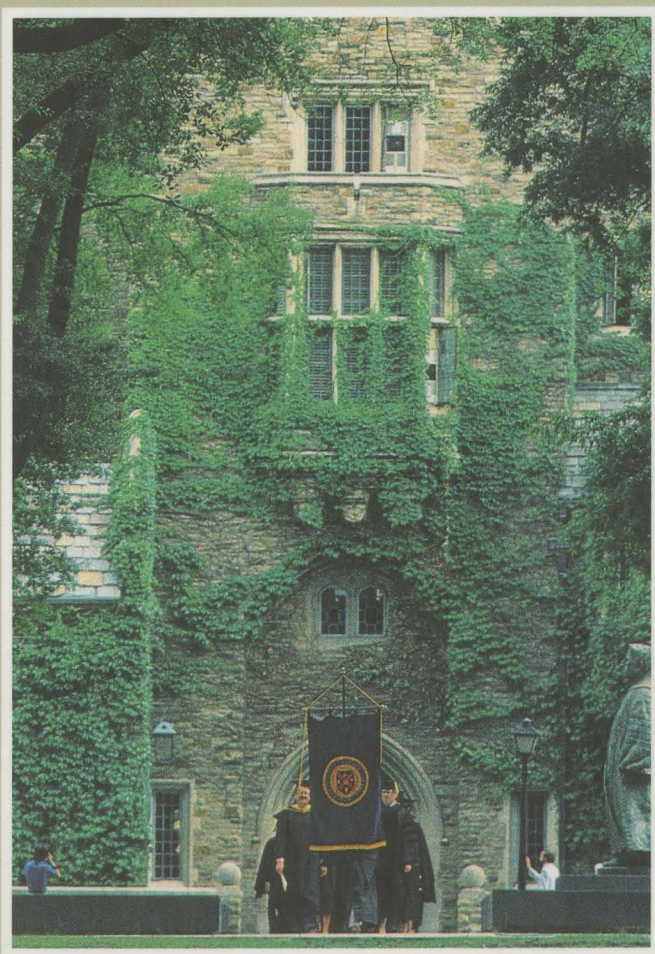


# *Celebrating the Humanities*

A HALF-CENTURY OF THE  
SEARCH COURSE AT RHODES COLLEGE



Michael Nelson, *Editor*

*Foreword* by Jean Bethke Elshtain

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SEARCH COURSE AT RHODES COLLEGE



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## Foreword

When I matriculated at age eighteen into the local Agricultural and Mechanical College, shortly before it became the rather more grand-sounding “Colorado State University,” I was eager to learn. I wanted to read and to think, to break out of everything small and parochial about my way of seeing the world. As a freshman, I took a course in Western Civilization and fell in love with the Middle Ages, in part because of my enthusiastic instructor, one of that remarkable group of American men who had fought World War II, who had gone to college on the GI Bill, and who were then beginning to fill the ranks of the professoriat. These were men who, at one time, could have conjured no such possibility for themselves. Many of those who survived the war were liberated by the aspiration for higher learning, and many went for it with gusto.

I became enamored of all things medieval. This, I learned, was part of my world as the daughter of a great civilization, but a part that was alien as well—strange, foreign, “other,” as we now say. I read Helen Waddell’s wonderful book on *The Goliardi*, wandering student poets and trouble-makers. Charles Homer Haskins’s *Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* gripped me altogether. It seemed that those lofty souls who later saw themselves leap-frogging over a thousand years of monkish superstition, as if all had been dark before they brought in the light, were making rather too much of themselves. Others had been there before them.

What must it have been like to follow Peter Lombard around Paris? (Of course, women were not then able to matriculate in the great centers of scholastic learning, but one’s imagination and aspirations are not thus constrained!) To engage in disputation with Abelard? Or perhaps to wander to Bologna to attend its famous law school? James Westfall Thompson’s labor of love on *The Medieval Library* offered an enthralling



account of the growth of libraries—what sorts of libraries emerged, where, and how many. Medieval Germany had at least a thousand libraries. I was touched by a poignant discussion of “The Wanderings of Manuscripts,” documents found, then lost, then found again miraculously, resurfacing in some other library in a place thousands of miles away. Codices told fascinating tales of cultural transmission and, sadly, of cultural loss as manuscripts disappeared never to be found again. Westphall concludes that it ill becomes those who came later to cast stones at the Middle Ages, “for the destruction of precious books that was most appalling came later when secular power made war against the church, dissolving monasteries, scattering and destroying tens of thousands of medieval books—the accumulation of eight hundred years of intellectual life.” The process of modern state making was particularly destructive in this regard. And yet so much remains, warranting so many centuries later St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s poignant reminder that we “stand on the shoulders of giants.”

But we have arrived at a time and a place—our own—where we do not want to be reminded of this indebtedness, of the gifts others have given us. Hubristic arrogance toward the past thrives in many quarters. We have become puffed up with self-pride and have fallen low as a result. Michael Nelson and his Rhodes College colleagues, by contrast, work from a stance of gratitude for much that has gone before, for brave men and women dedicated to life and learning, to letters and theology, to philosophy and the arts. They remain dedicated—in a lively, not a dour way—to what John Henry Cardinal Newman called “the university as an ethical idea.”

To all, like myself, who worry that we may be squandering much of our rich inheritance rather than nurturing it, contesting it, and thereby adding to it as a deposit of cultural faith to pass on to generations to follow, the complex story of the Search course at Rhodes College offers an example of the way a robust but resilient engagement with the past in the present can be sustained. Nelson and his colleagues remind us that a critical education helps students to engage in debate with interlocutors long dead or protagonists who never lived save on the page and, in that engagement, to elaborate rich concepts through which to understand our world. That is the way a living culture, and the education continuously defined and imperfectly realized within it, works.

In his great work, *The Idea of the University*, Newman warned against any single-minded approach to education, any reductionist account of

human meaning, purpose, and motivation. He knew things were more complicated. He understood that if you begin from impoverished assumptions, your view of education is itself bound to be impoverished—it cannot help but be—and you lose thereby education as “action upon our mental nature...the formation of character.” In *Celebrating the Humanities*, a wonderfully conceived and engagingly executed book, the dedicated keepers of the Search course flame at Rhodes College accomplish something remarkable. They offer solid grounds for hope—not, to be sure, giddy optimism, but hope, nonetheless—that our culture may yet have the resources with which to renew itself and to go on creating generations of scholars, seekers, and citizens.

*Jean Bethke Elshtain*



## Preface

I had a good idea in 1992 and a better one two years later. The good idea was to write a book marking the fiftieth anniversary of the “Search” course (formally titled *The Search for Values in the Light of Western History and Religion*) at Rhodes College, a Presbyterian-affiliated college in Memphis. The course, which was created for entering freshmen in 1945–1946 under the name *Man in the Light of History and Religion*, is a two-year, colloquium-intensive study of the literature, philosophy, religion, and history of the West from *Gilgamesh* to the present. Its catalog listings are Humanities 101, 102, 201, and 202, and it constitutes more than 10 percent of a student’s total credits toward graduation.

My motivation for writing such a book in the early 1990s was that, at a time when similar courses were being attacked at some colleges and universities as the dark vestiges of “Eurocentric patriarchy,” arrogantly presented at others under the banner of “our Judeo-Christian heritage,” and, at all too many institutions of higher education, indifferently taught in large lecture sections by resentful junior faculty, the Search course at Rhodes seemed evergreen. Its faculty were united in their commitment to the course but diverse in almost every other way, ranging from staunch traditionalists to feminists and postmodernists and including representatives from nearly a dozen academic departments. Its students comprised a substantial majority of the first-year class, and almost all of them elected to enroll in the course’s second year. Faculty and students alike took pride in how the students’ writing, critical thinking, verbal expression, and general education improved because of the course. Clearly the story of the Search course—how it began, how it developed, and how it has continued to thrive in a constantly changing intellectual and cultural environment—was worth recovering and recording.



If telling the Search story was the good idea, the better one was to share the research and writing of the book with several other participants in the course, including longtime faculty, recent faculty, men, women, historians, philosophers, political scientists, linguists, classicists, religious studies scholars, even (or perhaps especially) students. Bringing in others made the book better in ways that for half a century have made the course better, augmenting it with a large number of excellent voices, talents, and perspectives, all of them working together with just the right mix of individuality and collaboration.

The opening chapters of *Celebrating the Humanities* tell the history of the Search course from its origins at the end of World War II through its fiftieth year. In chapter 1, I introduce the course's founders—John Henry Davis, Alexander P. Kelso, Laurence F. Kinney, W. Raymond Cooper, and John Osman—and describe how they and President Charles E. Diehl influenced and were influenced by prevailing currents in humanistic and Christian higher education in the 1940s and 1950s. Douglas W. Hatfield picks up the narrative torch in chapter 2 and carries it through the 1960s, when the course was beset by many of the challenges of that tumultuous decade, up to 1975. In chapter 3, Robert R. Llewellyn chronicles the course from 1975 to 1985, equally stormy years because of obstacles that arose within the college itself. Then, in chapter 4, James M. Vest and Daniel E. Cullen bring the story of the Search course into the present, describing a decade in which the change in name from “Man” to “Search” neatly symbolized the turbulent academic waters that the course, like “Western civ” and “great books” courses everywhere, had to navigate. Vest and Cullen also analyze how Search has been able to survive and flourish, undamaged but not unaltered by the experience.

The remaining chapters offer a more eclectic mix of perspectives on the Search course. In chapter 5, Vest describes the spread of the course, or variants of it, from Rhodes to Davidson, Millsaps, Eckerd, Hampden-Sydney, the University of the South, and other distinguished liberal arts colleges. Chapter 6, written by Rhodes students David Welch Suggs, Jr., and James W. Turner, with assistance from a number of other student reporters, presents Search as a living institution by recording a week in the life of the course during the spring 1995 semester. Finally, in chapter 7, I speculate on the future of the Search course at Rhodes and of similar courses at other colleges and universities. In doing so, I take into account numerous trends in the humanities and higher education, ranging from the ongoing war over the “canon” to changes in educational technology.

Sprinkled throughout the book are a number of brief “perspectives”

essays, each written by a member of the Search faculty: Ellen T. Armour, Daniel Cullen, James Jobes, Larry Lacy, Kenneth Morrell, Fred W. Neal, Gail Corrington Streete, and me. These essays vary widely, in keeping with the spirit of the course. As its name implies, one of Search's purposes is to encourage students in their personal quests for meaning. Students differ greatly in the destinations to which their searches carry them. Why should it surprise anyone that professors do, too?

My colleagues and I have written *Celebrating the Humanities* in the hope that it will interest a wide range of readers. To those in the humanities and in higher education generally, the issue of how to treat the intellectual and moral legacy of the West within the college curriculum is a constant, significant, and often stormy one. There has been no shortage of books and essays on this subject in recent years. Nearly all of them, however, have been polemics of one sort or another. My colleagues and I hope that our book will offer a reflective, devoted, yet critical account of what one college actually has been doing for the past half-century. Perhaps others will see something of their own experiences and aspirations in this account.

Of course, another important audience for this book is the Rhodes community, wonderfully enumerated in all its diversity by Robert Llewellyn as comprising “housekeepers, teachers and coaches, students, alumni, parents, secretaries and staff assistants, retirees and saints, chaplains and counselors, benefactors, administrators and executives and deans, groundskeepers, trustees, librarians, maintenance technicians, friends.” To all of them—past, present, and future—*Celebrating the Humanities* is our lovesong for the college and the course with which we have cast our lot.

Many hands, hearts, and heads have helped me and my colleagues in the writing, editing, and publishing of this book. Several of the authors have used the notes to their chapters to thank individuals who were of particular assistance to them. But all of us are grateful to Elizabeth Gates Kesler, the college archivist, for her tireless and able help in gathering primary documents, to Jean Bethke Elshtain for her gracious foreword, and to all of the good people at Vanderbilt University Press who worked so hard and well to make our manuscript a book: Bard Young, for copy editing and composition; Gary Gore, for the book's design; and the director and staff of the press for the enormous care lavished on our book at every stage of its existence. My own debt, in this as in all things, is to my wife Linda Ezell Nelson (a 1993 adult alumnus of the Search course) and my sons Michael and Sam.

Michael Nelson



# 1

## The Founding Era 1945–1958

M I C H A E L N E L S O N

The headline in the August 1, 1945, edition of the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* must have intrigued careful readers:

SOUTHWESTERN TO TURN BACK  
TO GREAT BASIC BOOKS  
ADOPTING REVOLUTIONARY PLAN, MEMPHIS COLLEGE  
WILL FOUND TEACHING ON ROCK OF CLASSICISM

Their attention caught by the incongruous idea of “turning back” to a “revolutionary plan,” readers would have learned that Southwestern at Memphis was about to begin its fall 1945 semester by doing something that Harvard University was only talking about—namely, offering “a course designed to acquaint students with the sources of the civilization they live in, and to make them familiar with the great writings which have influenced Western culture.”<sup>1</sup>

The twelve-credit-hour course (six hours per semester) would be offered to all freshmen, the article continued, under the name *Man in the Light of History and Religion*. According to Southwestern President Charles E. Diehl, five professors would teach in the course—two historians, two philosophers, and a biblical scholar. They would take turns lecturing to the students (“all five professors will be present at all formal



lectures, four listening while the other speaks," the reporter marveled), then break up the class into small groups for discussions of the week's reading assignments.

Those assignments, drawn overwhelmingly from primary sources, would span the millennia of recorded Western history and thought. During the first semester, students would read widely in the literature of the ancient and early medieval world: the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, most of the Bible, Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Josephus, Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, Suetonius, Polybius, Plutarch, Terence, Plautus, Juvenal, Horace, Ovid, Lucretius, Epictetus, Seneca, Cicero, Tertullian, Augustine, Dante, Maimonides, Anselm, and Aquinas. The second semester would carry them forward to the present, concluding in a unit called The Two World Wars: Dictatorship and Democracy. The spring reading list included Chaucer, Machiavelli, Petrarch, More, Erasmus, Montaigne, Rabelais, Calvin, Luther, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Sidney, Bacon, Galileo, Newton, Hobbes, Molière, Racine, Donne, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke, Bunyan, Milton, Voltaire, Hume, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Goethe, Swift, Burke, Smith, Franklin, Malthus, Ricardo, Mill, Metternich, Kant, Marx, Emerson, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Goethe, de Tocqueville, Nietzsche, Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, James, Einstein, Planck—even Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler.

The *Commercial Appeal* quoted one of the new course's instructors, philosophy professor John Osman, as admitting that the reading load would be difficult for anyone to manage, much less a student fresh from high school. "But," Osman added, "the benefits from such a course will vastly outweigh the effort required to complete it." Osman's confidence in the importance of the endeavor was shared by his faculty colleagues: philosopher Alexander P. Kelso, biblical scholar Laurence F. Kinney, and historians W. Raymond Cooper and John Henry Davis. One of their main goals, they told the newspaper, was to overcome the growing "tendency of education to divide the body of human knowledge into many different fields. . . . Such a program has led to the fragmentation which marks our thinking. The consequence has been that students majoring in particular fields have learned their subject in isolation from the rest of that body of knowledge which is our Western cultural heritage." Another important goal of the course was to recover the understanding, exemplified by Socrates' "know thyself" and Jesus' "perfect thyself," that man "is a rational animal with a spark of the divine in him. Whenever Western civilization has ignored this heritage, it has fallen into low estate."

## Setting the Stage

Newspaper articles give a false sense of suddenness. Readers of the August 1, 1945, *Commercial Appeal* could have been forgiven for thinking that the new Southwestern course, reported on that day, had been invented the day before. In truth, the "Man" course, as people instantly began to call it, had been carefully constructed by Southwestern's president and faculty at the confluence of three major streams, each of which had been flowing through higher education for some time. The first was the general education, or "Great Books," movement. The second was World War II. The third was the almost three-decade long presidency of Charles Diehl.

### *Great Books*

Diehl and the Man faculty at Southwestern were not alone in decrying the fragmenting tendencies at work in contemporary higher education; nor were they the first. As the historian George Marsden has noted, in the 1920s the massive industrial and organizational effort required by the U.S. involvement in World War I had generated "the idea that an increasingly complex society demanded trained experts and specialists. The growth of higher education therefore took directions that would fill practical needs."<sup>2</sup> Heeding the call that Harvard President Charles William Eliot issued around the turn of the century, colleges and universities accelerated the trend away from the traditional common undergraduate curriculum to the free electives system. They began to offer an increasing number of technical and professional programs and, so that students could specialize in these programs, to loosen long-standing requirements that undergraduates take a significant number of liberal arts courses.<sup>3</sup>

Others learned a very different lesson from World War I.<sup>4</sup> The war had threatened the heritage of the West and laid bare the human capacity for evil, they believed, in ways that made urgent the task of educating Americans about the ideals on which Western civilization had been built. Toward the end of the war, at the prodding of the federal government, colleges and universities across the country had begun "war-issues courses" for student-soldiers in the Students' Army Training Corps. The purpose of these courses, which were jointly designed and taught by the historians, literary scholars, philosophers, political scientists, and economists on each campus, was to explore the deep roots of the war in the belligerent nations' history, literature, and philosophy. "Beyond its appeal



to professors as an outlet for their patriotism," the historian Carol Gruber found, "the War Issues Course was praised for having demonstrated the desirability and feasibility of educational reform to breach the walls separating the disciplines, to introduce some order in the chaos of the elective system."<sup>5</sup> Some scholars, notably Columbia University English professor John Erskine, President Robert M. Hutchins of the University of Chicago, and Mortimer Adler, who was Erskine's student at Columbia and, later, Hutchins's assistant at Chicago—were inspired to promote a broadly liberal general-education curriculum that was grounded in the great books of the West.

The General Honors course that Adler took from Erskine in the early 1920s was the prototype for general education—it had grown indirectly out of Columbia's War Issues Course.<sup>6</sup> General Honors consisted of sixty two-hour seminars spread over two years, each seminar devoted to a great book. Erskine believed that the mark of a great book was that it continued to speak to successive generations of readers. A number of curricular innovations flowed from this understanding. Because great books were timeless, students would read only primary texts, unencumbered by criticism or scholarship that would ground each work in its historical and cultural context. Because the books would shed light on the students' own lives (or so Erskine hoped), the class would discuss them, not hear lectures from the professor. And because the books were universally illuminating, leadership of the class would not rotate from specialist to specialist in literature, philosophy, classics, and so on, but would remain with one instructor, an amateur in the best sense of the word, who would be the students' fellow seeker as well as their docent in the search for truth.

Adler was evangelistic in his zeal for the great books approach. His most important convert was Hutchins, who in 1929, at age thirty, became president of the University of Chicago. Hutchins hired Adler as his assistant in 1930, and for the next twelve years they worked to infuse the university's undergraduate curriculum with great-books courses. (They even taught one together, modeled almost exactly on the course that Adler had taken from Erskine at Columbia.) In 1936, Hutchins published *The Higher Education in America*, which decried the trend toward specialization and professionalization in the curricula of most colleges and universities and urged that students be offered only general education courses during their freshman and sophomore years.<sup>7</sup> Hutchins's book was the most widely read and discussed work on higher education in the country for at least the next decade.

The great books approach to learning spread. Some colleges adopted the approach in its pure Erskine-Adler-Hutchins form. St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, for example, was founded in 1937 with a curriculum that consisted entirely of general education courses—its students read and discussed the great books and the great books only. (The president of St. John's, Stringfellow Barr, was a friend of Adler's.) Most colleges that incorporated such courses into the curriculum did so partially, however, and with more of a historical and cultural approach to the study of texts than the purists approved. But even they soon adopted the amateur over the professional ideal of instruction. "One institution after another," a contemporary observer found, "has concluded that a better humanities course could be developed when a single instructor took the same group of students through the whole program than when specialists were allowed to handle their own fields." As one instructor said, "I attribute [my success in the course] partly to my own ignorance. If I had felt really competent to teach such a course, pride would have prevented me from taking the frank attitude of the learner and sharing with the students fresh discoveries."<sup>8</sup>

A 1949 survey of the progress of general education in college humanities programs found that the approach had caught on mostly in private institutions outside the South, the majority of them church affiliated.<sup>9</sup> Curiously, however, the Bible found its way onto the reading list of few great books courses. Metaphysics—the rational search for first principles—was at the heart of general education, Hutchins argued in *The Higher Education*. As to theology, "we are a faithless generation and take no stock in revelation. . . . To look to theology to unify the modern university is futile and vain."<sup>10</sup> The influential *Harvard Report on General Education*, published in 1945 by a committee that President James B. Conant had appointed to reverse the trend toward specialization at his institution, was similarly nonbiblical and atheological in its recommendations for general education.

The general education movement was not without its critics. Virginia Woolf, deriding "middlebrow" culture as "betwixt and between . . . neither art itself nor life itself," singled out Adler's Great Books discussion groups as an especially egregious example of prosperous and complacent people seeking to add no more than a patina of intellectual respectability to their thoroughly bourgeois lives.<sup>11</sup> Stronger resistance came from within the colleges and universities themselves, which had been thriving on the trend toward specialization and professionalization. Faculty mem-



bers typically were resistant; as one study found, younger professors, anxious about their careers, "often feel that promotion can be better secured by faithfully discharging departmental duties than those in a course which has no administrative status."<sup>12</sup>

### *World War II*

The academic soul-searching that World War I had provoked was as nothing compared with that inspired by World War II. The rise of fascism in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, and its early alliance with Soviet communism, both rekindled fears that Western civilization's noblest traditions were imperiled and awakened hopes that a more widespread study of those traditions would be a safeguard for the future. When, on December 17, 1942, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox announced that colleges and universities must set aside liberal education for military training, Hutchins responded that the government was wrong to believe that "the only education useful in wartime is education designed to produce large quantities of low-grade mechanics and small quantities of high-grade ones. . . . I do not believe the technically-trained robots will be effective in time of war. I am certain that they will be a full-grown menace to their fellow citizens in time of peace."<sup>13</sup>

Some shared Hutchins's concern, asking, should not America cling all the more strongly to the liberal traditions that had so far spared it from a European-style collapse of democracy? As Wendell Willkie said in a January 14, 1943, address at Duke University, "The destruction of the tradition of the liberal arts, at this crisis in our history, when freedom is more than ever at stake . . . would be a crime, comparable, in my opinion, with the burning of books by the Nazis. And it would have approximately the same results. Burn your books—or, what amounts to the same thing, neglect your books—and you will lose freedom, as surely as if you were to invite Hitler and his henchmen to rule over you."<sup>14</sup> Hutchins's book on higher education received a new round of attention in the wartime environment.

### *Charles Diehl's Southwestern*

More, perhaps, than any other person in the South, Charles Diehl was absorbed by the national debate about general education.<sup>15</sup> But initially his ability to act on his interest was confined to a remote precinct of academe. The college whose presidency Diehl assumed in 1917 was not

Southwestern at Memphis but Southwestern Presbyterian University in Clarksville, Tennessee. The school's history had been turbulent since its founding in 1848—three name changes (from Masonic College to Montgomery Masonic College in 1851, then to Stewart College in honor of its president and major patron, William M. Stewart, in 1855, and to Southwestern Presbyterian University in 1874) and four corresponding changes in affiliation (from the Masonic Grand Lodge of Tennessee to the Masonic Lodge of Clarksville to the southern Presbyterian Church's Nashville synod to several southern synods). Of more immediate concern, the college's buildings were deteriorating, its endowment was shrinking, and its enrollment consisted of only fifty full-time students.

Diehl, a native of Charles Town, West Virginia, was the forty-two-year-old pastor of Clarksville's First Presbyterian Church when the college's board of directors recruited him to become president. His life had been much influenced by Woodrow Wilson, whose father, Joseph R. Wilson, had by coincidence headed Southwestern Presbyterian's divinity school in the 1880s. Like Woodrow Wilson, Diehl had studied at Johns Hopkins University, earning his B.A. in 1896. He went on to Princeton, where he took classes from Professor Wilson and earned an M.A.; he also graduated from the university's seminary (by then he was wearing Wilson-style pince-nez) and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. When Wilson became president of Princeton in 1902, he offered a new vision



*Charles E. Diehl, oil portrait by John Henry Davis.*



for the university that Diehl heartily endorsed: an Oxford-Cambridge style of education, grounded in the preceptorial method of small-group instruction, and an Oxford-Cambridge style of architecture. Indeed, Wilson decreed that thenceforth all new buildings constructed at Princeton would be in the Gothic style.

Reviving a dying college, not improving a strong one, was Diehl's immediate challenge in Clarksville. But he innovated as boldly as he could: an honor code for students in 1918, the admission of women in 1920, and a strategy of recruiting Oxford-trained scholars, including one of the founders of the Man course, W. Raymond Cooper, to the faculty. Cooper was a widely-traveled historian—he had grown up on a plantation in Alabama, earned degrees at Washington and Lee, Harvard, Oxford, and the University of Alabama law school, and served in the British army in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and India. Most significant, after Diehl and his board concluded that they could not fulfill their ambitions for the college in Clarksville, which had not developed into the large metropolis the college's founders had envisioned, they decided to move the institution to Memphis. The state's largest city rolled out not just the red carpet for Diehl, his faculty, and his students but also a green one: Memphians raised \$500,000 for their new college.

Memphis proved to be a blank canvas on which Diehl could paint his portrait of an excellent college. He was thwarted in his effort to rename it the College of the Mississippi Valley; the board of directors preferred Southwestern at Memphis. But in every other way Diehl succeeded. "Determined to fashion the most beautiful campus in the South, if not the entire United States," he purchased a wooded, 100-acre site near Overton Park in the city's growing eastern residential area.<sup>16</sup> He secured the services of Charles Z. Klauder of Philadelphia, the leading Gothic architect in the country and the designer of several Princeton buildings, and of a Klauder protégé, the Nashvillian Harry C. Hibbs, who had designed Scarritt College and Vanderbilt University's Alumni Memorial Hall and Neely Auditorium, to plan Southwestern's campus and buildings. He even bought a limestone quarry in Bald Knob, Arkansas, so that the college could fashion all of its buildings from the same stone. During the summer before the college opened its doors in September 1925, Diehl sent Cooper, who was the dean of men, ahead to Memphis to oversee final preparations. For two months, Cooper was the only person living on campus.

Diehl instituted an Oxbridge-style tutorial system of education, in which students would study certain subjects in individual sessions with

their professors. (Southwestern and Harvard were the only two colleges in the United States then employing such a system.) In addition, he redoubled his efforts to recruit faculty from the ranks of Oxford-educated Rhodes Scholars. More than a dozen Rhodes and other Oxford scholars joined the faculty during the Memphis phase of Diehl's tenure as president, including John Henry Davis and Alexander Kelso, two of the other founders of the Man course.

Kelso, the son of missionaries who were serving in India when he was born, was a philosopher and a Presbyterian minister. His two degrees from Oxford were a B.A. in ethics and an M.A. in theology, and at Southwestern he held the R. A. Webb Chair of Philosophy and Christian Ethics. Kelso was the sort of crusty, dramatic, impassioned, inspiring, unpredictable teacher whom students discuss constantly while they are in school and swap stories about at class reunions. One student penned a three-word tribute: "Socrates, Erasmus, Kelso." Another, Anne Howard Bailey, later wrote a National Christopher Award-winning television play about him for a 1951 episode of the "Armstrong Circle Theatre." The Kelso character in the play (Professor Kelsey) keeps students constantly off balance—he says things like "Exams are farcical. . . . And I enjoy farce!" and provokes a senior to describe him as someone who "loves to hang you on tenterhooks. Says it strengthens moral fibre!" But, as with the real Kelso, Kelsey's wisdom is what proves to be of enduring influence on his students. After an honor student cheats on an exam, he guiltily remembers Kelsey's discussion of Socrates: "Professor Kelsey put it this way. He said failure is sometimes worth more than success—and a man's got to know his true worth."<sup>17</sup>

Davis was equally fabled for his force of personality. A Kentuckian, he absorbed Oxford through every pore as a Rhodes Scholar studying history at Exeter College—by the time Davis returned home to teach at Davenport College in Lenoir, North Carolina, he wrote, "My English clothes, and accent, were quite a curiosity." After leaving Davenport to earn his doctorate at the University of Chicago, Davis turned down an offer from Vanderbilt and accepted one from Southwestern, whose faculty he joined in 1926. Davis got on wonderfully with Kelso—indeed, he lived with the Kelsos during his first year in Memphis—and tolerably with his fellow historian Cooper, "a misogynist . . . who always took the 'brighter' boys sections and left me the girls section and the 'dumb' section of boys." Davis was a famously affable and energetic professor; a colleague described him as "Leonardo-like" in his breadth of talents and



interests. He founded the Nitist Club at Southwestern, a group of faculty and students who wrote and read philosophical papers to each other. (Abraham Fortas, Class of 1930, was an early president). He also painted, including portraits of Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, each of whom taught briefly at Southwestern; played second bassoon in the Memphis Symphony Orchestra; and served as an ordained deacon at St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, whose centennial history he wrote. Davis was as Democratic as Kelso was Republican. Once, after losing an election bet over which party would carry Tennessee in a presidential election, Davis rolled a peanut down a campus sidewalk with his nose. Grandly (Davis was "a Falstaff without the vice or volume," one friend observed), he put the peanut in a little wagon, taped a band-aid to his nose, and briskly pushed it along.<sup>18</sup>

The mainline Protestant commitments that Cooper, Kelso, and Davis shared were no less important to Diehl than their Oxford pedigrees. Diehl's educational philosophy was Christian as well as British but in a way that resisted both of the leading educational trends of his time. Many colleges and universities, originally established as religious institutions, were abandoning their explicitly Christian identity for one grounded in science and professionalism.<sup>19</sup> Vanderbilt, for example, founded by Bishop Holland N. McTyeire in 1875, had cast off its Methodism in 1914. In response, a fundamentalist counteroffensive was underway. Conservative Christians founded hundreds of Bible colleges, mostly in the South, to offer students an alternative to the increasingly secular established colleges and universities. The 1925 Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, accelerated this development.

Diehl wanted Southwestern to open a third way: education that was liberal and general, not professional and specialized, and avowedly Christian, but not narrow or sectarian. With regard to liberal education, his main goals were to produce a "self-reliant and physically sound individual, with a high sense of honor, and an appreciation of *real* values; a responsible human being; . . . one who is mentally alert, has a disciplined intelligence, who has the capacity for critical analysis, ability to recognize and organize sets of facts, and to interpret them correctly; . . . one who has a cultivated taste, the ability to understand and appreciate the great documents of art, morals, and religion, and to evaluate them wisely; . . . one who is socially enlightened—kindly and courteous."<sup>20</sup>

As to Christian education, Diehl often bragged (inaccurately) that Southwestern was the first college in the country to require study of the

Bible in English. Freshmen had to take a two-semester sequence of Old and New Testament, then complete their education with the yearlong Senior Bible course designed to tie the entire college experience together. Diehl never doubted that every faculty member should be "a Christian gentleman with a love for the Christian Church and possessing the Christian graces that would make his influence felt among the students entrusted to his care; this, of course, in addition to his training as a thorough scholar in his chosen field of study."<sup>21</sup> But Christian faculty, especially those who taught religion, also had to be highly intellectual in their faith and in their teaching, drawing on the scientific method, archeological studies, and modern biblical scholarship, not imparting rigid dogma based on isolated passages of scripture. Although Southwestern would offer Christianity to its students as a serious alternative, it would not indoctrinate them.<sup>22</sup>

Diehl had to defend his commitment to Christian liberal education against critics on more than one front. Some felt that his approach was outdated and unrealistic. Diehl's "refusal to substitute the more popular vocational studies of the day for Mathematics, the Classics, and History was deemed old-fashioned," notes Cooper in his centennial history of Southwestern.<sup>23</sup> (Students had to choose from a limited range of courses in mathematics, Latin or Greek, English, a modern language, history, philosophy, and science, in addition to Bible.) Diehl did not dispute the accuracy of the label. The curriculum he admired most was the one that had prevailed in American higher education from the seventeenth century through the late nineteenth: a fixed course of study resting on the twin pillars of Christianity and the classics.<sup>24</sup> In a biographical statement written around 1950, Diehl trumpeted, "The program of religious studies has steadily increased [at Southwestern]; in the 1920s there was strenuous opposition to it by the Babbits of the day, who wanted more rah-rah and revenue for the college, but Dr. D. held his ground stoutly."<sup>25</sup>

Fundamentalists took a different tack in criticizing Diehl. In September 1930, at the instigation of W. S. Lacy, who had just resigned unhappily as Southwestern's executive secretary, a group of local Presbyterian ministers filed charges with the college's board that Diehl "is not what may be called Sound in the Faith," in part because "he did not believe in the historical or scientific accuracy of the first part of Genesis" and held unorthodox views concerning hell. On February 3, 1931, at a public hearing of the board presided over by Memphis mayor Watkins Overton, Diehl responded, "With regard to the first chapter of Genesis, I said I did



not think it was a scientific treatise." He added that "it was hard for me to think about [Plato] in an undying hell." But the burden of Diehl's testimony was to affirm his faith that "Christ alone is 'the Word of God,' that He alone is the perfect revelation of God, and that everything is to be judged and measured by His teachings and life." The board exonerated Diehl completely, to the joy of a widely supportive student body and faculty; so did his home presbytery in Nashville, where conservative Presbyterians had filed similar charges.<sup>26</sup>

World War II only confirmed Diehl in his commitment to Christian liberal education. In a 1943 speech to the Egyptians, a Memphis philosophical society, he argued that "one of the prime causes" of the current world crisis is the joining of the professionalization of education to

the secularization of education that has brought us to our present plight. . . . The religious aim was supplanted by the modern god efficiency, and the emphasis came to be laid on means rather than ends. . . . Technology, whether in the creation of new explosives or a new method of super-salesmanship, stands outside and disclaims the moral results of its acts. This war shows that the education of the past few decades has trained a fine group of technicians. It shows also that we might well turn back to the older theory of a liberal education for free men, which is concerned with convictions and consciences, with ultimate values.<sup>27</sup>

### Early Efforts

As concerned as Diehl was about what secularization and professionalism had been doing to higher education before World War II, he was even more concerned about the future. "The question we want to ask is, what about the postwar period as it relates to liberal education?" he said in his 1943 speech. "Are the humanities outmoded, or are they—philosophy, history, literature, and the arts—still to be depended upon to give perspective, poise, insights, conviction and a right sense of values? . . . Will there be a renewed effort to make our young men and women familiar with our history, more appreciative of our heritage, and more responsible for carrying forward our democratic way of life? . . . Will those in authority realize that education cannot be divorced from religion except at the peril of both, and the consequent impairment of our civilization?"<sup>28</sup>

Diehl's first effort to have Southwestern address these questions ended in disappointment. On October 28, 1943, he appointed the twelve-faculty-member Committee on Post-War Liberal Education, with political

scientist David M. Amacker as chair, and charged it to discover ways "of imparting a sense of the uses of knowledge in the lives of our students." "Great Books" were to be a part of this effort, Diehl added—"reading not about them, but reading the books themselves."<sup>29</sup> In addition, "It is probably wise to consider breaking down hard and fast departmental lines." The committee held many meetings, and eventually came up with a new program of comprehensive examinations in each senior's major field of study. But as to liberal education, "it produced only a host of conflicting definitions arranged in the fashion of Abelard's *Sic et Non*," according to John Henry Davis.<sup>30</sup>

### John Osman and "The Great Centuries"

Frustrated by the difficulties of generating reform within the college, Diehl turned outside for help. In July 1944, he sent a faculty delegation to a conference on the humanities at Vanderbilt. Several of them, including Kelso, came back fired with a stronger commitment to general education than when they left. Diehl also invited Theodore M. Greene, a philosopher and the chair of Princeton University's humanities division, and George A. Works, the former dean of the University of Chicago, to visit Southwestern as consultants on curriculum. Both were, like Diehl, Christians with a strong commitment to liberal education. Works came in February 1944, met with the faculty, and stimulated an inconclusive discussion about whether "a required survey of the humanities, consisting of a careful study of great books selected from various fields of thought" would be a good way to reduce the prevailing lack of "coordination or synchronization of the courses" taken by freshmen and sophomores.<sup>31</sup> Greene, whose contribution to the development of the Man course later would turn out to be substantial, was too tied down by war-intensified responsibilities at Princeton to visit Southwestern in 1944.

Greater success came when Diehl converted an outsider into an insider. John Osman was a young professor of philosophy at Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, during the war, but he was spending most of his time as physical-training director for the Army Air Forces Training Detachment that was based on campus. (Osman had been a champion sprinter for Presbyterian College as a student, making it to the finals of the 1932 U.S. Olympic tryouts.) Diehl invited Osman to speak at Southwestern's spring vesper service on April 2, 1944. Osman, who had an M.A. in philosophy from the University of Richmond and an M.Th. from Richmond's Union Theological Seminary, accepted the invitation,



and his visit was a great success. As a speaker he was, in the words of one observer, "limber and nice"—the front-page headline in the *Sou'wester* after his vesper talk was a mildly astonished, "Dr. Osman Proves to Be Interesting." (His theme was that the students should be worthy of the sacrifice made once and for all time by Jesus Christ and those made currently by American soldiers.) More important, Diehl discovered that Osman's views on Christian liberal education resembled his own—Osman believed strongly that one should study the great books and that the Bible was "the classic of classics."<sup>32</sup> Soon after Osman's visit, Diehl invited him to join the Southwestern faculty. He accepted with alacrity and arrived on campus in July 1944. Osman's position required him to teach philosophy, to serve as a wide-ranging assistant to Diehl, and, above all, to create the new adult education program that the college wanted to offer in anticipation of large numbers of returning veterans.

Osman's first act as adult education director was to organize a symposium for the Memphis and campus communities on The Great Centuries during the 1944–1945 academic year. Every Friday night for sixteen weeks, townspeople and students were invited to Southwestern's Hardie Auditorium to hear ninety minutes of lectures from various faculty members and (if the lecturers finished in time—they often did not) to ask thirty minutes of questions. The titles of each week's programs tended toward the celebratory—The Greek Miracle (5th Century B.C.), The Greatness That Was Rome (1st Century A.D.), The Century of Hope (19th Century), and so on. As the program booklet indicated, two of the main premises of the symposium were that, intellectually and spiritually, the past was better than the present and that the way to make things better in the future would be to recover the best ideas and beliefs of the past:

The world is intellectually and spiritually adrift. Long established standards of life and conduct are being swept away in a torrent of fluid history. There are absence of direction and confusion everywhere. . . . Perhaps if we can trace our heritage back to Israel, Greece, and Rome, we shall find those "first principles" which order our lives.<sup>33</sup>

One additional premise underlay the Great Centuries symposium: the importance of Christianity in sorting out the wheat in the Western tradition from the chaff. As Osman wrote, "The cultural materials of a Nazi, a Dane, or an American do not essentially differ. It is in the arrangement of these materials and the emphasis placed upon certain ones of them that

the great difference lies. The Symposium strives to work the materials of our Western cultural heritage into an organic whole under a single integrating principle. Such an arrangement will give us an approach to knowledge in the light of the highest truth—the sovereignty of God."<sup>34</sup>

The public's response to the Great Centuries was enthusiastic. Both Memphis newspapers, the *Commercial Appeal* and the *Press-Scimitar*, assigned reporters to write day-of and day-after stories each week. Chairs lined the aisles to accommodate the overflow crowds. Occasional interruptions—flickering lights on one occasion, a panicked, crowd-buzzing bird on another—were taken in stride. A student reporter for the *Sou'wester*, impressed by all that he had heard, proclaimed: "Southwestern has one of the best faculties in the United States."<sup>35</sup>

As a window opening on the Southwestern faculty of the day, the Great Centuries series revealed not just the faculty's excellence but also its evolving appreciation for Diehl's vision of Christian general education. Nineteen of the college's thirty faculty members took part, including all of the humanities faculty except for two Romance language professors. Two of the five natural scientists (one of them was Peyton Nalle Rhodes, a physicist and the future president of Southwestern) but only one social scientist, David Amacker, participated. Those who later would found the Man course were especially active, including Osman and his fellow newcomer and Union Theological Seminary alumnus, Laurence Kinney, a Presbyterian minister with a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Virginia who had joined the Southwestern faculty in January 1944 as the Albert Bruce Curry Professor of Bible. Kinney and Kelso spoke at eight sessions each, on topics ranging from, in Kelso's case, Virgil to twentieth-century pragmatism, and, in Kinney's, from Jesus to the nineteenth-century philosophy of progress. Osman, in addition to being the symposium's organizer, appeared five times, treating the Stoics and Epicureans, Kierkegaard, and a variety of other topics. Davis and Cooper spoke almost as frequently, and with equal range. Together, the five gave nearly half the lectures in the series.

The tone of the lectures was, as promised in the program, celebratory about the past, deeply concerned about the present (especially the American present), and urgent about the future. "The problem which faced the old Romans is similar to one which faces us today," said Cooper in a representative peroration. "Will we at the end of this war insist that laws and institutions peculiar to the American system are more enlightened than those of the rest of the world, and therefore must be adopted



by the 'One World' of the future; or will we be willing to study the laws and institutions of all nations, and assist in developing legal institutions and a legal system based on the ideas of justice and equality common to all nations?"<sup>36</sup>

The Great Centuries symposium crystallized some of the faculty participants' thinking about the kind of higher education that must follow the war if the future was to be better than the present. "The fate of the world is in the hands of the Democracies," Kelso said in one lecture, "and, in the last resort, of the people of the United States. . . . The fate of democracy in this land depends on education which reaches deep into a man's soul, leading to spiritual growth and development and, ultimately, spiritual freedom."<sup>37</sup> Osman drew the issue more plainly: "We tried to sell the boys the war on a materialistic basis . . . and it didn't work. No man is willing to go out and die for a mechanical refrigerator. But a man is willing to die for an ideal or a great spiritual concept, and the only way we can judge what is worth dying for is by using the yardstick of time."<sup>38</sup> Diehl, impressed by all that he had heard during the preceding fifteen sessions, ended the symposium approvingly on April 6, 1945. "Our only hope for the future is to return to the life of the spirit," he urged; "to realize that the problems we face today and in the future can be solved only by those who are intellectually disciplined and morally enlightened, that that which is economic and social and political must be subordinated to that which is spiritual."<sup>39</sup>

#### *Consultants and Planning*

The Great Centuries symposium laid a strong foundation on which to build the kind of curriculum innovations for the postwar period that Diehl had been wanting. Because the lectures had been so successful, faculty participants such as Cooper and Davis made the obvious suggestion: Why not do something like this for our students? Kinney and Osman, before coming to Southwestern, had already spent many hours together in Richmond sharing their passion for interdisciplinary education.<sup>40</sup> They and some other faculty members, including Kelso, were especially eager to bring a version of the symposium into the curriculum: they had invested a great deal of time preparing lectures and had enjoyed the experience of working and teaching together in a common endeavor. The combination of Osman's energy, Kinney's irenic calmness ("He had a way of being a kind of central spirit without exercising any kind of authority," said one observer),<sup>41</sup> Kelso's dramatic flair, Davis's breadth, courtliness,

and confidence, and Cooper's commitment to the college gave the group team-like coherence. All stood, unselfconsciously, on the traditional liberal arts side of the prevailing divide in the humanities that separated wide-ranging "men of letters" from the specialized philologists who had come to dominate the universities. As the literary scholar Gerald Graff has observed, "Literature for them was about spiritual and social values, not the pedantic etymologies, linguistic laws, and antiquarian facts that seemed to be the only thing the research scholars could find in it."<sup>42</sup> Most important, the five of them had developed whatever inchoate ideas they previously may have had about the importance of Christian general education into a mature educational philosophy.

Diehl was excited about the prospects for curriculum reform. On January 15, 1945, he praised the Great Centuries series at a faculty meeting and, according to the minutes, "raised the question of whether or not such a course should be required of all Southwestern freshmen."<sup>43</sup> The next day he wrote to Theodore Greene, who finally had been able to take time off from Princeton and was scheduled to visit Southwestern on January 27. In his letter, Diehl mentioned the idea (which he attributed to Cooper) of introducing a Great Centuries-style course into the curriculum, then asked Greene to broach the following topics when he met with Southwestern's faculty: "Indoctrination in ideals and values, religious, moral, esthetic, social, of Western World for citizenship and international mindedness. General reading of great books to be required of all students?"<sup>44</sup>

Greene was more than receptive to Diehl's suggestion. A Christian philosopher—"one of the few Christian philosophers in the country," Diehl had said of Greene when seeking the directors' approval to invite him<sup>45</sup>—and a passionate advocate of liberal education, Greene was a friend of Diehl's and an old friend of Cooper's. (While Cooper was with the British army in India during World War I, Greene was serving as secretary of India's YMCA and teaching at Forman Christian College of the University of Punjab.) In 1940, the American Council of Learned Societies had commissioned Greene to study how liberal education was faring in the increasingly hostile environment of specialization and professionalization in higher education. In the course of his research, Greene had visited forty-five colleges around the country, including Southwestern, where he gave the 1941 commencement address. The theme of his address—that World War II had come about because "the acids of modernity have eaten away, or at least gravely weakened, our cultural and



spiritual foundations” and that “[t]he cure, and the only one, is liberal education”—was music to Diehl’s ears.<sup>46</sup> When Green’s ACLS report, *Liberal Education Re-Examined: Its Role in a Democracy*, was published as a book in 1943, Diehl sang its praises in a review for the *Commercial Appeal*.<sup>47</sup>

Greene’s book contained, among other things, his proposal for the ideal humanities curriculum. This curriculum set history and philosophy apart from and, implicitly, above the rest of the humanities: arts, letters, and religion. According to Greene, “The primary function of both [history and philosophy] . . . is to provide integration and synoptic interpretation. So conceived, they have no distinct subject matter. Their primary task is to relate the specialized activities of the less comprehensive disciplines. . . . Parts acquire new meaning when they are set in a larger context.”<sup>48</sup>

During Greene’s visit, Southwestern’s faculty seemed to embrace his vision of the humanities curriculum and considered how to adapt it to the college’s distinctly Christian view of liberal education. They discussed with him, in an evening session, the “desirability of a course combining religion/Bible, philosophy, history in freshman year.” After Greene’s departure, in the section of the report on their conference with him that dealt with the goal of infusing values and coherence into the curriculum, the faculty secretary wrote, “History, philosophy, religion are synthesizing disciplines touching all. These are basic axes of all knowledge.”<sup>49</sup> The three disciplinary building blocks of what soon would become the Man course—not just history and philosophy, but also religion—were now in place.

### The Man Course, 1945–1958

Institutional inertia and departmental narrowness are powerful forces in academe. The momentum behind Diehl’s ideas for, in general, a renewal of Christian liberal education in the postwar era, and, in particular, an interdisciplinary humanities course for Southwestern’s freshmen that would serve as the basis for such an education seemed to slacken as soon as the glow of Greene’s visit wore off. On March 3, 1945, Diehl proposed at a faculty meeting that the college “consider the idea of giving the Great Centuries course next year to freshmen and sophomores.” No response is recorded in the minutes.<sup>50</sup> When he renewed his plea two days later, the faculty “moved and passed that this suggestion be tabled.”<sup>51</sup>

Diehl quickly arranged for Greene to return to Southwestern on May 21. He preceded Greene’s arrival with a May 14 letter that revealed his frustration:

As you well know it is very difficult to get members of a faculty, nearly all of whom are individualists, who think well of themselves and their departments, to be openminded about the matter of making changes. The idea of paying less attention to departments than to fields or divisions is not heartily welcomed, and yet this is one matter that must be seriously faced. I wish that you would exercise your persuasive ingenuity in connection with the problem.<sup>52</sup>

Diehl was not alone in wanting to bring about change, however. After the faculty voted to table his March 5 motion, the proposal for a Great Centuries-style course ended up in the hands of a committee that was dominated by Davis, Kelso, Cooper, and, as chair, Osman. One week before Greene returned to Southwestern, the committee issued a report whose stated purpose was “To construct a course in Western Civilization offering a new intellectual adventure to the student who seeks a liberal education.” Tentatively titled Humanities or The Cultural Heritage, the course was “proposed for next year and constructed around the general plan set forth in ‘The Great Centuries Lectures.’” It would be two semesters long, interdepartmental (“or nondepartmental”), chronologically arranged, and “concerned with the effects of events upon human attitudes and relationships.” The readings would come from primary sources, and nonliterary “great works of art” also would be included. One-fourth of the course would be spent on each of four units: The Classical Heritage (to 500 A.D.), The Medieval Scene (500–1550), The Culture of Modern Europe (1550–1815), and Our American Heritage (1815–present).<sup>53</sup>

Greene’s May visit, joined to Diehl’s steady pressure and the committee’s recommendation, turned the faculty tide in favor of the new freshman humanities course. On May 21 and 22, Greene and the committee worked to refine the proposal, addressing questions such as: How many people would be involved in teaching the course?; how many credit hours would it receive?; would it be a required or an elective course?; how would religion, history, and philosophy be intermixed? The next evening, with Greene present as a “special guest,” the faculty voted to approve the still unnamed course and charged the committee to spend the summer getting it ready for the freshman class that would arrive in September.<sup>54</sup>



*The First Year, 1945–1946*

With Osman as chair, Davis, Kelso, Kinney, and Cooper as members, and Diehl frequently in attendance, the Committee on the Course—now the staff of the course—met frequently during the late spring and early summer of 1945. Because they were people who generally liked and respected each other, shared a common educational philosophy, and had worked together before, they resolved the major issues of the course with remarkable speed and congeniality. They chose the name Man in the Light of History and Religion because it embodied the course's union of history, religion, and philosophy. The purposes they defined for the course, as stated in their jointly authored introduction to the bound syllabus (actually a full-blown study guide) that they distributed to all students, were threefold: first, to learn about "our cultural heritage by study of the historical movements and institutions and the philosophical and religious ideas which have produced Western man"; second, to help students grow personally ("Students need such an historic-religious framework into which they can fit their own lives and times"); and third, to lay an intellectual foundation for college study. Ruing "the tendency of education to divide the body of human knowledge into many different fields, such as history, art, economics, politics, religion, philosophy, and



Founders of the Search course. (Left to right): W. Raymond Cooper (inset), Lawrence F. Kinney, John Osman, John Henry Davis, Alexander P. Kelso.

the various physical sciences," as well as the consequent "fragmentation which marks our thinking," the Man staff committed itself to offering students a "cultural synthesis" so that their entire college education "will be fashioned into an organic whole."<sup>55</sup>

Not all the challenges of constructing the course were so stimulating; many were simply logistical. The staff needed a large lecture hall with maps, a slide projector, a screen, and windows that could be darkened—room 101 in Science Hall (now Kennedy Hall) was secured. A daily hour, six days a week, on the schedule needed to be cleared—the registrar pushed aside other freshman classes so that the new course could meet at nine o'clock in the morning. A massive amount of assigned reading material had to be gathered and made available to students—the library provided a room (soon dubbed the "Man room") on the third floor of Palmer Hall, and Mary Osman, the assistant librarian, placed thirty or more copies of each text on reserve, along with works of visual art and music. (A \$10 fee was assessed students in the course to help pay for the purchase of these materials, a substantial sum considering that the college's annual tuition was \$300.) In addition, the staff strongly advised students to purchase Helen Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* and required them to buy *Western Civilizations: Their History and Culture*, a 1941 text by the Rutgers University historian Edward McNail Burns that avowed to embody "the New History," in which "factual material" is mostly "presented as the groundwork of great cultural movements."<sup>56</sup>

The major question that faced the staff during the summer of 1945 was pedagogical: How best to organize and teach the course? They decided to arrange the academic year into thirty weekly units: the first semester would cover the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, early Christians, and part of the Middle Ages; the second semester would move forward from the medieval period to the present. Each week would begin with four days of lectures by some combination of Cooper, Davis, Kelso, Kinney, and Osman (the load was distributed fairly evenly among them), then end on Friday and Saturday in small-group discussions of the week's reading assignments, with each group led by a member of the course staff. Every staff member pledged to attend every lecture. Davis described one good effect of this practice in a 1949 progress report on the course—namely, that "the lecturer is [thus] put on his mettle and is less inclined to trust to inspiration or to the digressions or diversions which are sometimes indulged in when one is not under the critical scrutiny of conferees."<sup>57</sup>



The Man course embodied the general-education ideal that the best instruction is by broadly curious, fiercely dedicated amateurs. Although the lecture assignments tended to accommodate each instructor's area of specialization, the comprehensiveness of the course meant that each also had to stretch beyond his discipline. The philosophers Kelso and Osman lectured on Homeric Greece and Canaanite Culture, respectively. Kinney, a biblical scholar, handled Dante. The historian Cooper talked about The Jew in the Roman Empire and his colleague Davis about Copernicus and Galileo. The requirements of leading discussion sections were even more demanding. "The historian or the philosopher must be prepared to discuss with his section the assigned books of the Bible," Davis noted, "and on predominantly historical or philosophical readings the Bible instructors must be prepared to conduct discussions in what formerly may have been considered alien subjects."<sup>58</sup> To assure that every student would have every professor for part of the year, each group of students rotated periodically from professor to professor.

The load on the students was formidable. One hundred five freshmen, or 40 percent of the entering class, enrolled in the Man course in September 1945, attracted in part by the publicity the course had received in the local press (most Southwestern students at this time were from Memphis or its environs) and in part by the college's willingness to accept the Man course as a substitute for freshman Bible and history in the list of degree requirements. The shock that many of them felt during their first week in the course, which was also their first week in college, must have been acute. Lectures on subjects like The Nature and Origins of Civilization and The Hebrew Cosmogony, a list of discussion topics that included "What is the origin of art?" "Creation: ultimate explanation and proximate causes," and "The meaning of history" were complemented by reading assignments that covered 98 pages in the Burns textbook, 101 pages in Gardner, all of Genesis, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, selections from Herodotus, and a variety of other primary texts.

The pace never slackened, especially because each week brought either a paper or a quiz. A weeklong spring semester unit on The Puritans, for example, required students to read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Milton's *Areopagitica*, and selections from Locke, Harrington, Jonathan Edwards, and others. Sometimes the course's assignments were farfetched, as when the staff told the students to read Buddha and Lao-Tse alongside several Hebrew prophets but gave no guidance about how to connect them with each other. Often the assignments were brilliant, as when the Old Testa-

ment book of Esther was paired with Homer and "The ancient woman: Helen, Penelope, and Esther" was offered for discussion.

During the summer, Diehl had warned the staff that it was wildly overestimating the amount of work that freshman students could handle, but "John Davis and one or two others thought I was a pessimist."<sup>59</sup> Midway through the fall semester, however, even as class attendance remained so reliable that the staff did not bother to take roll, many students were floundering. One student quipped to Cooper, "If it takes five learned professors to teach this course, I don't see how one poor freshman can be expected to pass it."<sup>60</sup> Gloria Ash Minor later recalled, "I could not read all the assignments, much less understand them all—I was so at sea in the freshman year."<sup>61</sup> The staff, which met weekly over lunch to discuss how things were going in the course and how they could be improved, began editing assignments out of the syllabus even as the course proceeded.

#### *The Course Evolves, 1946-1958*

After a relentlessly busy first year, the summer of 1946 offered Cooper, Davis, Diehl, Kelso, Kinney, and Osman an occasion to assess what had worked in the Man course and what needed repair or replacement. Davis's notes from that summer's deliberations, scribbled on a copy of the 1945-1946 syllabus, are revealing. The basic structure of the course—the thirty weekly units, the chronological design, most of the readings, the blending of history, religion, and philosophy, the emphasis on primary sources, and other essential elements—was to remain unaltered in the 1946-1947 version. But incremental changes (noted by Davis in pencil in the margins) and deletions (boldly crossed out) were to be made in nearly every unit.

Moderating the load on the students "from unimaginable to merely impossible" (as one professor put it) was one reform. The Gardner textbook on art was abandoned, along with most references in the course to architecture, music, painting, and sculpture. (The thinking seemed to be that since they could not do art well, it would be better not to do it at all.) Nips and tucks were made in the remaining weekly reading assignments—Herodotus was removed from the first week's list, for example, and Edwards and much of Bunyan were excised from the unit on the Puritans. Wednesdays now offered, in place of a fourth lecture, a third discussion session to consider the week's reading assignments—the result of another "I told you so" from Diehl, who had thought from the beginning that the course was lecture heavy.<sup>62</sup> Finally, the weekly discussion ques-



tions listed in the syllabus were focused directly on the reading assignments themselves, instead of on broad and abstract topics.<sup>63</sup>

More dramatic than the changes in the syllabus were the changes that were taking place in Southwestern's student body. Wartime enrollments had been small (382 in 1944–1945), overwhelmingly female (80 percent), and of traditional college age. Now, as the armed services demobilized, older male veterans flooded back to college; indeed, the 801-member freshman class that enrolled in September 1946 consisted mostly of men. Initially, Southwestern greeted the veterans with some trepidation—the relieved tone of a 1947 report by Peyton Rhodes, the chair of the Faculty Committee on Veterans' Counseling and Education, is revealing in this regard: "I think most of the fears we had about the adjustment of ex-service personnel to college life were groundless. In general, and in fact almost without exception, I have found them pleasant, cooperative, and uniformly courteous."<sup>64</sup> Tom Jolly, an early student in the Man course and later a classics professor at Rhodes, recalls, "All of us were living in the shadows of the depression and the war and were serious about our education. Then when the veterans came it intensified. They were dead serious about getting an education."<sup>65</sup> Another fear—that the veterans would reject the liberal arts and demand professional and vocational programs—also was quickly allayed: they embraced the college's curriculum and impressed the faculty as more intellectually curious than most of the younger students. In fact, the only significant change that Southwestern had to make to accommodate the newcomers was to purchase thirty-six trailers from a wartime base in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and establish a small village north of the football field to house the married veterans and their families. Soon "diapers waving like banners among the veterans' trailers" became a familiar sight.<sup>66</sup>

Other veterans and their spouses were among the intended audience for the new Division of Adult Education that Osman had been hired to create at Southwestern. During the Man course's first year, Osman offered a noncredit course called *The Great Tradition*, in which adults met weekly for a two-hour evening discussion of twenty classic works from East and West. In 1946–1947, the adult education division offered a full-blown great-books program—a new version of *The Great Tradition*; *The Great Books Theatre* (professional readings of plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and others); and *The Soul of Russia*, a study of Russian literature. Osman previewed these offerings in a manifesto that embodied

the same mix of crisis warnings and exhortations for general education that had produced the Man course:

We waged a war with fear and in victory find defeat. . . .

Everywhere there is fear—fear of the atomic bomb, fear of Russia, fear of the Negro, fear of seemingly impossible economic problems, fear that the world of men has at last reached the end of a cycle and that civilization is on the wane. . . .

We have arrived at a time when man must fulfill his nature as a rational being. Ignorance is a crime against the state. . . .

The materials for this education are found today, as they were in Plato's day, in the Great Books.<sup>67</sup>

Planning the third year of the Man course brought further revisions in the syllabus. In September 1947 Osman took a leave of absence to pursue a doctorate at the University of Chicago, leaving Kinney, Davis, Cooper, and Kelso, the new chair of the course, to carry the load by themselves. (Kinney took over the adult education program.) The effort that had begun the previous year to tie the students' reading assignments to what was actually covered in class was intensified: the staff jettisoned the Burns textbook in favor of staff-authored one- to two-thousand-word essays that introduced each of the thirty units by setting the historical stage and previewing the assigned readings. The essays were uniformly literate and erudite. As one would expect from this group of writers, the tone of the introductions was respectful of Western civilization and, in particular, of the assigned authors and their works—not iconoclastic but not gushy either. The Christian perspective did not dominate the essays, nor was it concealed. For example, Kinney's introduction to the first of two units on Jesus began, "The lines of the Bible converge in the person of Jesus," and the final unit's essay (by Kelso) claimed that "only the spirit that makes man conscious of God as his Father can create [democracy]." In addition, the postwar domestic and international turmoil that Osman had described in his adult education brochure replaced the war itself as the dark force that was seen to be shadowing the times. Kelso's preface to the third edition of the syllabus asserted, "Today we are in what may well prove to be the greatest of world crises." Two new concluding units to the course were devoted to *Our American Heritage* and *Our American Destiny*.<sup>68</sup>

Southwestern's Class of 1950 was the first to approach graduation



with the Man course under many of its members' belts, and Dean A. Theodore Johnson used the occasion to survey student reaction to the course. He asked 139 students from all four classes to fill out a questionnaire. The results were encouraging. Ninety percent said that the Man course was "more valuable" than "other elementary courses, and as a basic orientation for college work;" only one student checked "less valuable." Sixty-three percent answered "much more meaningful" when asked, "Did it succeed in making clearer your concept of the role of religion in life?"; again, only one dissented. Sixty-four percent liked the balance of lectures and discussions, and of those who did not, almost as many wanted more lectures as more discussions. Yet seventy-one percent said that "the discussion sections aided [me] in understanding the reading material," far outnumbering the two students who said that the colloquia had been of no help.<sup>69</sup> Summarizing the results, Johnson wrote, "A number of students said it was the best course they had ever taken."<sup>70</sup>

To be sure, Johnson had surveyed a select group—namely, those who chose the Man course instead of going the traditional freshman-Bible, freshman-history route. As Davis noted a few years later, because Man "has the reputation of being more difficult than the separated study of Bible and history, I must report that enrollment has tended to diminish rather than expand." (The course bottomed out at eighty students.) The staff consoled itself with the thought that "like Gideon, we are attracting a larger proportion of the brave and the strong."<sup>71</sup> Indeed, students who enrolled in the Man course were widely regarded—by fellow students as well as by themselves—as an elite band. Richard C. Wood, who later joined the Southwestern faculty as an English professor and taught in the Man course, recalls that as a student, "Those of us who took the alternative program sometimes felt benighted, such was the reputation of 'Man.'"<sup>72</sup> An annual award, named for retired Bible professor William O. Shewmaker, was established by donors to honor the freshman who attained the "highest distinction" in the Man course. And it is the barely concealed pride of the boot camp survivor, not the overt complaints, that shines through this *Sou'wester* column by Eugene Botsford:

And that Man course! Imagine my joy when I open the syllabus and find that the professors have neatly arranged for me to read for tomorrow's lecture the following: 1) The Old Testament, 2) Ancient Hebrew Relics and their Origins, pages 10–898, and 3) The Encyclopedia Britannica, Volumes A–M.<sup>73</sup>

The word of mouth among students about the Man course consisted of more than just "great course, real hard." Some of those who had been raised in conservative Christian homes and churches also spread the alarm that the course was a threat to students' faith. To be sure, all of the faculty members were avowed Christians—a student's notes from the course, for example, record the title of one lecture ("The Risen Lord") and the professor's conclusion that there are "more facts for than against the resurrection." But they were clustered in the liberal Protestant band of the theological spectrum, and students also could expect to hear in lecture statements like this from Professor (and Reverend) Kinney about the first two chapters of Genesis: "If the object of the writers of these chapters was to convey physical information, then certainly it is imperfectly fulfilled." Kinney went on to say, quoting Marcus Dods, that "if their object was to give an intelligible account of God's relation to the world and to man, then it must be owned that they have been successful in the highest degree." He and his colleagues no doubt hoped that students would focus on the second of these two sentences. But conservative Christians often found the first, with its suggestions that the six-day chronology of creation is inaccurate and that "imperfectly" is a word one can properly use in connection with the Bible, to be the more arresting.<sup>74</sup>

The 1950s maintained the pattern of change within a basic framework of continuity in the Man course. The syllabus continued to be revised, but less frequently than during the first few years. The major change—to reduce the thirty weekly units to ten longer ones, each with the word *man* somehow infused into the unit titles in the 1956 sixth edition of the syllabus—was more organizational than substantive, although science-laden lectures on the origins of the universe and the origins of life were added to the opening unit. As for the faculty, Cooper had dropped out to concentrate on his history courses in the late 1940s, and Osman left Southwestern in 1952 to accept a position with the Ford Foundation. But Kinney, Kelso, and Davis continued to teach in the course, along with new colleagues who shared their and Diehl's commitment to Christian general education. In 1952, W. Taylor Reveley, a Presbyterian minister who had been the college's chaplain from 1946 to 1949, returned from doctoral studies at Duke University to join the faculty as a professor of Bible and teach in the Man course. Daniel D. Rhodes, also a Presbyterian minister with a Duke Ph.D., began teaching philosophy and Man at Southwestern in 1956. Although neither re-



mained at the college—Rhodes accepted a teaching position at Davidson in 1960 and Reveley was named president of his alma mater, Hampden-Sydney College, in 1963—each took the Man course to his new institution. Indeed, Rhodes was recruited for the specific purpose of creating a Man-style program at Davidson (see chapter 5.)

The logistical challenges of the 1950s proved to be more substantial than the curricular ones. To accommodate its swelling postwar enrollment, Southwestern had purchased some old army hospital buildings from Camp Forrest in Tullahoma, Tennessee, and replanted them on the north side of the campus. One of these thinly-walled, erratically heated “G.I. shacks,” as they came to be called, became the Man building, the home of the course’s reading room, lecture hall, and faculty offices. “The heater was old and rickety,” recalls Marcia Calmer Beard, a student in the course, “and when it was on, the fan would drown out the lecturer’s voice. We usually asked for the heater to be turned off, preferring to hear the lecturer even though freezing with our coats on.”<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

By 1958, Man in the Light of History and Religion had evolved from a glimmer in Charles Diehl’s eye to the flagship course of Southwestern at Memphis. Enrollment had climbed to 150 students—more than two-thirds of the freshman class—as the course’s “reputation spread from graduates to entering freshmen.”<sup>76</sup> Diehl had distributed the syllabus widely among his fellow educators, and to good effect. Theodore Greene spoke for many when he hailed the course as “one of the most significant educational projects in America.”<sup>77</sup> In 1949, U.S. Commissioner of Education Earl J. McGrath, who was compiling a national study of general education in the humanities, invited John Henry Davis to submit a chapter about the Man course, joining authors from Harvard, Haverford, Wisconsin, Cal Tech, Chicago, Reed, Wesleyan, and other distinguished colleges and universities. Davis was later invited to write a similar chapter for a subsequent volume in 1960.<sup>78</sup>

For a number of reasons, the 1960s would usher in an era of controversy about “great books” education in general and the Man course in particular. But on the eve of that decade, the main challenge at Southwestern seemed to be to spread the concept more widely across the curriculum. Kelso, in his preface to the 1947–1948 Man syllabus, had thrown down the gauntlet to the disciplines of psychology and sociology, which

he and his colleagues regarded as the humanities’ “academic competitors” in the effort “of awakening the mind of the scholar.” The social sciences, Kelso charged, are ahistorical and prone “to the folly of a purely secular, that is, contemporary view of man.” Similarly, Peyton Rhodes, who became Southwestern’s president when Diehl stepped down in 1949, affirmed Diehl’s commitment to Christian liberal education in his inaugural address; in 1958, he renewed efforts, first undertaken by Diehl in 1947, to persuade the college’s social science and natural science faculties to develop general-education courses in their divisions that would be comparable to the Man course.<sup>79</sup> Those efforts failed, leaving Man’s primacy in the Southwestern curriculum unchallenged.



## On Faith and the Critical Method

L A R R Y L A C Y



As best I can tell, I am the only person to have both taken the Search course and taught in it. As both student and instructor, I have sensed a strong relationship between my involvement in the course and my Christian faith.

What was it like for me to be a student in the Search course (then the “Man” course) in the late 1950s and, a few years later, fresh from three years of graduate study in philosophy at the University of Virginia, to become a member of the course staff, working with most of the professors under whom I had studied? In one way nothing changed—it seemed to me when I was a student, when I was a new faculty member, and now, as someone looking back more than thirty years later, that in those days “there were giants in the land.” Two of these giants especially stand out in my mind—Charlie Bigger and Larry Kinney. Both were philosophers; Kinney was also a New Testament scholar. Both were committed to philosophical reflection but also open to the claims of revealed truth. Both were grounded in Greek philosophy, especially Plato, but they were also passionately interested in every area of the life of the mind, such as the latest scientific theory about the origin of the universe and of life. Although they delighted in the dialectic of philosophical reflection, they loved literature, music, and art. Because of their breadth of interest, Bigger could easily relate Plato’s *Republic* to Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* to Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*; and Kinney could draw illuminating con-

nections between Augustine and Kierkegaard and between each of these and the Gospel of John or Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.

Working with these men as colleagues on the Search staff was, therefore, both exciting and vastly intimidating. Among the most valuable aspects of teaching in the course in those early years, and one that gradually helped me to feel comfortable in my new role, was the weekly staff luncheon. These were not just administrative meetings, but gatherings at which the staff probed the issues in the assigned readings from many different angles.

If the subject for the week was the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a meeting might go as follows—Granville Davis would suggest a question like, “How did realizing that he was not immortal influence the behavior of Gilgamesh?” to open the class discussion; he called them his “sparkplug” questions. Charlie Bigger would then show how the myth at the end of the *Republic* reveals some implications of a belief in immortality for the way one lives one’s life; Fred Neal would explain how the concern for immortality in *Gilgamesh* is similar to, yet in important ways different from, the significance of resurrection to Paul; and Larry Kinney would probe the existential meaning of the idea of immortality, perhaps drawing on Kierkegaard. Generous of spirit, my former teachers would bring me into such discussions. Their interest in and response to my halting contributions created the kind of atmosphere in which I could grow both in understanding of the issues and in confidence as a teacher and colleague. Such meetings were not only exhilarating, but also a great preparation for a novice Search teacher anxious about the next colloquium meeting with his students and about his place at the table.

Because the course has always included so much biblical, theological, and philosophical material, it has called on its participants, students and faculty alike, to consider issues of personal religious belief and conviction. When I enrolled in the course in 1957 as a junior transfer student, I was in the process of reexamining my Christian faith, which had been called into question during my freshmen and sophomore years at Georgia Tech by a worldview shaped primarily by science and technology. Although I never completely lost faith in the reality of God, I was plagued by questions and doubts. After that fundamental issue was settled in my mind, I then had to wrestle with issues specific to Christianity: Was Jesus God incarnate? How should one understand the atonement? What is the nature of biblical inspiration? One of the things that strengthened my faith and



encouraged me to continue grappling with such issues was to see people like Bigger and Kinney, with their intellectual gifts and their erudition, taking the Bible seriously.

When I returned to the college as an instructor, one of my concerns was to help students work through struggles they might be having relating their faith to the new ideas they were encountering. I was happy to be asked to teach in the Search course in part because that gave me an opportunity to read the Bible from a critical perspective *with* my students. I found in doing so that I was still in the process of forming and reforming my own theology, a process that continues to this day.

One of the great challenges in teaching Search to first-year students is helping them come to grips with the critical method of studying the Bible without assaulting their faith. Many people experience a tension between belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible and acceptance of the critical approach to biblical studies. Through teaching in the Search course, I found that the attempt to resolve this tension sometimes required that I be as critical of the critical method as of the Bible itself. For example, some New Testament critics proceed from the naturalistic assumption that miracles do not occur—or at least that miracles cannot be acknowledged by the critical method. Here the instructor's task is the philosophical one of examining the reasonableness of this version of the critical stance. On the other hand, sometimes it was my preconceived theory of inspiration that needed to be modified in light of the Bible as it is revealed by critical study. I have found myself working back and forth between these two strategies, seeking what one philosopher (in a different context) has called a position of "reflective equilibrium." Perhaps one of the best things we can do for our students is to allow them to see us wrestling with such issues as we engage with them in the critical study of the Bible.

In all, my involvement with the first-year units on the Old Testament and the New Testament, both as student and as teacher, has strengthened my faith as well as challenged it. Perhaps, however, the contrast between strengthening and challenging is misleading. One of the important ways in which I have found my faith strengthened is precisely through my attempt to respond to the challenges my faith has faced. An important facilitator of this challenging and strengthening has been the Search course.

## 2

## Curriculum Innovation 1958–1975

DOUGLAS W. HATFIELD

By the mid-1950s, a decade after its creation, the Man course had been established both as a central feature in Southwestern's curriculum and as a measure of the school's identity as a liberal arts college. The evidence of this centrality may be seen in the college catalogues of this era, in which descriptions of the course were included in three different places. First, in the section that extolled the ideals and objectives of the college, the Man course was listed, along with the tutorial plan and honors courses, as one of the three distinctive marks of Southwestern's commitment to the ideals of liberal education. Man was described as "an integrating course," one that would "help the student see the relations among his various college courses and to make unified understanding possible." The course also "harmonizes with Southwestern's tradition as a Christian college" concerned with understanding "[h]uman experiences . . . in the light of history and Christian truth." As a twelve-hour course, it offered three credits in Bible and three in humanities each semester.<sup>1</sup>

A second, more extensive, description of the Man course appeared in the listings of the Bible department as Bible 3—4. It defined the course as "[a] study of the origins and development of Christianity and its role in world affairs integrated with a study of the history of Western Civilization." This description also noted a twofold academic aim: "(1) to train a student in handling the primary sources; (2) to create a realization of the role of the Christian world community in solving modern problems."<sup>2</sup>