Monday evening, June 19, at 6 p.m. At 12:30 we arrived at Rochester and took rooms in the nearest hotel, which we abandoned the next morning at 6:00 in order to reach the private dwelling which had been prepared for us. In Rochester we found a German church which had been built in Roman style by the Redemptorist Fathers. The exterior is

finished, not so the interior. The walls are rough, not plastered nor whitewashed. The altar—there is only one in the church—with the picture of St. Joseph as patron saint, is simple but neat and clean. As in Buffalo the schools of Rochester were also offered to us. Two Sisters would find plenty of work there teaching 160 girls.

“About two and one half miles from St. Joseph Church there is another German congregation with a very old secular priest as pastor, because the parishioners do not want the Redemptorists; this church is rather small, built of wood; the school is below in the basement. Beside the two German churches there are three English Catholic churches in Rochester; none of these is large and clean. Fourteen years ago missionaries came to this city; therefore, one can find religion and education among the greater part of the people. Here God blessed the laborers in His vineyard with success but not without countless sufferings.

“Rochester is the prettiest city we have seen in America; however, it is not the largest. In the center is a waterfall (Genesee) sixty feet in height, which dashes down in 24 openings. How this does enhance the appearance of the city, which is kept very clean and has trees and plants of many kinds. Not far from this fountain we noticed a bear fastened with a chain. When we approached him we thought he became angry. His hair stood on end and he looked rather savage. He continued this attitude until we gave him an apple which he devoured in a very delicate manner, leaving nothing but the core. After he had finished he again stood on his hind legs while he tendered us the other two as if he would thereby show his gratitude. Behind his little wooden house we saw unusually large rats running around.

“During the night after the feast of Corpus Christi (Thursday, June 24) at 11:30 we left Rochester, and arrived at Albany the following evening. The next morning we reached New York City ...”

This brief narrative requires some explanations.

The first German parish that the trio visited in Rochester was St. Joseph's, founded in 1836 by the German Redemptorist Fathers. Sister Caroline describes the second church building to be occupied by Rochester's original German Catholic congregation. It was the familiar stone building on old Franklin Street, which was dedicated in 1846, and destroyed by fire in 1974. After the fire the Redemptorists could not afford to rebuild.



Sister Caroline Friess, School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) (1824-1892).

Fortunately, the Landmark Society of Western New York purchased the charred ruin and, by means of a popular subscription, developed it into a pretty mini-park. Only a small portion of the “rough” 1846 walls remain today. They buttress the lovely tower of 1910, designed by Rochester architect Joseph H. Oberlies (1872-1925).

The other German church that Sister Caroline refers to was the original St. Peter’s Church on Rochester’s west side, then located at the corner of Maple and King Streets. This frame church of 1843 was succeeded in 1859 by a masonry church named SS. Peter and Paul’s. In 1912, the masonry church was superseded by the present brick Church of SS. Peter and Paul on Main Street West. Most likely the “very old pastor” she mentions was the Reverend Count Antoni Berenyi, a Hungarian nobleman. Father Berenyi was perhaps no more than fifty years of age; but, according to Bishop John Timon of Buffalo, he lived “like a hermit.” He may therefore have appeared wizened and “very old” to the 24-year-old Sister Mary Caroline.

Sister Caroline speaks candidly of three “English” (i.e. English-language) churches in the city. This is puzzling. In 1848 there

were only two "Irish" churches within Rochester: St. Patrick's , the first Catholic church in the city (1823), and "old" St. Mary's (established 1834-35, reestablished 1841). But the visitors may also have gone out to Greece to see St. Ambrose Church on Mount Read. This "English" predecessor of Our Mother of Sorrows Church had been dedicated in 1832 as a country mission chapel for the Irish farmers of "Paddy Hill."

Methodical Sisters Theresa and Caroline were obviously pleased by the neatness of Rochester and the attractiveness of its trees and plantings. The falls that they saw were the main falls of the lower Genesee's four cataracts. They viewed them from approximately the site of today's "Upper Falls Terrace Park" at St. Paul and Platt Streets. Sister Caroline underestimated their height (96 feet). What she calls the many "openings" of the cataract were the streams of water beyond the main waterfall that cascaded down from the adjacent water-powered mills. The mills drew their water from the upstream millraces that ran parallel to the river.

Mother Theresa was to sail from New York, Europe-bound, on July 20, 1848, never to return to America. Sister Mary Caroline, as Mother Provincial of all the School Sisters in the United States, would often revisit Rochester. In 1853 she was finally able to establish a house of her nuns at St. Joseph's Church, to take over the girls' classes (and subsequently manage St. Joseph's Orphanage next door). Before her death on July 22, 1892, Mother Caroline had also opened convents here at SS. Peter and Paul (1855); at St. Boniface (1866); at Holy Family and Holy Redeemer (both in 1867); and at St. Michael's (1873). The School Sisters also had charge of the small school at Sacred Heart Church, Perkinsville (Steuben County), from 1858 to 1869. From time to time Mother Caroline used to return to these convents on visitation. In the twentieth century her order would accept further teaching assignments in metropolitan Rochester: at Holy Ghost School, Coldwater (1918); and at St. Philip Neri School, St. Margaret Mary School, and Bishop Kearney High School (all in 1962). (German was no longer the second language in their schools after World War I.) Therefore as a result of the 1848 stopover of Mother Theresa and Sister Caroline, the School Sisters of Notre Dame gained entrée into the Flower City. Since then they have made a substantial contribution to its educational and religious history.

Father John N. Neumann, C.Ss.R., who brought the two nuns to Rochester in 1848, was also to come back to this city often on the affairs of the Redemptorist Order. (His first visit to Rochester, by the way, had been in 1836. On July 11 of that year, as a newly ordained priest straight from Austria-Hungary, he had performed his first baptism and preached his first sermon, in Rochester's St. Patrick's Church.) In 1852, Father Neumann was consecrated bishop of Philadelphia.

What lends special interest to Sister Mary Caroline's account of their 1848 visit is that both of her companions would later on be officially ranked among the saints by the Roman Catholic Church.

Pope John XXIII declared Bishop Neumann "Blessed" on October 13, 1963; and on June 19, 1977 Pope Paul VI canonized him as Saint John N. Neumann. Pope John Paul II, on November 13, 1985, beatified the foundress as Blessed Mary Theresa Gerhardinger. Perhaps she, too, will one day be proclaimed a "full-fledged" saint.

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Back Cover: Buffalo Street (West Main) as it appeared when Sister Friess visited in 1848.

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