

## The Birth of the Faculty Assembly, 1966

It is always a difficult to recreate the past. Names, dates, and descriptions of events can fail to capture the spirit and deeper meaning of the times. A case in point is Fr. Peter Mitchell's, *The Coup at Catholic University: The 1968 Revolution in American Catholic Education*. Mitchell said that he wrote the book as a Millennial trying to understand what occurred on our campus during "the '60s," an era that seems foreign to his generation. As one of the book's reviewers, Leslie Tentler, professor emerita of our University noted, communications among Bishop-Trustees can go only so far in illuminating what happened then and why.

Let me make an attempt to describe our University in the 1960s with focus on the question of how the Faculty Assembly came to be. It was formed in 1966, but became a force in May, 1967, when the faculty from all the Schools came together to discuss how to respond the Bishop-Trustees' overturning of the School of Theology's unanimous vote to promote and grant tenure to Rev. Charles Curran. After careful deliberation, faculty members voted overwhelmingly to strike until Curran was reinstated. Why did the faculty take this stand? Were they defying the Bishops or was something else at stake? Why were there only three "no" votes when a strike risked loss of salary and also seemed to pit Church authority against academic freedom?

Perhaps the simplest way to re-enter the spirit of campus of those years, is to drop the term, coup, and think of a dam bursting. The structure began to give way in 1960 when the campus came alive with John F. Kennedy's election. American Catholics had come of age. In 1962, the Second Vatican Council opened and immediately dealt with issues of authority, scholarship, culture, and lay people's roles, topics Catholics had long questioned privately. At the same time, Washington, DC, including the Archdiocese under Cardinal O'Boyle, began to desegregate in earnest. Brookland, where many faculty families lived, started to change demographically as blacks moved in and whites moved out.

Our campus was abuzz with invited lectures not just about the Church and academic freedom, but also about the war in Vietnam as speakers on campus ranged from the liberal Howard Zinn to the aristocratic conservative, Joseph Alsop. To juice things up, our gym offered out-of-town protesting students a place to sleep and shower for a few dollars. Thus, onto campus came firebrands such as

Rene Davis and Jerry Rubin. (I recall Rubin's presentation in what was then Maloney auditorium. He entered in a torn "Just do it!" T-shirt by running down the aisle to the podium only to admonish the students for being seated here rather than marching out in public. (A few years later, Mr. Rubin settled down as a stock broker, as I imagine several students in the audience did.)

Back to the era, I ask you to walk on North campus today looking at O'Boyle and Marist Halls or across Harewood Road where the Augustinian House of Studies formerly was. In 1965, these buildings were filled with seminarians and young priests who were sent to CUA as the best and brightest of their orders. By the early 1970s, these buildings were nearly empty due to the great exodus from religious life that occurred at that time. Nearly every academic department on campus experienced this upheaval as their religious students, and often their priest or sister professors, simply exited the University for new lives as lay people. An equally vivid example occurred in the summer. Every year for decades, thousands of teaching sisters from Catholic grade and high schools, came to campus for advanced teaching certificates. We faculty marveled at the variety and types of habits which ranged from simple to horribly uncomfortable for Washington's torrid summer humidity and heat. Then suddenly one summer, the program stopped and no more sisters came to campus. (The high point in school enrollment and sisterhood was 1965.)

Let us now look at the events of the week or so from the Trustees' denial to the faculty's vote. Word of the Trustees' decision spread quickly across campus. This was possible because the School of Theology in Caldwell Hall and the rest of the campus were connected on the personal level. Members of the two faculties knew one another, talked to one another, and ate lunch together. To wit, the person in the spotlight was known neither as "Father" nor "Charles," but as "Charlie." During the week before the strike, Theology students and faculty members mobilized quickly to hold public gatherings across campus at which speakers explained the School's position, using as context the emerging understanding of Vatican II. It may help also to recall that our students were the first wave of the Baby Boom generation who, in retrospect, precipitated lasting changes in higher education. For a closer look at our students' views, I recommend reading the *Tower* newspaper of that era, which was controlled and produced by students.

Meanwhile, some senior faculty members communicated privately with the Bishops, explaining their concern about academic freedom and what was at stake in the coming Middle States accreditation. (There was real concern that non-accreditation was likely.) Many senior faculty at that time were veterans of World War Two and a few were refugees from Hitler's clutches. These scholars were not about to be passive when principles of scholarship were at stake. At the same time, many priest-faculty from across the University's Schools spoke with their diocesan Bishops at whose beneficence they served in Washington rather than back home. And then there were the frank exchanges between the Theology Dean, Walter Schmitz, and Cardinal O'Boyle. Finally, faculty in our School of Canon Law offered reassuring advice about our rights as scholars.

If I have described this era adequately, you might more readily grasp how it was possible for faculty from all Schools to assemble in one place, discuss carefully the School of Theology's judgment and the Trustees' denial, and then vote overwhelmingly to strike until Curran was reappointed. There were a few "no" votes, but courageous or not, they must be viewed in light of the hundreds of "yeses." A coup? Hardly. The dam was breaking, then deluged campus. The faculty held together and months later, another semester began with optimism as the University's Statutes began to be rewritten and a new era began.

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