Born in Defiance: The Public Career of Virgil C. Blum, S.J.

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BORN IN DEFIANCE:
THE PUBLIC CAREER OF VIRGIL C. BLUM, S.J.

by
William M. Fliss, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
BORN IN DEFIANCE: THE PUBLIC CAREER OF VIRGIL C. BLUM, S.J.

William M. Fliss, B.A., M.A.
Marquette University, 2022

This study examines the life of the American Jesuit priest, political scientist, and political activist Virgil C. Blum (1913-1990). Blum was a leading Catholic advocate for public funding for children attending non-public schools, expressed most clearly through his writings and his leadership in Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF), a parental lobby founded in 1958. In 1973 Blum founded the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Modeled on the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, the Catholic League opposed what it saw as an entrenched anti-Catholicism in U.S. society, and it sought to protect the religious freedom of the nation’s Catholic population.

In addition to analyzing Blum’s roles in CEF and the Catholic League and explaining the circumscribed success of these organizations, this dissertation uses Blum’s life as a lens to observe changes in the Society of Jesus, the Roman Catholic Church, Marquette University, and the broader U.S. culture. It provides the most detailed treatment to date of the Jesuit formation process in the United States from the 1930s to the 1950s. Blum’s public career straddled the pre-conciliar and post-conciliar periods surrounding the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and his life offers a case study of an older Jesuit coming to grips with cultural change.

Blum emerges from this study as a significant defender of Catholic education and the belief that parochial school parents enjoyed a constitutional right to receive public funds. He viewed Catholics as an embattled minority in U.S. society, one that must take its place alongside other identity groups in the modern civil rights movement. Blum was an early Catholic culture warrior committed above all to battling a growing secularism in U.S. society. He sought to build bridges with other faith traditions in the defense of religious liberty. Through his Catholic League, Blum became an influential Catholic voice within the larger conservative movement of the era, serving as a minor prophet leading Catholics from their traditional home in the Democratic Party and toward the GOP.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

William M. Fliss, B.A., M.A.

Researching and writing this dissertation has been a long journey, made more challenging by the fact I traversed it while working full-time as a professional archivist. Archivists ground the historical enterprise; we collect, preserve, and provide access to the primary sources that shape our understanding of the past. I begin by thanking the many excellent archivists who assisted me over the years, either remotely or else in person when I visited their repositories during my vacations from work. These archivists include David Miros at the Jesuit Archives & Research Center in St. Louis; William Shepherd and Maria Mazzenga at The American Catholic History Research Center on the campus of Catholic University in Washington, D.C.; David Crawford at the Creighton University Archives; and Lynne Wingert, Archivist at the Diocese of Des Moines.

I am indebted to my advisor, Steven Avella, and my committee members Kristen Foster and John Laurance, S.J. Dr. Avella exhibited remarkable patience with me. His encouragement helped to keep me going. I am grateful for the valuable perspective Dr. Foster brought to the dissertation and for serving in general as a paragon for how a professional historian should research, think, write, and teach. I thank Father Laurance, a theologian, for agreeing to serve on my committee. His eye for detail saved me from some embarrassing gaffes, especially in the section on Jesuit formation.

Turning in a more personal direction, I thank my parents who raised me to be the kind of person who could undertake and complete a dissertation. Both passed away by the time I had begun this process, but they were with me in spirit every step of the way. Finally, I thank my long-suffering wife, Kristin Schwengel, for her love and support throughout the journey. Each day with Kristin affirms the truth of those lines from Lord Byron that we put on our wedding announcement: All who joy would win / Must share it – Happiness was born a twin.
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INTRODUCTION

“Virg Blum was born in Defiance, and he’s been living in defiance his entire life.”

Rev. Francis “Tick” Wade, S.J.

Howls of laughter greeted these words from Father Wade, the master of ceremonies at Virgil C. Blum’s celebration of 50 years in the Society of Jesus. The scene was the community room inside Marquette University’s Jesuit Residence on Wisconsin Avenue in Milwaukee, the year 1984. Fellow Jesuits and family had gathered to mark this milestone in the vocation of Father Blum. The audience’s laughter indicated how perfectly Father Wade had summed up Virgil Blum, a man born in 1913 in the small farm town of Defiance, Iowa and one who remained defiantly committed to his core beliefs throughout a public career that spanned 35 eventful years in U.S. history. Not all of Blum’s Jesuit companions would have agreed with the defiant public stances he took, but they certainly appreciated how well Wade had captured the man. It is the most succinct and accurate assessment of Virgil Blum and an ideal starting point for this study.

Largely forgotten today, Virgil Blum was a household name in some quarters beginning in the mid 1950s when he embarked on a public career devoted to furthering the constitutional rights of U.S. Catholic citizens, a battle Blum waged ceaselessly until his death from cancer in 1990. Blum taught political science at Marquette University from 1956-1978, specializing in constitutional law and civil liberties and touching the

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1 Wade spoke humorously about Blum for a few minutes, but this is the line that stuck in listeners’ memories. See interviews by William Fliss with Thomas Caldwell, S.J., January 18, 2017; Thaddeus Burch, S.J., January 18, 2017, Gregory Carlson, S.J., April 1, 2017.
lives of thousands of students, encouraging many to pursue law school or graduate school. A tireless laborer, Blum found time to engage in a vigorous public life. He wrote several books and hundreds of articles, delivered speeches across the United States, lobbied in legislative corridors, and maintained a vast correspondence with other activists concerned about safeguarding religious freedom in a pluralistic democracy. Blum’s animating concern was to protect Catholic education in the United States at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Catholic education was the crux. Blum saw Catholic schools as key to the long-term survival of Catholicism in the United States; indeed, as key to the survival of American democracy itself. Virgil Blum was the quintessential hedgehog, to borrow philosopher Isaiah Berlin’s riff on a line from Archilochus, a Greek poet from the 7th century BCE: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” Berlin interpreted Archilochus’s line to distinguish two kinds of leaders or thinkers. Foxes tend to pursue many avenues, some of them unrelated and perhaps even contradictory. Hedgehogs, by contrast, “relate everything to a single central vision … a single, universal, organizing principle.”² For Blum, this principle was the protection of Catholic schools. He harbored a vision throughout his adult life of the nation’s 50 million Catholics united in exercising their constitutional rights in the public square, especially the right of parents to receive public funding for their children who attended non-public schools. Virgil Blum believed Christ called him to help realize this vision.

The Society of Jesus had formed Blum to assume a place within its vast educational system—a role he performed with distinction—but the Jesuit also used his

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position at Marquette as a base from which to develop an identity as a public intellectual and political activist. In the late 1950s his writings attracted the attention of a group of Catholic parents from the St. Louis area anxious to obtain public funding for their schoolchildren. With Blum’s help, they formed a group called Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF), which grew rapidly from its Midwestern roots to span the country. Blum became CEF’s mentor and chief strategist and helped lead it to legislative victories in several states until opponents, mobilized behind the idea of a strict separation between church and state, mounted legal attacks that undermined CEF’s achievements. Blum perceived a persistent anti-Catholicism at work in this opposition, a prejudice that had been operative since before the country’s founding. Originally rooted in Protestantism, anti-Catholicism had become more and more associated with secular liberalism during the twentieth century. In the 1940s Blum sympathized with a small chorus of Catholic voices identifying secularism as a grave threat to the United States. The U.S. Catholic bishops validated these concerns in a 1947 statement warning against the exclusion of God from human thinking and living. Blum’s own concerns about secularism would increase over the next four decades. He believed the country to have been founded on religious principles, and he was dismayed at how the U.S. Supreme Court increasingly interpreted the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause to favor a high wall of separation between church and state, in effect driving religion from public life. Blum embraced what he considered to have been the Founders’ original vision for church-state relations, one in which the state accommodated religion and cooperated with churches for the public good.
By the early 1970s Blum concluded that CEF would make no more progress in obtaining public funding for parochial schoolchildren until the underlying anti-Catholicism in American culture had been exposed and rooted out. Blum bristled at the way media and entertainment outlets ridiculed Catholic symbols and beliefs. He openly accused the U.S. Supreme Court of being anti-Catholic in its rulings on church-state matters. Blum’s solution was The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, founded in May 1973, the first Catholic anti-defamation and civil rights organization in U.S. history. Hesitant at first to lead the new organization, Blum overcame his reluctance and assumed the role of president and CEO, pouring his abundant energy into the Catholic League for the remainder of his life. He considered it a vital apostolate for the Catholic Church in the United States. Inspired by the example of Jews and African Americans battling for their own civil rights, Blum wished Catholics would do the same. He believed that public opinion would never come round to denouncing the deeply entrenched anti-Catholicism in American life unless a group such as the Catholic League countered defamatory public attacks on Catholicism and advocated noisily for the civil rights of Catholic citizens. The outcome would be justice in the courts because Blum believed that judges looked to society for cues on how to rule and they would therefore begin treating Catholic interests favorably.

Virgil Blum’s public career spanned over 30 years, but he has received almost no attention in the historical literature. Occasionally Blum is mentioned in passing as a proponent of public aid for parochial schools or as a defender of Catholic interests, mention of him paired perhaps with a representatively defiant quote from his writings;
but for the most part the historiography has been silent on Blum. Jim Carl has provided the only substantial treatment of Blum to date, located within his excellent history of educational vouchers. Carl points out rightly that Blum was significant for being an early advocate of vouchers and someone who kept vouchers in the public eye until they became popular at century’s end. Carl also notes Blum’s role as an early interdenominational coalition-builder. That Blum proved so willing to make common cause with other religious groups is even more remarkable after the events of Blum’s childhood and adolescence are brought to light. Carl’s interest in Blum is limited to the Jesuit’s involvement in CEF—certainly an important chapter in Blum’s public career but not the whole picture. Carl mentions the Catholic League but stops short of discussing what should really be seen as the culmination of Blum’s career and the expression of his beliefs taken to their logical end.

The Catholic League may be Blum’s most significant achievement; but like its founder, the League has received little scholarly attention. Its history has never been told. Instead, the Catholic League has simply been grouped among a constellation of relatively small, conservative Catholic organizations that emerged in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and the cultural upheavals of the 1960s. That the League had a conservative bent must be admitted, but Virgil Blum never intended it to occupy a niche on the periphery of mainstream Catholicism. He genuinely hoped it would serve to rally

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the entire U.S. Catholic population to take its rightful place within the modern civil rights
movement, a development that never transpired. Sometimes what does not happen in
history is as interesting as what occurs. That historians have largely ignored the Catholic
League may be due in part to its continuation under another forceful leader. Moribund in
the wake of Blum’s death, the Catholic League was reborn a few years later under the
strong leadership of Bill Donohue in New York City, where it remains in operation today.
Its old life was forgotten in the wake of its rebirth, and the memory of Blum faded into
the background. Yet the history of the early Catholic League, with its enormous
aspiration and circumscribed success, deserves to be told.

For good or ill, the Catholic League was synonymous with Virgil Blum. He was
the heart of the League, and so any effort to document its history gravitates toward a
biographical approach. Biography is the methodological vehicle for delivering the
historical insights of this study, and it is driven with some trepidation. According to
historian David Nasaw, “Biography remains the profession’s unloved stepchild,
ocasionally but grudgingly let in the door, more often shut outside with the riffraff.”6
The riffraff in this case would be the general reading public, which happily consumes
biography in large quantity. Professional historians have been leery of biography. Most
wait until they are comfortably established in their careers before venturing to publish
one. Biography can struggle to adequately capture the larger context within which a
subject operated, becoming too personal and self-absorbed to tell us about the larger
world.7 Historian Barbara Taylor summarized the potential weaknesses of biography

6 David Nasaw, “Introduction” in “AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography,” American Historical
Review (June 2009), 573.
7 Kate Brown, “A Place in Biography for Oneself” in “AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography,”
American Historical Review (June 2009), 599.
when she noted “its belletristic character; its emphasis on individual agency at the expense of larger historical forces; its flattening of complex causal connections to fit a linear life narrative.” Biography does seem to excel more at describing the past than explaining it.

Academic historians might feel disdain at the size of the biography section at a Barnes and Noble compared to the bookstore’s general section on history; however, in biography’s defense, relatively few members of the reading public connect with a history that concerns itself with theory or process or one that meticulously explicates a tight thesis. Most people gravitate to accounts of the past that contain a strong element of human interest. Biography offers a means for learning about the past that the general public finds interesting. Historians tend to lament the historical ignorance of the U.S. population. Perhaps we should be grateful to biography for enabling at least something historical to get through. Indeed, biography may have a civic role to play: If the existence of a historically minded citizenry is necessary in order to have a healthy body politic, and if sound historical awareness is like a medicine that contributes to societal health, then good biography is like the sugar coating that helps the pill go down.

The divide between scholars and general readers over biography may also be attributable to biography’s historical raison d’être. Since classical times biography has been a means for moral instruction. Thucydides’ treatment of the Athenian statesman Alcibiades in his history of the Peloponnesian War provided Greek readers with a lesson about the peril of hubris. In his Agricola, the historian Tacitus held up his father-in-law,
Gnaeus Julius Agricola, as the model Roman general whose virtue contrasted sharply with the vicious emperor Domitian. Modern historians have viewed biography dubiously because of its temptation to venture into fiction. The most notorious example was Parson Weems’s *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington* (1800), a work that contained fabricated stories about the lionized first president. Until the twentieth century, biographers often used a subject’s life to teach moral lessons. Professional historians eschew such didacticism, being more interested in the larger historical picture than the personal virtues or vices of an individual. Many general readers, by contrast, approach the past vicariously. For some, biography offers a way to transcend a mundane existence and experience life through the eyes of another. For others, the subject of a biography can become an aspirational figure, exhibiting qualities and behaviors that readers find attractive and worthy of emulation in their own lives. Whether or not Virgil Blum appears to any readers as an aspirational figure will depend largely on how they view his positions on controversial political issues.

Central to biography is an important question: What impact do individuals really have on history? If the range of opinions were viewed on a spectrum, at one end you would find the Russian writer Tolstoy for whom, in *War and Peace*, the individual exists at the mercy of larger forces. In Tolstoy’s view, Napoleon’s impact on historical events was an illusion—he was merely a child holding on to the reins of a runaway carriage. At the other end of the spectrum would be the anthropologist Margaret Mead who famously warned an audience (perhaps apocryphally) never to doubt the power of the individual to change the world because it was the only thing that ever had. Most historians today
would locate themselves somewhere between these poles.\textsuperscript{10} Karl Marx championed one of the most process driven approaches to history, yet he captured the compromise between these extremes very astutely when he observed, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.”\textsuperscript{11} By the time of Marx’s death in 1883, history as a professional discipline had emerged in Germany, championed by Marx’s contemporary, Leopold von Ranke. His archives-driven method of seminar research became the standard methodology by the twentieth century. Biography fell out of favor in the Rankean drive to dispassionately and non-judgmentally document the past. Historical inquiry moved away from a focus on individual lives to broader political and religious developments.\textsuperscript{12} Individuals still appeared in historical accounts, but these tended to be famous political men seeming to possess enormous significance. This “great man” approach to the past provoked a reaction beginning in the late 1920s in the form of the French Annales school that produced deep studies of historical places across layers of increasing temporal duration.\textsuperscript{13} The Annales historians sought to capture the collective consciousness, or mentalités, of a place’s inhabitants. The work of the Annales historians encouraged development of quantitative methodologies—as far removed from the scope of the individual life as can be imagined—which social historians, beginning in the 1960s,


\textsuperscript{12} Caine, \textit{Biography and History}, 14-15.

\textsuperscript{13} For more on the Annales school see Howell and Prevenier, \textit{From Reliable Sources}, 110-112.
developed to impressive levels of sophistication. For the new social historians, groups were the basic unit of historical analysis, particularly underprivileged groups that had been ignored by historians. Collective history “from the bottom up” replaced the “great man” approach to the past. In the 1970s and 1980s, biography’s appeal eroded further as postmodern ideas seeped into the profession from literary criticism. Poststructuralists viewed conventional biography as a fool’s errand, deeming it impossible to capture an autonomous being acting with its own will because no such thing existed. All that mattered were the surviving texts which contain multiple meanings depending on the prejudices and biases of the reader studying them.

Yet during these same hostile years, a newer form of biography emerged that used an individual life to offer insights into larger historical phenomena, especially the plight of the oppressed and marginalized that so interested social historians. Kathryn Kish Sklar’s *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (1974) proved an influential text in the way she used the experiences of this nineteenth century reformer to explore the relationship between women and U.S. society. Efforts like Sklar’s received support from microhistory, an Italian import to the United States that was a reaction against the French Annales school and its study of the past over long durations using quantitative data. The microhistorians, by contrast, focused on small, often obscure, events involving specific individuals and then used them to illuminate the larger society around them. Microhistory helped open the door to ethnographic methodology,

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15 Ibid., 23.
16 For an excellent example of microhistory applied to a U.S. context, see Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For a good discussion of microhistory and its relationship with biography, see Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much:
especially anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s use of “thick” description to closely analyze rituals to uncover ranges of cultural meaning.17 This method when applied to an individual life could shed light on an entire group of people.

The net effect for biography written by professional historians was the scholarly marriage of an individual life with its larger context. Biographical works now avoid self-absorbed tales of personal development and demonstrate instead how an individual life—scrutinized with the methodological care of scholarly training—offers insights into the happenings of the wider world. The historian “examines the process of historical change through an individual who, like other humans, grapples simultaneously with complex forces both public and private.”18 Barbara Finkelstein employs a delightful metaphor when she claims that biography is to history what a telescope is to the stars. For Finkelstein, “biography provides a unique lens through which one can assess the relative power of political, economic, social and generational processes on the life chances of individuals, and the revelatory power of historical sense-making.”19

It is with this understanding of biography that we embark on an account of Virgil Blum’s life. Blum was a significant historical figure in his own right as a pioneering advocate for public funding for non-public schoolchildren and as founder of the first Catholic anti-defamation and civil rights league in U.S. history; but Blum’s life also

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17 For more on thick description see Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), especially 6-10.

18 Nick Salvatore, “Biography and Social History: an Intimate Relationship” Labour History 87 (November 2004), 189.

serves as a lens for observing the historical changes he experienced in the twentieth century. Historian Alice Kessler-Harris captured this aspect of biography well when she said: “I believe that we will learn something if we watch the weather change, the value systems shift, the storm descend and retreat: as we observe the engaged life struggle to maintain its balance.” In Virgil Blum, we witness a man coming to grips with the transformation of his Catholic Church, especially after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the polarization of U.S. Catholics that ensued. Blum’s religious order, the Society of Jesus, experienced significant change as well, the conservative bulwark against Enlightenment modernity becoming a progressive champion of social justice for the poor and marginalized. Blum provides a good example of a Jesuit formed in the old Society who tried to interpret and make sense of these changes. Through Blum’s experiences at Marquette University, we witness the changes that overtook Catholic higher education in the wake of Vatican II. Blum is also a telescope for examining the conservative backlash against the progressive spirit of the 1960s. Blum became a loud voice in the U.S. culture wars of the 1980s and there is little doubt where his sympathy lay in that conflict.

20 Alice Kessler-Harris, “Why Biography?” in “AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography,” American Historical Review (June 2009), 630.

21 James Davison Hunter proposed the Culture War thesis in his 1991 book Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America. Building on the work of Robert Wuthnow, Hunter analyzed contemporary cultural conflict in the United States and attributed it to two contending systems of moral understanding. Adherents of cultural orthodoxy were committed to timeless truths rooted in an external, definable, and transcendent authority. Cultural progressives, on the other hand, saw moral authority in the rationalism and subjectivism of the modern age in which truth is a continuously unfolding process. Hunter tracked the conflict between these two world views in battles over family, art, education, law, and politics. Critics pushed back against Hunter’s thesis as one might expect with any bold generalization; but its resonance endures, especially with renewed cultural conflict during the second and third decades of the twenty-first century. Virgil Blum fits neatly into the struggle, clearly among the ranks of the culturally orthodox. On Hunter, see James Davison Hunter, Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America (New York: Basic Books, 1991). His critics replied with Rhys H. Williams ed., Cultural Wars in American Politics: Critical Reviews of a Popular Myth (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1997). For further discussion and Hunter’s response, see James Davison Hunter
The sources for studying Virgil Blum’s life are uneven. His public career and service to Marquette University are well documented in the archives. The Blum Papers form the foundation for this work and reveal the Jesuit to have been a prolific writer, correspondent, and hoarder of documents. However, the collection contains nothing created by Blum before he entered public life around the age of forty. Those first four decades—crucial to understanding Blum’s later actions—had to be pieced together from other sources. The effort involved the tedious work of the local historian, rooting out traces of information and assembling them to form a picture of Blum’s remarkable upbringing in Defiance, Iowa. The work of reconstituting Blum’s earlier life became much easier after he entered the Society of Jesus in 1934 and came into the orbit of Jesuit recordkeeping. The evidentiary trail preserved at the Jesuit Archives in St. Louis proved invaluable for understanding Blum’s formation in the Society of Jesus. Oral history complemented the surviving written record and serves as one of the source pillars upholding this study. Several of Blum’s family members, fellow Jesuits, and former colleagues responded to the call. Others declined the invitation to participate or else greeted the proposition with stony silence, a testament perhaps to the strong emotions Blum could provoke in others. Sadly, some of the most desirable interviewees had already passed away, a reminder that historians are, in the words of Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga, “Wrestlers with the Angel”, meaning the Angel of Death. Sometimes the Angel cannot be cheated of its silence.

This study proceeds chronologically through Blum’s life, offering his own journey as a lens through which to view changes taking place in the Catholic Church, the

Society of Jesus, and the United States. The chief concern is Blum’s public career, but it is impossible to understand his public actions from the mid-1950s to his death in 1990 without appreciating Blum’s upbringing, education, and spiritual formation. A strength of biography is its ability to show how historical actors developed into the people they became. In Tennyson’s poem “Ulysses,” the title character declares, “I am a part of all that I have met.” Ulysses’ point could simply be that he had played a role in all the big events recounted in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*; but his declaration can also be interpreted in the opposite sense as recognition that each of his experiences is a part of him—they shaped him into the triumphant hero returned to Ithaca. Ulysses is a fictional character, but the idea is applicable to real people in the past. To understand why historical figures may have acted in a certain way or made a particular decision, we must bear in mind their earlier experiences, especially in childhood and young adulthood. This certainly rings true for Virgil Blum.

The first chapter sheds light on Blum’s upbringing in Defiance, Iowa. He originated in an unusual community in Shelby County called the Colony, a cluster of Catholic farmers surrounded by a suspicious and sometimes hostile Protestant majority. From this religious crucible emerged a man extremely sensitive to criticism of the Catholic Church, intensely devoted to Catholic education, and one who believed Catholics to be an embattled minority in U.S. society. The methodology here borders on microhistory, recreating the fascinating world in which young Blum moved. The second chapter concerns Blum’s formation in the Society of Jesus, the largest and one of the most influential religious orders in the Roman Catholic Church. The chapter provides the most detailed examination to date of Jesuit formation prior to the changes ushered in by
the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). At times the analysis ventures into “thick” description reminiscent of the work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Here we track the 21-year-old Blum from his arrival at the novitiate in 1934 to the cusp of his ordination to the priesthood in 1947, showing how the Jesuits took the fighter from Shelby County’s Colony and molded him into a highly disciplined and pious man, yet one that carried a sizable chip on his shoulder. The third chapter completes Blum’s Jesuit formation and traces his further educational development. He was a pioneer of sorts among Jesuits, one who obtained a doctorate in political science during an era when the Society of Jesus was only beginning to give the social sciences their due. Unsurprisingly perhaps for a hedgehog, Blum’s mind did not revel in or entertain a diversity of political ideas. He was no Thomas Jefferson. Blum emerged from his studies with a handful of verities in mind that remained with him to the end: interest groups drive U.S. democracy and shape public opinion; effective interest groups are grassroots efforts; jurists look to this public opinion shaped by interest groups when deciding how to rule on the constitutionality of legislation. Blum concluded that the fate of Catholic education and the provision of public funding for non-public schoolchildren would ultimately be decided in the courts, and so he concentrated his efforts on legal studies, specializing in constitutional law and civil liberties.

Having explored the circumstances that produced Virgil Blum, the dissertation turns to the Jesuit’s public career, covered in two lengthy chapters. Blum began public life as a popular writer in the mid-1950s before becoming a political organizer and activist. The fourth chapter describes Blum’s emergence into the public square and spends most of its time discussing his involvement with CEF. Along the way we
encounter Blum grappling with the tumultuous Sixties and the changes it brought to his religious order and university. It ends with Blum poised to make a major change in his public ministry, having concluded that a group like CEF was doomed to fail if the root problem of anti-Catholicism could not be eradicated from American life. The final chapter reveals Blum’s solution—the Catholic League—and recounts its creation and the circumscribed success it enjoyed under Blum’s leadership. The League joined in the culture wars raging in the United States, especially the war centered on the hot-button issue of abortion. Blum and the League allied themselves with elements of the Protestant Religious Right, illustrating the restructuring of religion in American society that gradually unfolded after the Second World War.  

According to this process, during the second half of the twentieth century, the principal cleavage in American religion ceased to be a denominational line (i.e., Protestant versus Catholic) and became instead an ideological one (i.e., liberal versus conservative). Over time conservative Catholics could be seen as having more in common with Protestant evangelicals than with many of their own coreligionists. The Religious Right became closely associated with the Republican Party; and so we see Blum, during the last decade of his life, become like a minor prophet leading Catholics away from their traditional allegiance to the Democratic Party and toward the GOP.

Virgil Blum lived his life in defiance. Blum defied a Protestant majority that he believed had consigned Catholics to second-class citizenship. He defied his fellow U.S. Catholics who refused to join him in rebellion. Over time, Blum defied a secular mainstream that sought to drive religion from public life. His defiance extended to the bishops and bureaucrats within his own church who failed to support his proposals. And he defied many of his fellow Jesuits whom he believed never gave his vital ministry the support it deserved. Finally, Blum’s defiance extends even toward the effort to write his biography, and not just because the man failed to preserve any document written in his own words from before his fortieth year. Blum defies a biographical enterprise that since the postmodern turn has stressed the “shifting and multi-faceted nature of individual personality.” Such a perspective ultimately denies the existence of a fixed core within individuals and delights instead in exposing their nuance and ambiguity. Here Blum defies his biographer. After digesting the surviving historical record on Blum, it is difficult to deny that the Jesuit possessed a fixed core. Insecurity may have haunted his actions, but with Virgil Blum what you saw was what you got.

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CHAPTER 1: Raised in Defiance, 1913-1934

Hear me coastlands,
Listen, distant peoples.
Before birth the LORD called me,
from my mother’s womb he gave me my name.
He made my mouth like a sharp-edged sword,
concealed me, shielded by his hand.
He made me a sharpened arrow,
in his quiver he hid me.
He said to me, You are my servant,
in you, Israel, I show my glory.

Isaiah 49: 1-3

Virgil Blum’s experiences in childhood and adolescence, combined with the long spiritual formation and education he received from the Jesuits, shaped a culture warrior committed to defending his Catholicism in the public square. Recovering a picture of Blum’s development is challenging because not a single document that he wrote before 1953 has survived in the historical record. Blum would make up for it in later years, leaving behind scores of publications and thousands of pieces of correspondence; but the first four decades of his life are hazy and must be pieced together from other sources. Blum was already 40 years old when his name first came to public attention. By then his character was set—a medley of piety and self-discipline, tenacity and personal insecurity that would influence his actions and shape his reactions to the many political and religious changes that took place in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century.

Beginnings

Virgil Clarence Blum was the product of a large German Catholic family living in a verdant western Iowa populated by pious farmers committed to hard work. He was born on March 27, 1913, the fifth child of John P. and Elizabeth (Rueschenburg) Blum. Seven more children would follow. Virgil was born on the family’s farm a mile and a half outside Defiance, the largest community in Union Township within Shelby County, about seventy miles northeast of Omaha, Nebraska. Defiance itself was a small town, averaging only 400 inhabitants between 1910-1930.\textsuperscript{25} Blum’s father, known throughout the area as J.P., enjoyed a reputation as an energetic and enterprising young farmer.\textsuperscript{26} The year after Virgil’s birth, J.P. constructed an eleven-room house for his burgeoning family. It was the marvel of the neighborhood, boasting hard wood floors and casements, hot and cold running water, and acetylene gas lighting.\textsuperscript{27}

High crop and livestock prices relative to farm expenditures explain much of the Blum family’s success during the Teens. Compared to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was a golden age for farming across the United States. Farmers who during the period 1910-1914 enjoyed a farm price index of 100 had, by contrast, experienced a price index of only 69 back in 1900.\textsuperscript{28} The specter of overproduction loomed by mid-decade, but the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 prolonged the good times. Farm surpluses

\textsuperscript{26} Edward Speer White, Past and Present of Shelby County Iowa, (Indianapolis: B.F. Bowen, 1915), 1219.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.,1219. Robert Dotzler, interview by William Fliss, October 22, 2016.
\textsuperscript{28} R. Douglas Hurt, Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 12. A farm price index is a normalized average of the prices of agricultural goods at a certain point in time, used for broad statistical analysis or historical comparison. The higher the price index the better it is for farmers.
vanished as agricultural exports soared, driven by warring powers that desperately needed the abundance flowing from Iowa farms like the Blum’s.29

The Blum family’s success can also be attributed to J.P.’s enterprising instincts as a farmer as well as to hard work on the part of everybody in the family. J.P. had abandoned formal education at age twelve to begin a life of manual labor, but he possessed a keen intelligence that he directed toward agriculture. Soon after his marriage to Elizabeth in 1905, J.P. snatched up an attractive 160-acre farm just south of Defiance. A tributary stream of the West Nishnabotna River intersected the property, imbuing its soil with great fertility.30 J.P. put this bottomland to good use, growing corn, oats, and pasture, and devising a system of scientific crop rotation to enhance productivity.31 By 1915 he had more than doubled the size of his farm to 240 acres. Many farms in the township encompassed only 80 acres—the maximum area a single farmer could reasonably manage. Larger parcels required the help of a hired man, who would toil relentlessly during the summer months and then remain with the family through the winter, working for his room and board by performing chores and taking care of the livestock.32 The federal census reported a twenty-year old man residing with the Blum family in 1910.33 No such person appeared on the 1920 census return, presumably because the oldest sons had reached a useful age and J.P.’s 78-year old father, Peter, now living with the family, could lend some assistance.

31 White, Past and Present of Shelby County Iowa, 1218.
32 Robert Dotzler, interview.
J.P. emerges from the historical record as a single-minded man and strict disciplinarian. His passion was farming, and he pursued it with an intense singleness of purpose that son Virgil would share, albeit channeled down a different stream. Virgil’s later interest in politics did not originate with his father. Though known as a loyal Democrat, J.P. took little interest in political matters, restricting his involvement to casting a vote on election days. He directed his time and energy to strict oversight of farm and family. J.P. instilled a powerful work ethic in his children. He brooked no disobedience from his offspring. On one occasion, discovering that an offense had been committed, J.P. confronted his sons, but none would confess to the infraction nor implicate his brother. He summarily lined them all up and gave each a whipping.

Virgil's fascination with politics cannot be traced to his father, but his later sensitivity to matters of justice and civil rights may have been formed in part by life in an authoritarian household.

The Ecclesia domestica

If Virgil inherited his strong work ethic and stubborn single-mindedness from his father, he received much of his piety from his mother, Elizabeth. Although J.P. provided a devout example for his children—serving as secretary of the local branch of the Roman Catholic Mutual Protective Society and encouraging any hint of a vocation they might exhibit—Elizabeth was the religious center of the family, inculcating devotional habits in her offspring. Under her watchful gaze, the family knelt together every evening to pray.

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34 White, Past and Present of Shelby County Iowa, 1219.
35 Shelby County’s principal newspaper reported on a corn-picking contest held on Armistice Day 1933 between two of Virgil Blum’s younger brothers. In nine hours, Edgar picked 165 bushels of corn, narrowly beating Verne’s total of 160 bushels. J. P. verified the winner when he unloaded the corn. See Harlan Republican (Harlan, IA), November 13, 1933.
the Rosary. Elizabeth poured her piety into her progeny to great effect—a quarter of her children would discern a religious vocation. She exhibited a particularly intense devotion to the Blessed Virgin; every day until well into their adolescence, Elizabeth would dress her daughters in blue clothing to honor Mary.37

To the twenty-first century observer, Elizabeth Blum appears as a poignant figure. Unlike her husband, Elizabeth never received significant mention in a history book. Like so many farmers’ wives, she existed quietly in the background, enduring a life of domestic toil and childbearing. She is remembered as a meek woman, subservient to her husband in all but religious matters.38 Born one of eleven children into a German immigrant family, Elizabeth followed the path familiar to her, participating in a male-dominated culture that embraced a gendered division of labor.39 J.P. and the boys concentrated on the farm work, while Elizabeth and the girls performed all the housework (cooking, cleaning, laundry, sewing) plus they would have been expected to help with farm chores.40

Unfortunately for Elizabeth, her own household suffered from an unbalanced division of labor. Only three of her twelve children were daughters, with her eldest daughter, Laura, being the only girl among the first nine children. To what must have been Elizabeth’s bittersweet delight, Laura chose a religious vocation and left Iowa at age twenty, entering the School Sisters of St. Francis on June 13, 1929, taking the name

38 Linda Fruend-Ebbinga, interview.
Sister Roselle. In later years, Sister Roselle recalled the sadness of the situation and voiced the terrific guilt she felt at abandoning her mother to do so much work alone. Despite being four years younger than her husband, Elizabeth would predecease J.P. by sixteen years.

Young Virgil’s religious formation began at home. He drank in Catholicism with his mother’s milk. The Blum family appeared to be the epitome of *Ecclesia domestica*, an ancient Catholic notion that the family unit is like a little church unto itself. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) would later expound upon the concept: “[P]arents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.” For Catholics prior to Vatican II, the highest of vocations was to the religious life. The Blum’s eldest child, Victor, responded to that call and entered the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1926. Their second child, Laura, became Sister Roselle and spent most of her ministry at a high school in Chicago. Virgil became the family’s third and last religious vocation, although others of the Blum children reportedly considered such a path, including Virgil’s younger brother, Ermine, who after spending time as a postulant at a Jesuit novitiate, decided not to continue in the religious life.

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42 Linda Fruend-Ebbinga, interview.
The parish

Virgil’s religious formation continued at St. Peter Parish, the center of Catholic life in Defiance.\(^{45}\) In 1882 Bishop John McMullen of Davenport had dedicated a small church in the newly platted town. St. Peter’s began as a mission church, visited over the years by priests from parishes in nearby Earling and Harlan. In 1910 the parish’s 25 families cornered Bishop James Davis as he visited the area administering the Sacrament of Confirmation, and they petitioned him for a resident priest, setting their sights upon Father Charles Burkhisier, a popular priest residing at St. Michael’s in Harlan.\(^{46}\) The Bishop transferred Burkhisier to St. Peter’s the following year.\(^{47}\) Father Burkhisier would baptize the infant Virgil at his church in 1913.\(^{48}\)

Filled with the energy and enthusiasm of a new pastor, Burkhisier strove to care for his growing flock. By 1915 the congregation had swelled to 60 families, outstripping the small church building located south of Main Street.\(^{49}\) Burkhisier assumed the mantle of builder, and Catholic families such as the Blums opened their coffers wide to support him. For $4,000 a new rectory arose on high ground that parishioners had purchased for the parish near the northwest corner of town. He turned his attention next to a parish school. The American bishops who had gathered in 1884 at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore had decreed priests in the United States must establish a school within two

\(^{45}\) Over time, it became known as Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, apparently with the official opening of St. Paul’s School at the parish in 1917.  
\(^{46}\) Sts. Peter and Paul Defiance Cemetery Directory and Church History (Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, 200-), pages within book are unnumbered.  
\(^{47}\) At the time of his appointment to Defiance, Burkhisier was a relatively new priest, having been ordained only in 1908; but he was 31 years old, suggesting he had a prior career before entering the seminary. See Clergy Record found in Charles V. Burkhisier Priest File, Archives Diocese of Des Moines.  
\(^{48}\) Personnel Record Card in Biographical Information File, Record Group A-4.5, Series 9, University Records, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University.  
\(^{49}\) History Book Committee, Defiance Century Review, 1882-1982 (Defiance, 1982), 18.
years of a parish’s formation. Burkhiser converted his old rectory into the parish’s first school, opening its doors to sixteen students in September 1913. By spring 1916, the student body had swelled to forty, swamping the former rectory house and creating the need for a new school building. Burkhiser responded by constructing a massive two-story, multi-purpose brick edifice on the new property. Built with $23,000 of parishioners’ funds and dedicated by Bishop Austin Dowling on May 30, 1917, the impressive structure had a worship space on the second floor with seating for 400. The first floor and basement contained the school and included quarters for a small group of teaching sisters.

Father Burkhiser had employed a single laywoman as teacher for the school’s first two years; but with construction of the new building, the priest turned to the Benedictine Sisters of Atchison, Kansas for assistance. Congregations of teaching sisters formed the backbone of the Catholic educational enterprise in the United States, trickling down even to rural spots such as Shelby County. Sisters helped pastors to fulfill the educational decrees of the American bishops. The Benedictine Sisters at Atchison had been sending forth women from Mount St. Scholastica convent to staff parish schools in southwestern

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51 The building’s cornerstone bore the name "St. Paul's School," suggesting that the upstairs worship space was only temporary and that Father Burkhiser envisioned building a separate church. By this time the parish was known as St. Peter and Paul. The building would be demolished in 1981 in the wake of school consolidation in the area.

Iowa since the late 1880s.\textsuperscript{53} In 1917, residents of Defiance witnessed for the first time a sight that would repeat itself until well after Virgil Blum’s departure from Iowa: Benedictine sisters clothed head to foot in black habit and scapular with white coif and bandeau arriving by train at the beginning of the school year.\textsuperscript{54} They departed at the end of each year.\textsuperscript{55} Parishioners supported the sisters during their stays, contributing canned goods to an annual food drive conducted on their behalf. Farmers supplied a steady stream of fresh food. The adolescent Virgil would have taken his turn depositing produce, meat, and cans of fresh milk at the school doors.\textsuperscript{56}

Virgil Blum came under the sisters’ tutelage in 1920 when he entered the first grade at the age of seven. How the sisters regarded Virgil during his years at St. Peter's—whether they enjoyed having him as a student or not—is unknown. He probably stood out as one of the most intelligent boys in class, but whether his mother Elizabeth's deep respect and deference for those living a vowed life rubbed off enough on her son in the presence of these sisters to temper Virgil's stubborn and confrontational tendencies remains unknown.\textsuperscript{57} The Benedictine sisters would have provided Virgil with a decent education. The convent's Constitution, or founding document, stressed that the sisters


\textsuperscript{55} For example, a contributor to \textit{The Harlan Republican} (Harlan, IA) from Defiance noted on June 9, 1932, “The Benedictine Sisters, who have taught the parochial school this past year, left Tuesday for the convent at Atchison, Kan. to spend the summer.”

\textsuperscript{56} Donald Dotzler, interview by William Fliss, August 26, 2017.

\textsuperscript{57} Virgil’s intellect received mention in the county newspaper when it reported that he narrowly lost out on becoming St. Paul High School valedictorian, Alice Finken’s 95.5 percent average eclipsing his 95 percent. See \textit{The Harlan Republican} (Harlan, IA), June 2, 1932.
always be competent in the subjects they taught, which by the 1920s included religion, literary studies, mathematics, and the natural sciences.\textsuperscript{58}

The sisters continued the spiritual formation begun at home, drilling Virgil and his peers in the Baltimore Catechism. Crafted by the American bishops in the wake of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, the Catechism sought to provide schoolchildren with a consistent and practical understanding of Catholicism. The Baltimore Catechism remained the standard catechetical tool from 1885 until the 1960s, receiving an update in 1941.\textsuperscript{59} It employed a question-and-answer format with over 400 questions of varying complexity to be posed to young Catholics over the course of their childhood and adolescent years. Questions such as "What is God?" "Why did God make you?", and "What is Heaven?" appeared in the Catechism alongside brief, succinct answers to be memorized by the children until they could be repeated with rote efficiency upon demand. Ideally, the sisters used these answers as a jumping off point to probe more deeply into the questions with their students.\textsuperscript{60}

In addition to religious development, the sisters took part in the civic formation of their charges. Like its public counterpart, the parochial school curriculum was grounded in textbook/readers. The famed McGuffey Reader had its Catholic counterparts in texts produced \textit{en masse} by large Catholic publishing houses such as the Benziger Brothers or the Sadlier Company, both of New York City. These Catholic readers stressed the same

\textsuperscript{60} Thomas L. Kinkead. \textit{An Explanation of the Baltimore Catechism of Christian Doctrine: For the Use of Sunday-School Teachers and Advanced Classes} (New York: Benziger, 1921), 4.
middle-class virtues as their Protestant counterparts, virtues such as thrift, honesty, and good social behavior. They also stressed patriotism; however, the Catholic readers linked Americanism to biographical profiles not likely to be found in public school readers, such as the Maryknoll Missioners and the Jesuit martyr, Isaac Jogues. An impressionable Virgil Blum would have lifted his nose from these readers with a growing pride in his American identity and with a sense that being at once Catholic and American bore no contradiction. Virgil's abiding belief that he was no less an American citizen than his Protestant neighbors took root at an early age, paving the way for an adult life spent railing against what he perceived to be a second-class citizenship imposed on Catholics by a Protestant, and later secular, mainstream.

Virgil marched his way through the grades at St. Paul's School. By the time he had reached the eighth grade, he could look forward to continuing his high school education at the parish instead of having to enroll at the public high school. The construction of a separate church building in 1928 allowed renovation of the parish's multipurpose building to accommodate high school classes. Father Burkhiser had begun raising funds for the new church building several years earlier, but an illness in 1926 prevented him from seeing the project to completion. Despite a lengthy leave of absence to recuperate, Father Burkhiser's health broke irretrievably the following year, leading Des Moines bishop Thomas Drumm to appoint Father Charles McAniff as parish administrator in Defiance.

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61 Walch, Parish School, 73-75.
62 See for example, School Sisters of Notre Dame. The American Fifth Reader for Catholic Schools (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1930), 87-102, 167-172.
63 Drumm to McAniff, September 12, 1927, found in Charles McAniff Priest File. Archives Diocese of Des Moines.
Father McAniff remained at Sts. Peter and Paul for less than two years, but he had a significant impact on the parish. He tackled the church building project with gusto. McAniff had a penchant for Spanish architecture, and he carried this aesthetic through into the attractive brick edifice dedicated by Monsignor Vitus Stoll, Chancellor of the Des Moines Diocese, on September 19, 1928. Over 600 parishioners and guests crammed into the new church for its first High Mass.\textsuperscript{64} Fifteen-year-old Virgil Blum would certainly have been in attendance with his family to hear Monsignor Stoll exhort his listeners to become "living stones" in the spiritual house of the Lord.\textsuperscript{65}

That Father McAniff succeeded in building his new church during the 1920s speaks to the great piety and self-sacrifice of many of Defiance’s parishioners. The golden age of farming that Iowa enjoyed during the early teens and war years was by now only a memory. The Great Depression that would grip the entire nation by the early 1930s took root in rural America a decade earlier. The end of the First World War saw a decline in exports as European agriculture recovered from the conflict and as heavily indebted allies lacked the means to continue purchasing American produce. Government policy in the United States exacerbated the problem. Woodrow Wilson's administration removed wartime price controls that guaranteed a good price for crops, while his successor, Warren Harding, enacted a protective tariff that further discouraged international trade. Prices plummeted, which had a devastating effect on farmers struggling to pay off debt they had incurred during the war years when they raced to

\textsuperscript{64} The Harlan Republican (Harlan, IA), September 23, 1928.

\textsuperscript{65} “Sermon Given at the Opening of the New St. Peter and Paul Church, Defiance, Iowa, by Rev. Vitus Stoll.” September 1928. Souvenir program reproduced in Sts. Peter and Paul Defiance Cemetery Directory and Church History.
expand and increase productivity.\textsuperscript{66} Despite these hard times, parishioners at St. Peter's contributed $40,000 to the building fund and offered their talents and labor to help construct the new church.\textsuperscript{67}

Given the central importance in American Catholic life that the parish enjoyed during Virgil Blum's years in Iowa, it is not surprising that parishioners sacrificed on behalf of Sts. Peter and Paul.\textsuperscript{68} It was the spiritual and social center for Catholics living in Defiance and its environs. The annual church picnic was a highlight of the year. The first picnic took place in 1911, following Father Burkkis's arrival as resident pastor, and it drew in 2,500 people from around the county.\textsuperscript{69} Parish organizations that existed to perform charitable or devotional works assumed an important social role, divided by gender. For the men at St. Peter's there was the Holy Name Society, a medieval confraternity that experienced an efflorescence in the United States during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Its purpose was to uphold and defend the name of Jesus, and it reflected a muscular style of Catholicism that emerged during the period and mirrored a similar development in Protestantism.\textsuperscript{70} For the women at St. Peter's there was the Altar Society, which cared for the ceremonial objects used in Catholic rituals but that also provided a key outlet for female socializing.

\textsuperscript{67} James Scheuring, interview by William Fliss, August 26, 2017.
\textsuperscript{69} Quasquicentennial Committee, \textit{Pages from the Past: Defiance, Iowa, 1882-2007} (Defiance, 2007), 43.
The rituals themselves brought women and men together. Feast days filled the Catholic Church calendar, providing opportunities for special celebrations. The Feast of Corpus Christi called for a procession through town. Rosary processions abounded, especially in May and October. Rogation days witnessed the singing of the litany of All Saints. Sundays were a day of intense worship when many families--including almost certainly the Blums--attended two Masses plus a benediction in the evening. It would be a mistake to exaggerate the degree to which Sts. Peter and Paul melded all the parishioners around Defiance into one big happy family. As will be seen, Father McAniff’s brief tenure revealed fractures in the Catholic community. Yet the parish was central to the maintenance and reinforcement of Catholic identity among the people, an identity that met challenges as soon as they exited the church doors.

The Colony

Sts. Peter and Paul Parish stood at the edge of an unusual Catholic community known throughout Shelby County simply as the Colony. Iowa has been one of the most Protestant states in the Midwest, with Catholics barely exceeding a quarter of the total population at any point in its history. Most Catholics in Iowa have been found in the eastern counties, particularly around Dubuque. Shelby County was among the twenty-three counties in southwestern Iowa that constituted the Des Moines Diocese founded in 1911. Catholics in the diocese accounted for only 5-6 percent of the total population.

72 The earliest reference appears in a 1904 article by John L. Lewis. He spelled it with a lowercase ‘c.’ By 1915, the colony had become capitalized to Colony. See John L. Lewis, “Shelby County: A Sociological Study,” Iowa Journal of History and Politics 2, no. 1 (January 1904), 86-87; and White, Past and Present of Shelby County Iowa, 125.
during Virgil Blum's childhood and adolescence. Catholics were a minority living within a Protestant society, and they knew it. That the name Colony would rise organically to refer to the Catholics clustered in Shelby County speaks to the alien quality of their presence in the area and the sense of otherness with which Protestants viewed them and with which many viewed themselves.

The small towns at the center of the Colony were overwhelmingly Catholic, but when one reached the peripheral town of Defiance to the north, the Catholic and Protestant populations approached parity. These two groups coexisted uneasily. During the early-mid 1930s, religious tension in Defiance grew into ugly conflict and proceeded almost to bloodshed. For the devoted person of either faith tradition, growing up in such an environment could not fail to affect later perceptions and actions. It is impossible to understand the adult Virgil Blum without accounting for the religious crucible that formed him. Certain trademarks of Blum's adult self—the extreme sensitivity he exhibited to criticism of the Catholic Church, his intense devotion to Catholic education, and his enduring perception of Catholics as an embattled minority in American society—may be traced to his upbringing in Defiance.

The oddity known as the Colony came into being because of the railroad. The land it occupied had been ceded to the federal government by the Native American Pottawatomie nation in 1846. The United States in turn granted this land to the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railway Company to finance the building of track that it hoped would eventually snake throughout the region, encouraging economic development. In

March 1872 the railroad's land commissioner, John Drew, negotiated a contract with A.H. Kettler to sell the land in parcels to German Catholic settlers.\textsuperscript{75} Why the contract specified Catholics is unclear, but Kettler soon advertised in German-language newspapers both in the United States and abroad; and by August, he had his first buyer, Emil Fleusche.\textsuperscript{76}

The stream of settlers that followed Fleusche suggests a chain migration at work whereby relatives encouraged family and friends to join them.\textsuperscript{77} Among the newcomers in 1874 was Virgil's maternal grandfather, Joseph Rueschenberg. The following year, the township where the Colony first took root saw its name changed from Sumner to Westphalia, reflecting the old home province in Germany whence many of the settlers had emigrated. Virgil's paternal grandfather, Peter Blum, joined the community in Westphalia in 1882, having moved there from Wisconsin where he and his parents first settled after leaving Germany when Peter was eight years old. By 1885 there were 300 families clustered around Westphalia and attending St. Boniface's, the ur-Catholic parish in the Colony.

No rail line ever made direct contact with the town of Westphalia; however, the railroad's presence in Shelby County helped to expand the Colony by developing other communities where the overflow from Westphalia township could settle. In 1881 the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad launched a major construction drive through Shelby County in a quest to reach Council Bluffs on the Missouri River. This led to the platting of towns along the route: Defiance, Earling, Panama, and Portsmouth. Catholics

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 6-7.
from the Colony spread gradually into these new communities. New parishes emerged.
Earling, like Westphalia, became almost completely Catholic. In 1892, the inhabitants of
Earling constructed St. Joseph Church on the hill at the center of town. It was a
magnificent structure that dwarfed the other Catholic churches in the county, its steeple a
conspicuous landmark that proclaimed Catholic pride to any passersby. Virgil Blum
would choose St. Joseph Church as the site of his first High Mass celebrated after his
ordination to the priesthood in 1947.

Defiance preceded the coming of the railroad in that it originated before the Civil
War as a stagecoach stop consisting of a post office, harness shop, and implement shop,
known locally as Willow Creek. By 1875 the post office there bore the official name
Defiance. In 1881, when the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul laid its track just east of
Willow Creek, the post office relocated one mile to join a new freight station under
construction. The railroad named the station Defiance, and a town was platted there in
February 1882. Within three years, the population of Defiance had grown to 500.
Only a small number of Catholic families lived near Defiance at this point, gathering at
the mission church of St. Peter for sacraments administered by a visiting priest. Defiance
at its outset, therefore, was firmly Protestant. A county history from 1889 alluded to a
Catholic church in Defiance, but its author did not mention it by name nor give it the
same descriptive paragraph lavished upon each of the three Protestant churches.
St. Peter's shared Defiance in the late nineteenth century with a larger Methodist Episcopal

78 White, Past and Present of Shelby County Iowa, 405.
79 History Book Committee, Defiance Century Review, 2.
80 Ibid.
81 Biographical History of Shelby and Audubon Counties, Iowa (Chicago: W.S. Dunbar & Company,
1889), 279.
82 Ibid., 280.
church, a Church of the United Brethren in Christ, and a congregation called simply The Christian Church.

In addition to being firmly Protestant, young Defiance began with a strong Masonic presence as well. Lodge 441, bearing the name Guardian, took shape at the town's founding and received its charter from the Grand Lodge of Iowa two years later in 1884. Protestantism and Freemasonry had not always coexisted peacefully. In the early nineteenth century many Protestants had persecuted Freemasons, viewing them as a secret society conspiring to undermine Christian democracy. The anti-Masonic movement receded by the 1830s; and with the arrival in the United States of millions of Catholic immigrants beginning in that decade, Protestants and Freemasons made common cause against the newcomers. Masonic belief in a Great Architect of the Universe could be reconciled with the Protestant notion of God, and some Protestants could find in the status hierarchies and esoteric rituals of Freemasonry an attractive social dimension absent from the simple worship in their churches.

Catholicism and Freemasonry, on the other hand, were at continuous loggerheads, and Catholic antipathy toward Masons predated the founding of the American republic. The modern Masonic movement can be traced to English construction guilds in 1717. By 1738 Pope Clement XII had issued an encyclical condemning the growing movement and prohibiting any Catholics from belonging to it. Anti-Masonic rhetoric flourished during

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the papacies of Pius IX (1846-1878) and Leo XIII (1878-1903) who combined to speak out over 2,000 times against Freemasonry. Leo XIII's 1884 encyclical *Humanum Genus* stood out as the starkest and most articulate denunciation. Not only did Leo argue for Freemasonry's irreconcilability with Catholic doctrine, but he linked the worldwide movement to Communism, an action that infuriated many American Masons.

Although Freemasonry could appear monolithic in Catholic eyes, it was in fact a diverse collection of rites, based loosely on the same symbols and principles but keeping their own traditions and secrets. The largest rite in the United States was the Blue Lodge with which the state Grand Lodges and their myriad local lodges were affiliated. Blue Lodge Freemasonry never officially denounced the Catholic Church, always maintaining that the Lodge was open to people of every faith. Yet anti-Catholicism was rife among individual Masons, and this could undoubtedly take on a corporate identity depending upon local circumstances. Masonic fears of Catholicism were not so much theological as political and social. The Protestant and Masonic worldviews met in regarding the Catholic Church as a foreign, autocratic power with designs to impose its control over the United States. According to this view, American Catholics loomed as a potential army that might bring into effect papal conquest of the American state. Most alarming to Masons was the emergence of parochial schools seen to perpetuate Romish ideology and undermine the public school, an institution Masons regarded as a vital seedbed for the life of non-denominational American democracy.

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By the early twentieth century, Defiance, Iowa had become ripe for rural religious conflict. A Protestant majority, including a leadership cohort infused with Masonic ideals, came slowly to coexist alongside the overflow from the Catholic Colony. It does not require a leap of historical imagination to recover a concerned Protestant point of view: Picture a devout Methodist man watching anxiously the gradual Catholic growth in Defiance. Perhaps he settled in the community in the decade after its founding, a young man establishing a life for himself. He eventually joins the Guardian Lodge, finding fellowship and identity among his fellow Masons. He watches the Catholics gather on Sunday, but they are few and their church is just a modest wooden structure south of Main Street. As the new century dawns, the Catholics he encounters increase. The number of families he sees gathering around the small church has grown. He watches an energetic priest named Burkhiser settle in Defiance. He is shocked at the number of Catholics from the county that turn out for the first church picnic, an event so large it uses the pavilion grounds near the railroad station. Some local Protestants must have attended as well, but he stays away. He grows alarmed two years later when a parochial school opens, seeming to compete with Defiance's fine public school. The following year, in June 1914, he hears word that a Knights of Columbus chapter has been established eight miles away at St. Joseph's in Earling. Some of Defiance's Catholics are known to belong to this sinister organization.

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88 Quasquicentennial Committee, *Pages from the Past*, 43.
89 White, *Past and Present of Shelby County Iowa*, 500. The standard history of the Knights of Columbus is Christopher J. Kauffman, *Faith and Fraternalism: The History of the Knights of Columbus, 1882-1982*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1982). The Knights were a fraternal aid association for immigrant Catholics that assumed a villainous role in anti-Catholic propaganda. See for example, "Alleged Bloody Oath of the Knights of Columbus" found in Box 8, Folder 14 Anti-Catholic Propaganda 1920-1923, in Series 1.1 Office of the General Secretary, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Records, Catholic University of America Archives.
Over the years, his unease mounts. He is pleased to see his wife join the new chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star, a predominantly female organization affiliated with the Masons, established in Defiance in September 1916. He still gains enormous comfort from his Masonic brothers, and he looks forward to their meetings on the first Tuesday of the month at the Lodge's rooms on the second floor of what used to be the Dowling Hotel on Defiance's Main Street--known once upon a time as "the best $2.00 hotel in the Mid-West." He is less happy in 1917 to see a new Catholic church/school building rise along the high ground near the northwest corner of town; it is an impressive brick edifice that rivals the public school constructed five years earlier. Later that same year, he encounters one of the most glaring of Papist symbols when he witnesses four black-garbed Catholic sisters detraining at the station. Perhaps his perception of these seemingly benighted women is shaped by lurid tales about nuns that circulated in print among Protestants, such as The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk, one of the bestselling books in America during the nineteenth century. As the hard years of the 1920s unfold, he observes from time-to-time Catholic devotional rituals—processions of parishioners seeming to shuffle like lemmings in the open air. As he enters the autumn of his life, he watches the enormous crowd gather to dedicate the new St. Peter's Church, a far cry from their earliest wooden structure. To make matters worse, he learns that the parochial school has now expanded to include a high school. When will it end, he wonders?

91 Ibid., 242.
The priests

During the 1920s, conditions were in place for religious conflict in Defiance. On one side was a growing Catholic population unafraid to express devotion to its Church, with an active Holy Name Society and Altar Society as well as the support of the local Knights of Columbus. On the other side was an uneasy Protestant population divided at this point among at least four churches yet united in their non-Catholic identity and supported by the male Masonic Lodge along with its female counterpart, the Order of the Eastern Star. Nevertheless, Catholics and Protestants coexisted peaceably during the decade. The situation began to change, however, with the arrival of Father Burkhiser’s successors at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish—first, Father Charles McAniff and then later, Father Emil Schuman. They sought greater control over the Catholics in the community and took actions that alienated their Protestant neighbors. At the heart of the religious troubles in Defiance would be the issue of high school education.

Father Burkhiser was a popular pastor, but his continued presence at Sts. Peter and Paul became doubtful by the mid-1920s. Over the years he had developed diabetes, and the illness compelled Burkhiser to take medical leaves of absence as the decade progressed.92 Finally, on August 31, 1927, he submitted his resignation to Bishop Drumm, citing ill health. Burkhiser seems to have been popular with Protestants as well; many of them reportedly turned out for the priest’s farewell party.93

Father Charles McAniff became parish administrator in September and was elevated to pastor the following April. McAniff was a tall, lanky man of great piety and

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92 Clergy record card, found in Charles V. Burkhiser Priest File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
93 Sts. Peter and Paul Defiance Cemetery Directory and Church History.
drive but also of restless energy and financial irresponsibility. McAniff was a rolling stone that passed briefly through Defiance’s history but left an important mark. The year after McAniff’s departure from Sts. Peter and Paul, Bishop Drumm admonished the priest: “Your card [i.e. clergy record] shows a lot of movements. I hope they will become fewer.”

Defiance was a difficult assignment for McAniff. Soon after his arrival, he wrote to Drumm that “Defiance has been quite a revelation to me. The true conditions of the place were so well covered up by some of the laity that even the trustees knew little of them.”

The problem centered on lay abuse of Columbia Hall, an auditorium building that the parish had acquired at some point over the years. Taking advantage perhaps of declining oversight by Father Burkhiser as his health deteriorated, a “hall committee” composed of four laymen exerted strict control over the space to their own benefit. McAniff told Bishop Drumm that the parish used the auditorium no more than six times a year on account of it having been turned into Defiance’s public dance hall and even serving as gymnasium for the public school. Furthermore, only a fraction of the proceeds generated from the hall found their way into the parish’s bank account. The pious McAniff complained to his bishop that, “moral conditions are so far from the Catholic ideal—it is disgusting. The church through this committee operated the worst public nuisance in north Shelby County.”

McAniff put a stop to it, alienating the parishioners who had benefitted from the arrangement and probably alienating the Protestants as well.

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94 Bishop Drumm to McAniff, April 10, 1930, found in Charles McAniff Priest File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
95 McAniff to Drumm, October 27, 1927, found in Charles McAniff Priest File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
96 Ibid.
that had made use of the space. McAniff’s piety was on display in his subsequent decision not to include a basement in the design for the new church building. He feared that if it became a social gathering space, similar activities might take root. Father McAniff wanted no opportunity for sin to be committed beneath the worship space.  

Father McAniff directed his energy into erecting the new church, and he encouraged moral reform within the parish. When Monsignor Stoll preached at the dedication of the new church building in 1928, he singled out drunkenness for special censure, perhaps an oblique reference to perceived sins among a minority at the parish. McAniff built a shrine to the Little Flower—St. Therese of the Child Jesus—at the new church, and he instituted novenas prayed in her honor and seeking her intercession. The diocesan newspaper celebrated the renewed devotionalism at St. Peter’s and crowed that these novenas “have brought many souls back to the church who have been away for years.” J.P.’s family, of course, had never been away from the church. The Blums were undoubtedly supporters of McAniff. Nearly a half-century later, Virgil Blum would confide that it was Charles McAniff who first led him to consider becoming a priest.

With the new church building completed, Father McAniff converted the old church space into classrooms for a parochial high school. The new school met resistance among some in the Catholic community. Even though the American bishops had declared that Catholic children must attend a Catholic school if one was available, some parents

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97 James Scheuring, interview by William Fliss, August 26, 2017. The parish would eventually build its own auditorium hall in 1936, located across the road from the church building.
99 “Solemn Novena to Little Flower at St. Peter’s,” The Catholic Messenger, September 20, 1928.
preferred to keep their children in the public high school. In the fall of 1928, two families refused to shift their children to St. Paul’s School. Father McAniff took drastic unilateral action by refusing to administer the sacraments to these pupils or their parents. By the following April, McAniff had resigned from Sts. Peter and Paul because of ill health. The county’s main newspaper reported in February that he was in Seattle, Washington recovering from a recent surgical operation. Although McAniff returned to Iowa the following year, his association with Defiance was at an end. He served short terms at other parishes in the diocese before becoming a professor at Des Moines Catholic College after 1937. Upon the heels of McAniff’s departure from Defiance, Bishop Drumm appointed Father Emil Schuman as parish administrator, a post Schuman held until 1933 when he received promotion to pastor.

Father Schuman was several years older than McAniff, but he had been ordained for only three years when Drumm sent him to Defiance. Schuman entered the priesthood later than most men of the period. He was a cavalry veteran of the 1916 Mexican Expedition who later served in the First World War. Schuman had earned an accounting degree from DePaul University and worked in the business world before discerning his call to the sacerdotal state. His secular credentials as a certified public accountant help explain why Drumm appointed Schuman to St. Peter’s. “[Y]ou will have to tackle finances promptly and get them straightened out,” the Bishop advised, showing that he

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101 Despite the uncompromising wording of the edict, the American Church never achieved this goal and no more than a third of Catholic school children attended a parochial school. See Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 275-278.
102 *The Harlan Republican* (Harlan, IA), February 14, 1929.
103 Clergy record card, found in Charles McAniff Priest File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
104 “Father E. J. Schuman Funeral Held in Avoca on Tuesday,” May 5, 1955, unidentified newspaper clipping found in Emil John Schuman Priest File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
counted on Schuman to bring order to the financial disarray that came from years of neglect under Burkhisier and from McAniff’s brief but eventful tenure that witnessed construction of the new church building.  

A few months after Father Schuman’s arrival, he faced a deepening of the high school crisis. “The bolshevicks [sic] of Defiance are again running rampant,” he wrote to Chancellor Vitus Stoll. Eight of the students at St. Paul’s were switching to the public high school. Schuman told Stoll he had only just learned that McAniff had refused sacraments to recalcitrant parishioners the year before. Schuman approved of such a drastic measure, but he wanted written approval from the Chancery Office before taking the same action. Chancellor Stoll refused, arguing that it “may bring endless complications and may do more harm than good.” Additional investigation by Schuman revealed that the mass transfer had been motivated by the parishioners’ discovery that their high school was not accredited. Lack of accreditation meant that graduates would be unable to secure a job that required proof of a high school diploma. Adding to the families’ anger was the fact that Father McAniff had assured them that St. Paul’s was accredited. Schuman defused the situation by quickly arranging for state accreditation at “quite some expense and trouble.”

Father Schuman feared additional unrest down the road. He complained to Chancellor Stoll about a minority of “very liberal catholics” in his parish. “Now these

105 Drumm to Schuman, February 28, 1929, found in Emil John Schuman Priest File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
106 Schuman to Stoll, September 3, 1929, found in St. Peter’s School File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
107 Monsignor Stoll to Schuman, September 4, 1929, found in St. Peter’s School File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
108 Schuman to Stoll, October 4, 1929, found in St. Peter’s School File, Archives Des Moines Diocese.
people, catholic-protestants, are the ones who have and will make all the trouble.”

Schuman renewed his plea for permission to withhold the sacraments from parishioners who sent their children to the public high school, but Chancellor Stoll remained firm in refusing it to him. Denied authority to weaponize the sacraments, Schuman turned to his pulpit instead. When a parishioner named Peter Fromm tried to convince some of the boys to transfer to the public high school so that it might field a better basketball team, Father Schuman publicly humiliated Fromm by angrily denouncing him by name during Sunday Mass. Over time, Schuman’s hardline stance on obedience to the Church’s teachings and his effort to crack down on independent Catholics in his parish widened the divide between Protestants and Catholics in Defiance. Schuman is remembered as having exacerbated latent tension between the two groups.

The war

Ugly conflict broke out in Defiance between Protestants and Catholics during the years 1933-1935. The historian's dilemma in treating such an event is that local strife of this nature seldom finds its way into the historical record. Academic historians tend not to dwell on tiny communities like Defiance, and the works produced by local historians—usually coinciding with town anniversaries—seek to celebrate the community's past, with conflict and division submerged beneath a narrative of nostalgia and togetherness. Recovery of the hidden past depends in large measure on memories that remain within the community, either from witnesses to the events or from stories passed down the generations.

109 Ibid.
110 Robert Dotzler, interview.
111 James Scheuring, interview.
The event that brought about open conflict in Defiance during the 1930s was a dispute over the public high school. The school district had a tradition of hosting a special spring dinner for its juniors and seniors. The Protestant-dominated school board decided one year—most likely in 1932—that the event would be held on a Friday and that chicken would be served. The Catholic parents who sent their children to the school objected, pointing out how their religion prohibited their children from consuming meat on Fridays. The school officials would not budge, telling them in effect that they could either eat chicken or stay away. Tempers flared. One Catholic parent and taxpayer reportedly flung folding chairs across the room at a meeting, yelling "Well, dammit this school is ours too!" He later cornered the school superintendent on Main Street and roughed him up.\(^{112}\) What followed was a concerted effort by Catholics in Defiance to take control of the local school board. Catholic and Protestant candidates vied for election to the board. Catholics accused the victorious Protestants of rigging the first election, successfully forcing a re-election that the Catholics won. Years later, the son of one of the Catholic candidates would recall how men used to gather in his family's kitchen during the runup to election day and carefully count the available votes.\(^{113}\) Catholic victory must have struck Protestants and Masons in Defiance as calamitous. The opening of a parochial school had been bad enough. Catholic control of the cherished public school was intolerable.

Father Schuman supported the Catholic effort to wrest control of the local school board away from the Protestants, but his exact role is unclear. Equally hazy is his

\(^{112}\) James Scheuring, interview.

\(^{113}\) Robert Dotzler, interview.
motivation for doing so. As a proponent of parochial education, Schuman wanted all of Defiance’s Catholics at St. Paul’s School. Perhaps social control of the Catholic population was at the heart of his actions. Whatever the motive, Schuman supported the effort by permitting an empty house that the parish owned near the church to be used as a lodging for Catholics brought in from outlying farms to swell voter turnout. Father Schuman also marched the eight school sisters down the street to vote on election day, a move that made Protestants and Masons apoplectic—these women were seasonal inhabitants who did not even pay taxes.\textsuperscript{114}

Even if Father Schuman was not the prime mover behind the election war, it is plausible that Protestants and Masons perceived him to be the Catholic mastermind. The Catholic laity had a long-standing reputation among Protestants of being firmly under the control of priests. During the conflict in Defiance, Protestants took to calling Catholics "Cat-Lickers"—a pejorative play on words that suggested Catholics were like kittens whose eyes had not yet opened.\textsuperscript{115} Masonic hatred toward Father Schuman is evident in a story still remembered among Catholics about a failed attempt on the pastor's life.\textsuperscript{116} After the Catholics seized control of the school board, the local Masons drew straws among themselves to decide who would assassinate Father Schuman. The man who ultimately drew the short straw could not bring himself to do the deed. He committed suicide instead. Whether or not the tale is true, its continued presence in local Catholic lore attests to the intensity of the passions aroused during the period and the extent of action deemed believable at the time.

\textsuperscript{114} James Scheuring, interview.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Robert Dotzler, interview.
If Cat-Licker became the epithet of choice directed toward Catholics, the Catholics themselves took to lumping their opponents together under the label "Klu-Kluxers." This term refers specifically to members of the Klu Klux Klan, an infamous racist and nativist group that has seen multiple incarnations in U.S. history. The first Klan appeared in the South after the Civil War as a terrorist organization involved in reasserting white supremacy over the region. By 1872 the federal government had succeeded in crippling the group. The second Klan originated near Atlanta, Georgia in 1915. It soared to popularity in the 1920s, reaching apotheosis in 1925 when it boasted over 4 million members nationwide and paraded 50,000 hooded Klansmen down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. Although the second Klan was founded in the South, it enjoyed significant support in parts of the Midwest. Historian Thomas Pegram has concluded that "the most strikingly consistent feature of the revived Klan was its antipathy to Catholicism." This anti-Catholic message resonated among some Protestant Midwesterners fed up with heavy Catholic immigration. They warmed to the Klan's slogan of 100 Percent Americanism, perceiving the Catholic immigrants to be potential bootleggers and slavish followers of an authoritarian religion seeking the union of church and state. The Klan enjoyed significant support among Masons. 

Iowa experienced Klan activity during the group's heyday in the 1920s, particularly in the southern counties, where Bishop Drumm sent priests to evangelize among the Protestant majority. The Klan's overt presence in Iowa declined in step with

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the fortunes of the larger organization. Scandals involving the Klan's national leaders hastened its disintegration by the end of the decade.\footnote{121} Events in Defiance in the 1930s, however, suggest that the group was not extinct in the Hawkeye State. The Klan's anti-Catholic sympathies, distinctive regalia, and intimidating activities could emerge in public if circumstances warranted. At least one march through Defiance by hooded men is remembered to have taken place during these years, and a cross burning occurred near the town's flagpole.\footnote{122}

The religious war in Defiance never spilled over into pitched battles and bloodshed, although a near-riot one Saturday evening came close, with crowds of Cat-Lickers and Klu-Kluxers screaming at each other from opposite sides of the street.\footnote{123} Conflict during these years tended to take the form of social segregation and business vendettas. Protestants and Catholics frequented only the merchants who were their coreligionists. People crossed the street to avoid each other. Father Schuman exhorted his flock from the pulpit to always seek out a Catholic professional (e.g., lawyer, doctor) if they needed one. If a Catholic family was selling its farm, Schuman tried to convince them to sell it only to another Catholic family.

An ardent minority of citizens on both sides was probably responsible for keeping the war going, with many people left awkwardly in the middle. Reflecting years later, a Catholic old-timer is remembered to have labeled the entire period "Father Schuman's religion stink."\footnote{124} A Protestant resident of Defiance named Dorothy Tryon recorded how

\footnote{121} For an account of the declining fortune of the Klan in Iowa see Dorothy Schwieder, “A Farmer and the Klux Klan in Northwest Iowa,” \textit{The Annals of Iowa} 61, no. 3 (2002): 286-320.\footnote{122} James Scheuring, interview.\footnote{123} Ibid.\footnote{124} Ibid.
she and her family kept their heads low and tried to remain neutral during the religious strife. Nevertheless, Tryon's memoir showed how even fence-sitters could be drawn into the conflict: She admitted to joining other Protestants in taking mail to nearby Harlan so that Defiance's Catholic postmaster would not get credit for it.\textsuperscript{125}

Virgil Blum was a product of this divided community. He never championed an anti-Protestant message in his public life, but Blum’s experience growing up in Defiance left its marks upon him, leaving him very sensitive to any criticisms against his Church and laying the groundwork for his belief that Catholics battled against an outsider status in American society and needed therefore to band together if they were going to be treated as equals. Virgil Blum was not present to witness all the religious strife that played out in Defiance from 1933-1935, but his family would have kept him abreast of developments. Since his graduation from high school in 1932, Virgil had begun moving away from his home in Defiance and toward a new home in the Society of Jesus.

\textbf{The vocation}

Catholic culture in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century placed tremendous value on religious vocations, and it held those who discerned such a calling in highest esteem. The steady stream of young men and women who chose a vowed life helped to perpetuate the Catholic Church in America. Virgil Blum would join this stream, entering the Society of Jesus in 1934. His choice of the Jesuits made Virgil something of an outlier and part of an exclusive group. Jesuits enjoyed an exalted reputation among American Catholics based upon their intellectual training and skill as educators. Most young men with vocations tended to become diocesan priests, with most

\textsuperscript{125} Dorothy L. Tryon, \textit{Where Have I Been?} (Self-published, 1996), 28.
of these spending their ministries in the parishes. Their work enabled the local, sacramental heart of Church life to continue. Most young women became teaching sisters, educating generations of parochial school children in their faith and encouraging the future vocations that would keep the sacramental system running.

The Catholic Colony in Shelby County produced a stunning number of vocations. By 1953, over two hundred of its sons and daughters had entered religious life as priests, sisters, or brothers. ¹²⁶ St. Boniface's in Westphalia led the charge: From 1886-1972, thirty-four young men and eighty-five young women departed the small parish to pursue religious life.¹²⁷ Most young women from the Colony ended up joining the same religious order that had taught them; this was certainly the case in Westphalia where the vast majority entered the School Sisters of St. Francis with its motherhouse in Milwaukee.

What motivated so many vocations from the Colony in Shelby County? The simplest explanation is that it was a place particularly suited to inculcating the piety that would lead a person to solemnly embrace countercultural values such as poverty, chastity, and obedience. A skeptic might counter this by pointing to the disproportionate number of female vocations from the area and suggesting instead that these women, certainly in the early decades, were simply fleeing the unrelenting toil and premature death awaiting them as farmers' wives. But if we accept that sincere religious belief and desire grounded these vocations from Shelby County then we must consider why such belief flourished so strongly there. Sociologists of religion Roger Finke and Rodney Stark argue that historically only "high tension" religious groups have flourished in the United

¹²⁶ Avella, The Catholic Church in Southwest Iowa, 46-47.
¹²⁷ Zimmerman, The History of Westphalia, 27.
States. What they mean is that America's most vibrant and fecund churches have been those existing outside the cultural mainstream. In effect, such religious groups drew strength from the fact they were providing a clear alternative to mainstream religious and secular culture. The applicability of this theory to Shelby County falls short in the sense that few of the Catholics in the Colony seem to have been Protestant converts drawn away from the dominant culture. But it stands to reason that daily life in an area where one's own belief system was at odds with the dominant religious culture could have a fortifying effect upon that person's piety. Devotion to the Catholic Church grew particularly well in soil surrounded by hostile conditions. The Colony's situation therefore produced a force multiplier effect upon any individual propensity toward a vocation.

Having a priest, sister, or brother in its ranks was a source of pride for most Catholic families. They basked indirectly in the glory shone upon their sons and daughters by the larger Catholic culture. The elevated status enjoyed by a young man or woman with a religious vocation could rub off on the family. The Blums would have enjoyed minor celebrity status among the most devout of Defiance's Catholics. The hard-toiling Elizabeth Blum surely experienced some measure of gratification when she attended St. Peter's Church each Sunday after 1929 and moved among the other families knowing that hers had produced the first two vocations to ever come from the parish. The Blums' eldest child, Victor, had entered the Society of Jesus in 1926. Their second child, Laura, entered the School Sisters of St. Francis three years later. Virgil would be

129 Quasquicentennial Committee, *Pages from the Past*, ??.
the family's third and final vocation, eventually following his older brother into the Jesuits.

Virgil's route into the Society of Jesus was a meandering path compared to Victor's, which ran straight to its destination like an ancient Roman road. Victor was six years older than Virgil and seems to have stood out from an early age as a prodigiously bright boy. J.P. and Elizabeth were determined to give Victor the best Catholic education possible and so they sent him to school in Westphalia from 1914-1917, only switching him to the parish school in Defiance with the arrival of the Benedictine sisters. Victor completed the 8th grade at St. Paul's in 1922 and then departed that fall for Campion High, a Jesuit boarding school in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, near the banks of the Mississippi River. It was a testimony to Victor's intellectual talents that he gained entrance to prestigious Campion. The high school enjoyed a stellar reputation in the Midwest and was especially popular among Chicago's Catholics. Campion must have been an eye-opening experience for Victor, the Iowa farm boy rubbing elbows with the wealthy sons of Chicago's Catholic elite. By the time of his graduation in 1926, Victor had chosen to follow in the footsteps of his teachers and join the Society of Jesus. He entered the novitiate later that year.130

Victor exerted the greatest influence on Virgil's eventual vocation, but his influence seems to have come nearer the end of the process. Father Charles McAniff stoked the first embers of the young man's calling. McAniff's brief tenure as pastor at Sts. Peter and Paul coincided with an openness on Virgil's part to consider a religious path. The adult Virgil Blum said almost nothing about his formative years, but he noted once in

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130 Details on Victor’s movements found on "Personnel Record," in Victor J. Blum, S.J. File, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
a brief interview that Father McAniff, by word and example, had first led him to consider the priesthood.\footnote{"Catholic Freedom Man" Our Sunday Visitor, February 29, 1976.} Victor's influence on Virgil at this point was more distant. The first four years of Jesuit formation was a life of relative isolation; young Virgil probably only saw his brother a few times between 1926-1930. Victor's influence during these years therefore would have been more as an ideal than a tangible reality. Father McAniff, on the other hand, was before his eyes regularly.

In the fall of 1932, Virgil Blum enrolled in classes at Des Moines Catholic College. The school had opened its doors in 1918 and owed its existence to the determined fundraising efforts of Bishop Austin Dowling who saw the college's primary role as providing vocations to the priesthood.\footnote{Avella, \textit{The Catholic Church in Southwest Iowa}, 87-93.} It had a reputation among Catholics in the Colony as a training ground for priests.\footnote{Robert Dotzler, interview.} Perhaps Virgil went there to discern whether he did in fact have a vocation. It could also be that Des Moines Catholic College was the only option available to him to continue his education. Although economic depression had gripped rural America since the early 1920s, the plight of farmers deepened even further as the rest of the country joined them in the economic trough. From 1929-1933, net farm income nationwide plunged by 50 percent.\footnote{Wilfred W. Cochrane, \textit{The Development of American Agriculture: A Historical Analysis} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 101.} Virgil's future at Des Moines Catholic College became doubtful by the end of his first year. The institution struggled to remain solvent, and an ugly row that summer between the bishop and his priests over financial assessments owed to the college by the diocese's parishes threatened to close the school.\footnote{Avella, \textit{The Catholic Church in Southwest Iowa}, 139-143.} Although Des Moines Catholic College survived the
crisis, Virgil chose to transfer to Creighton University in the fall, his attendance there made financially feasible by a work-study program through the National Youth Organization.136

Creighton University was 20-year-old Virgil's first direct exposure to Jesuit education. When he arrived in Omaha in September 1933, Creighton had been operating for 55 years, ever since the local bishop invited the Jesuits to Omaha to run a new Catholic college made possible by a bequest from Mrs. Mary Lucretia Creighton in memory of her late husband, Edward. The university occupied a small cluster of buildings upon high ground that was a 15-minute walk from Omaha's central business district. Enrollment at Creighton fluctuated between 2,500-3,000 students, of which 12-13 percent hailed from nearby Iowa.137 As a first-year student, Virgil likely resided at St. John's Hall, known locally as the "Beanery" on account of the ubiquity of that staple on the residence hall's menu. He would have been required to enroll as a cadet in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. and periodically don a uniform provided by the university. Virgil likely joined either one or both student religious organizations on campus: The Sodality of the Immaculate Conception and the Apostleship of Prayer, each of them begun by European Jesuits in earlier centuries to inculcate pious habits and Christian virtues among their members. Virgil's opportunity for extracurricular activity was limited, however, by the demands of the NYO program, which paid him a quarter dollar an hour to perform various jobs around campus. Virgil had played on the

137 Enrollment figures are based on the averages of data found in The Creighton University Bulletins for 1932-1933 and 1935-1936 because the Bulletin for 1933-1934 omitted this information. Other descriptive information in this paragraph was culled from The Creighton University Bulletin, Vol. 25, No. 1, (February First 1933), 7-8, 10-11, 14, 18, 26.
basketball team at Des Moines Catholic College, but his busy life of study and manual labor demanded he abandon athletic pursuits while at Creighton.

Virgil might have lost out on basketball at Creighton, but he gained a vocation. At some point during that year, he decided to become a Jesuit priest. A contributing moment in the discernment process might have been the Annual Retreat every student was required to make at the end of each fall semester. The three-day event featured a well-known pulpit orator who offered talks based upon *The Spiritual Exercises* of the Society's founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola. This would have been Virgil's first exposure to the heart of Ignatian spirituality, and it must have resonated with him. He encountered several Jesuits during his year at Creighton, but the two he mentioned later as having influenced him were the Degelman brothers, George and Francis. George, who until recently had been serving as Creighton's dean of Arts and Sciences, acted that year as a special coordinator of the colleges while at the same time instructing the freshmen in religion, an assignment that would have put him in contact with Virgil. Francis Degelman was Creighton’s student counsellor, responsible for the spiritual guidance of the entire student body. The Degelmans may have served as a model for Virgil of two brothers serving God and supporting each other in the Society of Jesus. By now, Victor would have reemerged as a more direct influence on Virgil's life. Victor was pursuing graduate studies and teaching physics at St. Louis University. After sizing up Virgil and

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139 Ibid.
140 “Degelman, Georgius A.” biographical file, Creighton University Archives.
141 Creighton *Bluejay* Yearbook (1934), 12.
deeming him in possession of the mental acuity and disciplined piety demanded in a Jesuit, Victor would certainly have encouraged his younger brother in his vocation.

Virgil's application to the Society of Jesus followed the usual course. Four Jesuits examined him in separate interviews to assess his vocation. Their opinions, along with the results of a physical examination, went to Provincial Samuel Horne, S.J., of the Missouri Province. Father Horne approved Virgil's request to enter the novitiate in the summer of 1934 and embark upon the long road of Jesuit formation. If Virgil ever second-guessed his decision later, no evidence of it remains in the historical record. Exhibiting J.P.'s singleness of purpose, he devoted his entire self to being a Jesuit. Elizabeth must have received news of her son's vocation with intense joy.

The choice met with surprise in other quarters. Blum’s older brother Edgar would later comment to one of his daughters that Virgil was the last person that the Catholics in Defiance ever thought would become a priest. He had a reputation for being ornery and a fighter. Through his 56 years as a Jesuit, Virgil Blum would take these defiant qualities in his makeup and offer their use according to the Jesuits' motto, *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*—For the Greater Glory of God.

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142 Marilyn Munchrath, interview.
CHAPTER 2: Formed in the Society of Jesus, 1934-1947

Virgil Blum entered the Society of Jesus in his twenty-first year and remained a Jesuit until his death at age 77. He followed the customary 13-year course of formation leading to priestly ordination. The Jesuits were unique among religious orders in having such a lengthy formation process, a fact that engendered respect and admiration in many Catholics. Blum was in formation when the Jesuits celebrated their 400th anniversary. While the Society of Jesus was young compared to such orders as the Benedictines or Carthusians, it could nevertheless celebrate a history that had been unfolding since the very beginnings of the modern era. Its history was controversial, inspiring love and hate in others; indeed, had Virgil Blum wanted to choose an order that reflected his own personality, he could hardly have chosen better than the Society of Jesus, both being capable of provoking strong emotions in others, positive and negative. By Blum’s day, the Jesuits were most conspicuous as educators, having established a global network of high schools, colleges, and universities. The rigorous Jesuit formation process had remained largely unchanged for centuries, producing erudite and disciplined men for its vast educational system. Jesuit formation changed profoundly in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), a seminal event that had a transformative effect on the entire Catholic Church. Virgil Blum was a product of the pre-conciliar (i.e., pre-Vatican II) Church and Society of Jesus. Like other Jesuits of his generation, Blum lived much of his ministry in a post-conciliar setting. His life straddled both periods, making it a useful lens for observing changes within the Church. Since Vatican II, the old formation process has been criticized as a liability that produced men incapable of contending with a rapidly
changing society. By looking closely at Blum’s formation and tracking him through its various stages, we can detect the process’s weaknesses but also discern its strengths. Blum’s formation left an indelible mark on him as it did for all who passed through it. The great gifts he received from the Society of Jesus as well as the psychological harm it inflicted upon him help explain Blum’s later triumphs and failures, and they delineate the limits of what he could achieve.

The finger of God

In 1934 Virgil Blum entered one of the most famous—to some, infamous—religious orders in the Roman Catholic Church. The Jesuits traced their origin to the Basque nobleman Iñigo Lopez de Loyola (1491-1556), who experienced a religious conversion while recovering from a leg wound suffered at the Battle of Pamplona in 1521. The only books available to the convalescent Iñigo were Ludolph of Saxony’s *The Life of Christ* and a popular collection of Saints' lives called *The Golden Legend*. These stories stirred Iñigo to abandon his worldly pursuits and devote himself entirely to Christ. He departed the family castle at Loyola and, after depositing his worldly possessions at the shrine in Montserrat, adopted the life of a pilgrim beggar, eventually settling near the Spanish town of Manresa where Iñigo underwent profound mystical experiences, the fruits of which he distilled over many years into a little book called *The Spiritual Exercises*.

After making a brief pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Iñigo set his sights upon becoming a priest, and he traveled to the University of Paris to acquire an education. There, Iñigo changed his name to Ignatius and developed a circle of friends, fellow university

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students, with whom he shared his *Spiritual Exercises*. The group coalesced into a company of pious men eager to evangelize the Holy Land. Unable to secure passage to Palestine, the company traveled to Rome instead and offered its services directly to Pope Paul III, who in 1540 officially ratified the new Society of Jesus and directed its members to elect a general. Ignatius's companions promptly elected their friend the Society's first superior general. The name Jesuit was never used by Ignatius, emerging first as a term of derision leveled at the upstart order by its critics. The Society of Jesus eventually turned the insult Jesuit into an honorific.\footnote{John W. O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).}

By the time of Ignatius's death in 1556, the Society of Jesus had swelled a hundred-fold from 10 original members to 1,000.\footnote{Alain Woodrow, *The Jesuits: A Study in Power* (London: G. Chapman, 1995), 46.} Ignatius led the Society for its first 16 years and wrote the basic Constitutions that would guide the order for centuries. Even before its founder's passing, the Society's special charisms had taken shape. One charism involved giving retreats based upon *The Spiritual Exercises*, the work itself being essentially an instruction book for retreat masters leading retreatants on an intense course of prayer and spiritual discernment. A second charism involved missionary work--taking the Gospel to the furthest shores. The Jesuits would produce a string of legendary missionaries, including Francis Xavier, Mateo Ricci, and Isaac Jogues. The Society's third charism--over time its most conspicuous--was in the field of education. It had a humble beginning in Messina, Sicily, where ten Jesuits responded to a call from some of its citizens to establish a secondary school for their sons.\footnote{John W. O’Malley, *Saints or Devils Incarnate? Studies in Jesuit History* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 199, 207.} From this tiny seed sprouted a
global garden of high schools and universities, winning the Jesuits renown as being among the world's finest educators.

The Society's activities and successes earned it significant enemies as well. The Jesuits' special vow of obedience to the pope lent the order an autonomy and freedom of action that vexed some within the Catholic Church. The timing of the Society's birth also shaped its development. The Society emerged during a period of reform within the Catholic Church in the early sixteenth century, one that would be eclipsed in historical memory by Martin Luther's revolt and the subsequent Protestant Reformation. The Society of Jesus had not been founded with the Counter-Reformation in mind, but the Jesuits found themselves drawn into the religious struggle, their zeal directed by the Catholic Church toward battling what it determined to be heretics. It was an activity at which they excelled, winning for themselves legendary labels such as the pope’s “shock troops” and earning the enduring hatred of some Protestants.

The prestige of its schools brought the Society of Jesus enormous influence, a surefire way to arouse jealousy in others. Jesuits rose to serve as spiritual directors to powerful rulers and nobles, leading to charges of intrigue and political manipulation. Some charges had merit. Political roles put Jesuits at odds with the spirit of their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The Spanish Jesuit Carlos Valles later summed up these men as,

147 The German historian Hubert Jedin shed light on this reform period in an influential 1946 essay that debunked a common belief which held that anything of significance happening in Catholicism in the early sixteenth century happened as a reaction to the Protestant Reformation. Instead, Jedin argued that reform efforts were already underway by the time of Luther’s public appearance. However, historian John O’Malley cautions that the Society of Jesus should not be interpreted as a conscious participant in this reform movement. Ignatius and his companions did not have reform of the church in mind when they built their company. See John W. O’Malley, “Was Ignatius of Loyola a Church Reformer? How to Look at Early Modern Catholicism,” Catholic Historical Review 77, no. 2 (April 1991): 177-193.

148 O’Malley, Saints or Devils Incarnate?, 98.
Not the king but the kingmaker. Not the throne but the power behind the throne. The Richelieu in the French court, or the Munjal in the halls of Anhilwad Patan. The chief eunuch, the courtier, the king’s confessor, the bishop’s advisor. The Jesuit Araoz in the court of the king of Spain. The grey eminence. The policy maker. That is what gave our Society a bad name. Power politics. Jesuits who did keep the external injunctions of their three vows on power, freely violated their spirit by indulging in power games throughout the courts of Europe.\textsuperscript{149}

The word 'Jesuitical' became synonymous with deviousness and prevarication. By the late eighteenth century, the Society's enemies had influenced the pope into suppressing the order, forcing it out of existence in Western Europe from 1773-1814. Returning near the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the Society of Jesus rebuilt its educational network, and the Catholic Church looked to the Jesuits as an intellectual bulwark against Enlightenment ideas disseminated by the French Revolution. The Society reemerged with its dark reputation intact. One suspects that Russian novelist Dostoyevsky intended his famous Grand Inquisitor in \textit{The Brothers Karamazov} (1880) to be a Jesuit. In the twentieth century, French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre would remark, "Like the Freemasons, the Jesuits are one of the great occult forces that govern the world."\textsuperscript{150}

The Society of Jesus thrived especially in the United States; and within a decade of Virgil Blum's ordination to the priesthood in 1947, the American Assistancy constituted the world's largest national body of Jesuits, numbering nearly 8,000.\textsuperscript{151} The first three Jesuits had arrived in British North America in 1634 at the founding of the Maryland colony. Suppressed along with the rest of the Society in 1773, the small Jesuit

\textsuperscript{149} Carlos G. Valles, S.J. \textit{Living Together in a Jesuit Community}. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984).
\textsuperscript{150} Quoted in Woodrow, \textit{The Jesuits: A Story of Power}, 10.
community in Maryland maintained its property holdings and corporate identity. In the wake of the Society's restoration in 1814, about 20 Jesuits ministered to the small Catholic population in the American republic. Over the course of the nineteenth century, émigré Jesuits came to the United States in large numbers where they established schools and parishes to serve the ballooning Catholic immigrant population. Jesuit seminaries filled with native-born vocations. A century after the Society's restoration--while little Virgil Blum took his first tottering steps in Defiance, Iowa--the Jesuits in the United States numbered over 2,000.  

Men entering any other religious order, or a diocesan seminary, could expect ordination to the priesthood within a few years, but those joining the Society of Jesus experienced a unique and lengthy formation process. Aspiring Jesuit priests had to wait thirteen years until ordination and then another two years before embarking full-time upon their ministries. The multi-stage process explains the intellectual gravitas Jesuits enjoyed within American Catholic culture.

The first stage of Jesuit formation took place at a novitiate where, isolated from the rest of the world, the novice spent two years developing his spiritual life and learning about the rules and history of the Society of Jesus. At the end of these two years, the novice took simple vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He then entered the juniorate, customarily attached to the same seminary as the novitiate, but a world apart from it: novices and juniors mingled only on rare "fusion" days. The juniorate also lasted two years, but it focused on the intense study of Greek and Latin classics, subjects the

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Jesuit would be expected to teach later in his formation. By the end of his juniorate, the man had received the equivalent of a bachelor's degree.

Already four years into his life as a Jesuit, the man (now called a scholastic) moved on to one of the Society's philosophates and spent three years studying philosophy, many of the courses conducted only in Latin. Following a comprehensive oral examination, also conducted in Latin, the man received a licentiate, the equivalent of a master's degree, in philosophy. The scholastic now took up his regency, a three-year period spent teaching in one of the Society's high schools.

Only after regency did the scholastic begin the study of theology. As in the philosophate, faculty taught most of these courses in Latin. He was ordained to the priesthood after three years of theology but then returned to the theologate for one more year of instruction before proceeding to his final stage of formation called tertianship. Here he essentially returned to the novitiate for a third year of spiritual training. After completing his tertianship, the Jesuit made his final vows in the Society and embarked upon his life's work, most often a string of assignments within the Jesuits' extensive educational system.

The length and complexity of Jesuit formation makes intelligible their elite status within the American Church. The famed Trappist monk Thomas Merton, researching the Jesuits before his conversion to Catholicism in the 1930s, came away "...breathless with the thought of so many novitiates and tertianships and what not—so much scrutiny, so much training. What monsters of efficiency they must be, these Jesuits." American Jesuits of Virgil Blum's generation took pride in their service to the Catholic Church. No

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doubt many of them would have nodded in agreement at those words in Jesuit lore attributed to Pope Paul III when he approved the Society of Jesus: “Digitus Dei est hic.” (The finger of God is here.)

**St. Stanislaus**

Virgil Blum arrived at the novitiate near Florissant, Missouri, on the evening of Friday, August 31, 1934. It marked his official entrance into the Society of Jesus—the date that would be carved on his headstone at Calvary Cemetery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, over a half century later. He arrived that Friday with one other novice, Francis Ring from Theilman, Minnesota. Eighteen more novices would make their appearance the following day. Thirteen had already arrived on August 8. Of these thirty-two men who joined Blum in the pipeline for the priesthood, seventeen (including Ring) would be ordained alongside him in 1947. As for the rest, some may have been ordained in other years, their ordinations accelerated or delayed based upon exceptional circumstances; but most of those absent from priestly ordination in 1947 were victims of attrition, having dropped out at some point along the arduous formation process.

The novitiate was part of St. Stanislaus Seminary, a sprawling 1,047-acre property nestled in the verdant Florissant (i.e., flourishing) valley near the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. The seminary lay about twenty miles northwest of St. Louis. Belgian Jesuits from the Maryland Province had established the seminary in 1823 and named it in honor of Jesuit Saint Stanislaus Kostka, a sixteenth century Polish novice

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renowned for his holiness. St. Stanislaus provided for three of the stages of Jesuit formation, encompassing a novitiate, juniorate, and a tertian building. The population of the Jesuit community at St. Stanislaus fluctuated from 166-193 men over Blum's four years and included approximately forty temporal coadjutors, who were brothers, not priests. Considered Jesuits, these brothers underwent a shorter and less rigorous course of study, focusing their ministry instead on manual labor. The expertise and sweat of these Old Brothers (fratres veterani) enabled St. Stanislaus to remain in operation, because the seminary included a fully functional farm, and it exhibited a degree of communal self-sufficiency that should elicit admiration from any devotee of a sustainable food system. In addition to growing its own crops and raising chickens and Holstein cows, the community possessed its own dairy, bakery, stables, powerhouse, greenhouse, apiary, and winery. The vineyards at St. Stanislaus produced fine vintages for sacramental and table use. The grapes were particularly excellent during Blum's second season as a novice, and the sale of claret at $1.25/gallon helped the seminary financially during these Depression years.

Blum and the other novices spent their initial week at St. Stanislaus in a condition called First Probation. They lived apart from the rest of the community to acclimate to the new environment and to make certain they wanted to join the community. In doing so, they would take the places of the second-year novices who made their First Vows in early

158 For a detailed layout of the seminary on the eve of Virgil Blum’s arrival see “Maps of Saint Stanislaus Seminary, 1933,” Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 1.6, Drawer 9, Roll 12, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
159 “Minutes of the Meetings of the Consultors of St. Stanislaus Novitiate, 1912-1966,” Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 1.1, Box 348, Page 61, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
September and then moved immediately into the juniorate building to continue their formation. The Master of Novices, Ernest Dannegger, S.J., selected some of the men beginning their second year to serve as "Angels" accompanying the new men through the days. Blum and several of the others received their distinctive black cassocks on Saturday, September 8th, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was an important moment in the life of a new Jesuit, marking his entrance into the larger novitiate community. The cassock would remain Blum's uniform for years.

When Blum first passed through the imposing doors of the seminary’s central stone structure, nicknamed the Rock Building, he entered a completely new world. The novitiate closed around him and held him tight, cutting him off from his old life. Except for letters to and from his parents and siblings, Blum was completely isolated from the outside world. Parents and siblings could visit on rare occasion, but the Manuductor's Diary—a daily record kept by the novice assisting the Novice Master—reports no visitors for Blum during his period in the novitiate. He and the other novices had no access to newspapers or radio. Mail was censored and any newspaper clippings removed. The isolation at St. Stanislaus continued through Blum's formation in the juniorate, meaning that the years 1934-1938 were lost to him in terms of outside events. Another Jesuit who had been a novice a decade earlier recalled that when he read Frederick Lewis Allen's popular history of the 1920s, Only Yesterday, he especially enjoyed the second half of the book because the events of 1925-1929 were completely new to him.

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160 “Manuductor's Diaries, 1873-1944,” Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 1.4, Box 353, Page 126, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
The Jesuits believed that isolation liberated each novice from outside distractions that would hinder development of his spiritual life. For the chief purpose of the novitiate appears to have been the nurturing of an authentic interior life of the spirit. Another goal was to immerse the novice in the culture and history of the Society of Jesus, providing him with a new self-identity as member of the corporate body. This seems to have been secondary, however, to the forging of a spiritual foundation that could guide the Jesuit through the periods of consolation and desolation that would fill his future ministry. All novices had likely arrived at the doors of St. Stanislaus as good Catholic boys—that is, faithful churchgoers, perhaps altar boys or choir members, and regular participants in parish activities. But their interior lives had not been well developed, as some former novices would later attest. One Jesuit claimed that the novitiate taught him how to pray, something he had not done effectively to that point. Although much recitation of common prayers filled the days, there were also significant periods of private meditation when the novice sought communion with God the Father and, most importantly, with his Son, Jesus. To use an idiom more often associated with Protestantism, in the novitiate the young man established a personal relationship with his Savior, Jesus Christ. It could be a kind of "born again" moment in the man's spiritual life.

At the center of the spiritual instruction in the novitiate was *The Spiritual Exercises*, begun during Ignatius's convalescence in 1521, continued during his mystical stay at Manresa in 1523, and organized and refined by him through the mid-1530s. The

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book was not meant to be read as much as experienced. Of greatest use in the hands of a retreat master, the *Exercises* provided practical instructions for guiding a retreatant over a 4-week course of intense prayer and spiritual discernment. All novices at St. Stanislaus experienced *The Spiritual Exercises* in their entirety beginning in October of the first year. Virgil Blum and his peers embarked upon the "Long Retreat" on Saturday, October 6th, and they emerged from it on Tuesday, November 6th.\(^{166}\)

For these four weeks, the young men gave themselves over entirely to the retreat. All normal recreation was suspended. Complete silence prevailed. Three break days provided the only respite from the month-long routine. When the Ignatian retreat first emerged in the sixteenth century, it had been a one-on-one experience between director and retreatant—a practice that would be revived later in the twentieth century—but at the time of Blum's formation, the first-year novices at Florissant received the *Exercises* as one large group.\(^{167}\) Novice Master Dannegger gave four presentations per day. The novices knelt for an hour of meditation following each presentation. They spent the remainder of the day in private or communal prayer, engaged in spiritual reading, or on solitary walks around the property.\(^{168}\)

Each week of the *Exercises* had a distinctive theme.\(^{169}\) During the first week, the retreatants contemplated their own sinfulness in the light of a creator God whose

\(^{166}\) Manuductor's Diaries, 132-141.


goodness suffused the world. The emphasis here was on repentance and contrition, conditioned by a growing awareness that human perversity could never defeat God's love. During the second week, the retreatants encountered Jesus of Nazareth and followed his life from his conception to his joyous arrival in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Ignatius taught them how to imaginatively enter the Gospel stories and witness events firsthand. Christ's Passion was the focus of the third week, the novices walking alongside Jesus through his suffering and death, meditating upon the great love he bore for humanity. The final week of the Exercises centered on Jesus's resurrection and its meaning for the lives of his apostles. Again, the retreatants entered the Gospels, spending time with the apostles as they encountered the risen Christ. Despite the heavy emphasis on sin at the beginning of the experience, the overall spirit of the Exercises was not one of self-abasement and guilt. Rather, it focused on discernment—grasping the true relationship between Creator and creature and responding to God's great love by making choices throughout life always motivated by the person's participation in that love. A near contemporary of Blum's at the seminary, Joseph McGloin, S.J., summed up the novices' Long Retreat as "the beginning of God's taking everything we had and helping us turn it in His direction."170 Another novice, George Riemer, who would experience the Spiritual Exercises at St. Stanislaus six years after Blum, summed them up years later in very accessible terms:

The Exercises cannot merely be read or be read about, but must be personally experienced. They intend to bring you before the barest, most basic image of yourself it is possible to have, before a self stripped of cosmetic effects, deceptions, masks, false fronts, false bottoms, false supports and securities, false goals and false pasts. Once you have had this vision of your naked self and accepted yourself as you are, then you are ready to consider the meaning of Jesus. The meditations and prayers try to crack through the hardened language shells covering the story of Jesus' life, his dialogue with people he

170 McGloin, I’ll Die Laughing, 29.
knew, his activism and commitment to revolution, his love of people, his special relatedness to children and women, his rejection and murder, his resurrection and his plea that we live out his love and express his values in our own world today, each of us in our own way according to our own insights. The *Exercises* intend to create a crisis of insights and feelings that challenge you to serve love, growth, and life. If you now arrange your time and begin to work for this cause, the *Exercises* have helped to Christianize you. If you commit all your time to such work under Jesuit leadership, you are a Jesuit.171

The practical methods for prayer and discernment that Ignatius taught in the *Exercises* were woven into the novices’ routines over the next two years and made into habits that the men internalized. Like every Jesuit, Blum would make the Long Retreat one more time, during his tertianship at the end of formation. In the intervening years, he made many shorter retreats based upon the *Exercises*. Once embarked on his ministry, Blum was expected to make his own annual 8-day retreat; and like all Jesuits, he was required to use his knowledge of the *Exercises* to act as retreat master for groups of non-Jesuits, introducing them to Ignatian spirituality.

Directing others in *The Spiritual Exercises* was still a long way off for Blum and his fellow novices in the autumn of 1934. Following the Long Retreat, they plunged headlong into a highly regimented life at St. Stanislaus, days divided up by the ringing of bells into precise periods of prayer, instruction, manual labor, meals, recreation, and spiritual reading. From 5:00 a.m. until 9:30 p.m. each day, the novices followed a strict schedule that varied based on the Church’s calendar of feast days and on the seasons of the year.

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A dizzying array of rules governed Blum's life. Novices referred to one another as "Brother," and they remained in silence except for prescribed periods of recreation and on holidays. English could be spoken at certain times when silence was lifted; otherwise, all communication took place in Latin—verbal exchanges that began as a pastiche of English and Latin phrases over time reflected a conversational fluency in the Catholic Church's official language.\footnote{Leonard, \textit{The Letter Carrier}, 29.} The rule of \textit{tactus} prohibited any physical contact between novices, and the rule of \textit{numquam duo} (never two) meant that novices always spent their recreation periods in randomly assigned groups of three, except for those times when the entire body of novices participated in athletic games. The goal here was to prevent formation of "particular friendships." In part this reflected concern over potential homosexual liaisons, but it also had the practical objective of hindering the growth of cliques within the community and the spiritual goal of fostering charitable equality among the men. As one former novice phrased it, "[O]ur charity was supposed to be universal."\footnote{Ibid., 27.} None of the novices could eat between meals without permission; as a result, the novices assigned to pick apples in the orchard never tasted the fruit of their labor unless the \textit{Manuductor} called out, "Dentalia!"\footnote{Riemer, \textit{The New Jesuits}, 23.} Actions were severely circumscribed: Don't open or close the dormitory windows unless you've been appointed to do it. Don't walk near the juniorate. Never go into the kitchen unless on a work assignment. If you're going to do spiritual reading outside, confine it to the garden, etc.\footnote{"Regulations—Master of Novices 1919-1925," Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 1.5, Box 348, Folder 32, Jesuit Archives Central United States. Two personal mortifications expected of novices, which according to Garry Wills were still being practiced at St. Stanislaus during the period 1951-1953, were the chain and the discipline. The chain was a metal belt with studs facing inward worn against the flesh on certain mornings from rise until after breakfast. The edges pressed into the flesh, producing...}
Despite these rules (or in part because of them) humor and camaraderie grew among the Jesuits in formation. Forced to speak Latin, they might adopt slang based on puns, such as calling underwear *sub ubis* (under + where) or saying *quercus* (oak) in place of "o.k."\(^\text{176}\) When a novice at St. Stanislaus a few years after Blum accidentally broke the finger off a statue of Christ while cleaning the chapel, he showed it to the sacristan and declared, tongue in cheek, "Digitus Dei est hic."\(^\text{177}\) Shared experiences throughout the Jesuit formation process forged bonds that would last throughout their lives. Nicknames abounded. If two paths crossed again somewhere over the long years of ministry, memories returned of shared tribulations and joys. When in 1955 Blum wrote to Adrian Kochansky, S.J., assistant dean of the college of liberal arts at Marquette University--almost pleading for a transfer there from Creighton University--he could take solace in the fact that this was correspondence between "Virg" and "Coach," who had spent their regencies together teaching the boys at Campion High School.\(^\text{178}\) There is a danger to be sure of exaggerating the degree to which joyful solidarity reigned in Jesuit formation. Living in community could be difficult, especially during the first four years when silence prevailed. Even the eternally sunny Daniel Lord, S.J.--who entered St. Stanislaus in 1909 and eventually became a kind of Catholic celebrity and Jesuit booster-


\(^\text{177}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{178}\) Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Adrian Kochansky, S.J., March 19, 1955, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1955.”
recalled how "a man with a habit of unpleasantly clearing his throat would become an almost savage trial."179

Brother Blum took his turn carrying out some of the duties assigned to novices at St. Stanislaus. On Thursday, July 4, 1935, Blum assumed of office of castilian, responsible for the care and cleaning of the novitiate's toilets.180 On Monday, November 4, he was appointed dormitorian, presumably acquiring authority to open and close the dormitory windows.181 Later that same week, Blum led the novices in their daily praying of the Rosary.182 On February 1, 1936, Blum offered his Marianum before the St. Stanislaus community.183 This was a carefully prepared and scrupulously practiced sermon about the Blessed Virgin Mary that each novice delivered from the pulpit in the refectory (dining room) while his audience consumed their meal in silence.

Two assignments pushed the novice Blum to grow in new ways. On Friday, September 13, 1935, he received appointment as a catechist.184 Novices took turns providing basic religious instruction to Catholic boys from the St. Louis area. The seminary focused on serving the underprivileged, which included boys from the St. Louis Training School for the "Mentally Defective," the Bellefontaine reform school, and the Gallaudet School for the Deaf.185 This stint may have been Blum's first experience as a teacher, marking the launch of his long educational career. The second assignment

180 Manuductor's Diaries, 176.
181 Ibid., 213.
182 Ibid., 214.
183 Ibid., 232.
184 Ibid., 198.
185 "Catechetical Activities of Jesuit Scholastics, circa 1930s-1950s," Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 1.1, Box 348, Folder 3, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
occurred earlier that same year, on Monday, February 24, when Brother Blum and
Brother Joe Jelinek left St. Stanislaus for nearly a month's work at St. Mary's Infirmary in
St. Louis. This was known as the Hospital Probation, and novices labored for the sisters
who ran the facility. Novice Master Dannegger reflected years later that the ministry
could be a good experience for the men under his charge: "The novice had to do hard and
humble work, [and] got acquainted with the physical and spiritual miseries of the people
of the world."\(^\text{186}\) St. Mary's Infirmary served the African American population of St.
Louis. Given that the 1925 Iowa Census listed only 12 "Colored" people living among
Shelby County's 16,177 residents, it is possible that this was Blum's first encounter with
African Americans.\(^\text{187}\) He cared for the male patients at St. Mary's Infirmary, emptying
their bedpans, helping them bathe, offering whatever spiritual counsel a 22-year-old
novice might provide.

Catholic teaching inoculated Blum against the crudest forms of racism. The
natural law perspective that shaped the Catholic worldview held that all persons,
regardless of origin or condition, were human beings loved by God and therefore
possessing a dignity that Christians must honor. Later in life, Blum would express tactical
reservations about the African American civil rights movement, but he never doubted the
humanity or basic worth of African Americans, nor deemed them undeserving of equal
rights in American society. St. Stanislaus's focus on serving the underprivileged meant
that Blum ministered to some of the same kinds of people that the Nazis would soon

\(^{186}\) Ernest Dannegger, S.J. to Joseph Gschwend, S.J., September 5, 1940, Saint Stanislaus Seminary
Collection, Subseries 2.2, Box 343, Folder 55, Jesuit Archives Central United States.

\(^{187}\) Iowa. \textit{Census of Iowa for the Year 1925}. Des Moines: The state of Iowa, 1926.
begin quietly exterminating in Germany in 1939 in what became a dress rehearsal for the Holocaust.

Obedience was a hegemonic virtue in the novitiate, and it constituted one of the basic vows that each Jesuit made at the end of his second year. Obedience permeated all of Jesuit formation and had been a characteristic of the Society of Jesus since its founding. Ignatius and his companions had offered themselves to the pope to go wherever and whenever he needed them. This ethos was a defining feature of the Society when Blum entered it, and the exacting time schedules imposed during formation served as a training tool for obedience. By having his day broken up into prescribed periods of activity ranging from one minute to two hours, the young Jesuit developed the habit of quickly abandoning the task at hand and moving on to something else appointed for him.

Regimentation remained a fixture throughout Jesuit formation, although its severity ebbed and flowed depending upon the stage in the process. The Jesuit superiors' micromanagement of the daily lives of the scholastics may strike observers as needlessly authoritarian and even suffocating, but one of its other effects, either intended or unintended, was a kind of freedom. The ingrained ability to shift attention rapidly from one task to another—to compartmentalize activities and flexibly re-focus concentration—freed up the Jesuit to be more productive in his ministry. A hallmark of Virgil Blum's later life was his amazing productivity: his ability to handle simultaneously a full university teaching load, extensive administrative and committee work at the university, and the clamoring demands of a public career, first as an education reformer and then as president of the Catholic League. Blum's Jesuit training taught him the self-discipline and agility of mind needed to pull it off.
A day in the life\textsuperscript{188}

At precisely 5:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 10, 1935, the tower bell rang out at St. Stanislaus Seminary near Florissant, Missouri, calling the Jesuit community from slumber. In the novices' dormitory, lights came on and movement stirred among the rows of beds that filled the room. Brother Virgil Blum rose to his feet and pulled shut the white curtain that hung from brass rings on a metal pipe about seven feet above the floor. It enclosed his small sleeping space, providing a modicum of privacy from the other novices. Brother Blum stripped off his pajamas and washed himself in the basin at the small washstand next to his bed. He was 22-years old and well-muscled, standing 5' 10" tall, with close cropped blonde hair and wearing wire spectacles. Blum quickly put on underwear, socks, trousers, and shirt and then reached for his black cassock. By now, he had mastered the distinctive Jesuit garb. It wrapped around his body and closed with two hooks, one at his throat, and the other over his right shoulder. Blum wrapped a two-inch wide black cincture twice around his middle and knotted it on his right side. He completed the uniform by hanging a large rosary from his cincture. The rosary beads distinguished the novices at St. Stanislaus from the juniors who upon their ascension to the next level of Jesuit formation proudly traded in the rosary on the cincture for a square, 3-pointed cap called a biretta. The novices' toilet was down the stairs and Blum undoubtedly stopped there on his way out the building and across the courtyard to the

\textsuperscript{188} I have carefully reconstructed Blum’s day based upon the Manuductor’s Diary and House Calendar in the Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, augmented with judiciously selected details from the memoirs of men who were novices in Florissant during the first half of the twentieth century: McGloin, \textit{I'll Die Laughing}; Lord, \textit{Played by Ear}; Riemer, \textit{The New Jesuits}; and Francis Joseph Yealy, S.J., “Saint Stanislaus, 1909-1913,” \textit{St. Louis University Magazine} 44, no. 3 (November 1971): 28-31.
chapel. By 5:25 a.m. he was seated with the 60 or so other novices for their first brief visit to the chapel.

At 5:30 a.m. the bell rang again, and the novices rose and trooped out in a long black line to a large room beneath the dormitory called the ascetery.\(^{189}\) Rows of desks filled the ascetery. At each desk was a padded kneeler, and Brother Blum now settled on to his for 55 minutes of meditation on points received the night before from either Novice Master Danneger or one of the other priests on staff. Following Ignatius's instructions, Blum sought to enter the story, meditating on Christ's actions, opening himself to whatever insights the Holy Spirit might grant him. At 6:25 a.m. he rose and marched back with the others to the chapel for morning Mass. At 7:15 a.m. the group finally sat down for jentaculum (breakfast) in the refectory—two hours and fifteen minutes after rising. They ate hungrily and drank their coffee in complete silence before returning to the dormitory where each exchanged his cassock for a gray work jacket. At the door stood the Manuductor, one of the second-year novices (secundianni) who served as the Master of Novice's assistant. Blum filed past him with the others, receiving his assignment for Manualia, the 55-minute period of manual labor that now commenced. Tasks included scrubbing dishes, sweeping corridors, scrubbing floors, setting the table for dinner, or working under the supervision of the fratres veterani in such places as the garden, chicken yard, or bakery.

When the bell rang at 9:05 a.m. Brother Blum joined the others back at the dormitory to don his cassock again and scurry down to the ascetery where the Master of Novices, Father Ernest Dannegger, S.J., lectured for 45 minutes on the Constitutions, or

\(^{189}\) The ascetery at St. Stanislaus had the curious and inexplicable nickname "Texas."
founding documents, of the Society. When the bell rang at 10:00 a.m. the novices adjourned to the garden where together they prayed the Rosary. Five minutes of *gymnastica* (calisthenics) followed, and then a few minutes of free time before returning to their desks for an hour of Greek or Latin grammar. Instruction ceased with the bell at 11:30 a.m.

Brother Blum then enjoyed a quarter hour of free time before the bell summoned him to his kneeler in the *ascetery* where he made his first Examination of Consciousness. Devised by Ignatius and central to his spirituality, the Examen was a brief prayer (15-minutes) in which the person reflected upon his day up to that point, acknowledging with gratitude the blessings God had granted him but also recalling those moments where the supplicant failed to live up to the example of Jesus, either by word, action, or inaction. Prayed twice daily—at midday and before bed—the Examen became a habit in the novitiate that every Jesuit was expected to continue throughout his ministry. It was the ideal prayer for a person engaged in a very active life, and Ignatius called upon his men to make the Examen their one essential prayer should circumstances permit them time for only one prayer during the day.

At precisely 12:00 noon, the tower bell called all at St. Stanislaus to the *refectory* for *prandium* (dinner). As Brother Blum ate his corn bread and stew, he listened to one of the novices or juniors read from the elevated wooden pulpit in the corner of the room. Rhetorical skill was a key objective of Jesuit formation; beginning in the novitiate, the young men studied to become effective public speakers. On that day, the young man likely began with ten verses of Latin Scripture followed by announcements and then concluding with excerpts from a spiritual work in English. Father Thomas O'Connor, the
faculty member who served throughout 1935 as Prefect of Reading, listened closely and
publicly corrected the young man every time he made an error of pronunciation.

At 12:45 p.m. the novices assembled for 45 minutes of recreation. They broke up
into groups of three assigned by the Manuductor, at whose command silence dropped,
leaving the novices free to speak to one another in English. The groups headed out for a
brisk walk. Each group included one of the secundianni whose job was to keep the
conversation of the two first-year novices (primianni) upon spiritual matters and not
allow it to drift into anecdotes from their earlier lives. Only Latin could be spoken during
the last 15 minutes of each recreation period, thus preparing the young Jesuits for their
future studies in philosophy and theology when most classes would be conducted in that
ancient tongue.

At 1:30 p.m. Brother Blum returned with his recreation group to the ascetery
where they spent the next half-hour reading about the lives of the saints, most likely
about a Jesuit saint. Another period of Manualia followed, ending at 2:40 p.m. and
ushering in twenty blessed minutes of free time, perhaps enough time to begin a letter
home to his parents or to Vic. The bell at 3:00 p.m. drew Blum back to the ascetery for
another hour of Greek or Latin grammar. At 4:00 p.m. he partook of a haustus (snack)
with the others and enjoyed a few more minutes of free time until 4:30 p.m. when the
novices received a half-hour lesson on English grammar.

The bell at 5:00 p.m. ordered the young men to take up spiritual reading. For the
next half-hour they read silently from Alphonsus Rodriguez's Practice of Christian and
Religious Perfection. Rodriguez was a Jesuit moral theologian from the sixteenth and
early seventeenth centuries whose 3-volume classic advised Christians on how to lead a
practical life of virtue. It had become required reading at Jesuit novitiate by the twentieth century. At the bell's toll, Blum switched to 15 minutes of reading from Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, a devotional work of the late Middle Ages that emphasized the interior life, self-abnegation to God, and most importantly for Catholics, an abiding devotion to the Eucharist. *The Imitation of Christ* became monumentally popular in Catholic culture, and it had been much admired by Ignatius, hence its inclusion in the novitiate's order of the day.

At 5:45 p.m. Blum rose with the other novices and assembled for *Exercitium Modestiae*, the exercise of correcting conduct. They formed a horseshoe shaped line with the open end facing the Master of Novices seated at a table. Over the next half-hour Father Dannegger called out the names of four men, Brother Blum's among them. At the sound of his name, Blum stepped forward and knelt in front of the Master of Novices with bowed head and clasped hands. At a signal from Father Dannegger, the first man to Blum's left offered an admonishment of Blum's observed behavior. The man next to him followed, and so it continued down the line. If a man had nothing to report, he might say something to the effect of "Haven't noticed anything, Father." Although the observations could be wounding, they were not supposed to be malicious and usually were not. The objective seems to have been to keep the novices humble and to correct any behavior that was driving others in the community up the wall. (e.g., "When he laughs, it's too loud and explosive.") Criticism was limited to external behavior and never attacked the man's spiritual worth or inner character. There is no record of what Blum's *fratres* voiced to the back of his kneeling figure, whether his orneriness and pugnacity had manifested themselves in the sight of his brothers. The novices being examined were expected to
write down the observations afterwards and then bring them to Father Dannegger for discussion at their next private conference. A quarter hour of free time followed the *Exercitium Modestiae*.

The bell at 6:30 p.m. summoned the seminary to the *refectory* for *coena* (supper), served and consumed in silence. A different novice or junior ascended the pulpit and read aloud to the assemblage above the din of clattering plates and scraping silverware. After supper, Blum joined the other novices for another 45-minute period of recreation, conducted first in English and then in Latin for the final 15 minutes. At 8:00 p.m. the entire St. Stanislaus community gathered in the chapel to pray together the Litanies of the Saints. It was the one communal prayer event held each day at every Jesuit house in the United States: The Society called upon the Saints in Heaven—including Jesuit luminaries such as Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, Peter Claver, Alphonsus Rodriguez, and Aloysius Gonzaga—to intercede on their behalf and on behalf of all God's pilgrims on earth. Afterwards, the long black line of novices wound its way to the *ascetery* where Brother Blum spent a quarter hour preparing the points for the following morning's meditation.

The bell at 8:30 p.m. shifted all the novices to their kneelers where they made their second and final Examination of Consciousness for the day. Then back to the chapel for one last visit before ascending to the dormitory. At 9:00 p.m. the *De Profundis* bell rang out and the novices stood beside their beds and recited together the Latin prayer from Psalm 130:

*De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine;*  
*Domine, exaudi vocem meam.*  
*Quia apud Dominum misericordia, et copiosa apud eum redemptio.*  
*Et ipse redimet Israel ex omnibus iniquitatis eijus.*  

*From the depths, I have cried out to you, O Lord;*  
*Lord, hear my voice...*  
*From the morning watch, even until night, let Israel hope in the Lord. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.*  
*And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*
Then, lights out. Restful oblivion followed and Wednesday, April 10, 1935, came to its end. For Frater Virgilius Blum it had been day 222 of 728 in the Novitiate. There were 506 more days until Vow Day.

*Studia humanitatis*

Virgil Blum made his First Vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the Society of Jesus on September 8, 1936, in the chapel at St. Stanislaus Seminary. It was the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and exactly two years since Blum first received his cassock. He and the other *secundianni* ascended the altar in the middle of the liturgy, each making his vows in turn and then moving to sit with the juniors. They had already moved into the juniorate building on August 17 but their transit to the other side of the chapel symbolized graduation to the next stage of Jesuit formation. Each man donned his new biretta hat and afterwards enjoyed a special breakfast celebrating the event. On that day, Brother Blum became Mr. Blum, and he began adding the initials S.J. after his name.

If the novitiate developed the young Jesuit's spiritual life, the juniorate trained him in the classical humanities—both for his own intellectual and moral development and for the benefit of his future students. Here he read the authors and studied the subject matter that he was most likely to teach during his regency period of formation spent at one of the Society's high schools. For two years, the juniors gorged themselves on a main course of Greek, Latin, and English authors accompanied by side dishes of history, art, and modern languages. Blum's efforts culminated in 1938 with an A.B. degree in Classics.

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190 "Juniorate Diary," Volume 1, p. 213, Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 1.4, Box 351, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
and English conferred on him by the Jesuits' St. Louis University, with which St. Stanislaus Seminary was affiliated.

Humanistic studies had been at the center of Jesuit teaching since the Society's educational charism emerged in the sixteenth century. The Jesuits were not trailblazers in this regard; they inherited the Renaissance humanism that had already flourished in Europe during the previous century. The humanistic schools were a reaction against the medieval university with its emphasis on problem solving and career advancement.\(^{191}\) Humanistic schools, by contrast, pursued studia humanitatis, a term meaning literally "the study of our humanity." They sought to create a particular kind of person, a virtuous person, a vir bonus dicendi peritus (a good man, skilled in speech), expected to play a constructive role in his community. Renaissance humanists saw the classical authors as exemplars for this moral training.

The Jesuits agreed with the Renaissance humanists, but for the Jesuits the greatest appeal of these ancient authors lay in their complementarity with the Spiritual Exercises at the heart of Ignatian spirituality.\(^{192}\) The Exercises focused inwardly to develop a certain kind of person, one able to discern the internal movements of the good (i.e., holy) spirit from those of the bad (i.e., diabolical) spirit in that person's interactions with the created things of the world. Ignatian discernment meshed harmoniously with the good judgment, or prudence, that study of the classics reputedly inculcated in the reader. Christian students therefore could benefit from the "pagan" wisdom found in classical authors, especially if the selections from an author's writings provided support for

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\(^{192}\) Ibid. 17-18.
Christian doctrine—Plato, the Greek philosopher, or later Seneca, the Roman philosopher, come quickly to mind.

Classical authors also appealed to the Jesuits because their works illustrated clear thinking and rhetorical prowess. The speeches of a Demosthenes or Cicero were paragons of argumentation and felicity of expression and became models for how the Jesuits strove to think and write. The juniors read these works in the original Greek and Latin. The long hours spent in the novitiate studying classical grammar now bore fruit. The harvest proved more plentiful for some students than others: The grades assigned to Virgil Blum in the novitiate suggest he emerged with a tolerable proficiency in Latin but struggled in Greek.193

First-year juniors in Jesuit formation were called poets. At St. Stanislaus, they spent four hours per week studying selected works from ancient Greek poets such as Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Parmenides, and Pindar. Five hours each week were devoted to Latin poets including Vergil, Plautus, Terence, Lucretius, Ovid, and Juvenal. English received four hours of classroom instruction each week, the reading focusing on poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer and John Milton. The juniors spent two hours each week in a course called Elocution and Sacred Oratory with one of the hours centered on theory while the second involved practice. An archaeology/art class and history courses, both ancient and general, rounded out the work week.194

194 “Reading List” and "Chronological Development of the Course of Studies in the Juniorate, Florissant, Mo." Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 2.2, Box 343, Folder 65, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
In their second year, the juniors became rhetoricians, and the focus shifted from poetry to prose works. They translated and discussed the histories of Herodotus, Thucydides, Sallust, and Tacitus, among others. They examined closely the dialogues of Plato, the works of Demosthenes, and the speeches of Cicero, among others. In English, they studied the greats of British eloquence such as Edmund Burke and John Henry Newman. The breakdown of class hours within their studies remained essentially the same, except that coursework in education replaced the ancient and general history studies of the first year. In the first semester of their second year, the rhetoricians studied educational methods, while during the second semester they considered the history of education. These education courses began preparing them for their eventual careers teaching in the classroom.  

The juniors' day was still regimented, broken down into prescribed periods of activity. Most of the week was devoted to study, but the Jesuits did not want to drive the young men to exhaustion and therefore included leisure time as well. The juniors still enjoyed daily recreation to go on walks or play in a variety of athletic games. On Thursdays, the juniors spent the entire day at the Jesuits' villa, called Charbonniere, located on the St. Stanislaus property two miles north of the main seminary buildings. The villa consisted of a few crude structures on a slight bluff along the Missouri River. A day at Charbonniere afforded the men time to relax, play games, perform manual labor, and read books unrelated to their coursework. One man later reflected that without the day off at "Charb" he would not have been able to endure six days of study each week.

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195 Ibid.
196 McGloin, I’ll Die Laughing, 43.
Because the juniors were essentially pursuing undergraduate degrees, their year was divided into conventional academic semesters. Coursework continued during the summer, but the study was not nearly as intense, and it concentrated more on learning modern European languages such as German or French. Blum and the other juniors enjoyed a two-week vacation at Charbonniere at the end of the spring semester. This vacation was referred to as the "Long Order" and it was followed by the "Short Order" which continued until the "Regular Order" resumed with classes in September. The Short Order favored recreation over study, and it provided the men enough time to refresh themselves before the demanding coursework began again in the fall semester. Still denied newspapers and radio, many juniors spent their summers devouring the modern English novels that filled the juniorate library but did not appear on the official syllabus.

Rules governed the life of Virgil Blum and the other juniors, but the regime was not as regulated as it had been in the novitiate. The rule of tactus was still in effect, but numquam duo was lifted, permitting the men to take their recreation in pairs. Radios were still forbidden, but the juniors enjoyed a luxury denied the novices—they could listen to records on a Victrola during recreation periods. Verbal communication still had to be conducted in Latin, but there were ample times when the restriction was lifted, such as during recreation and on their days off at Charbonniere. The juniors still ate their meals in silence with the rest of the community, and they took turns reading publicly from the pulpit and having their pronunciation corrected.197

197 Complete silence was not observed at every meal. The seminary rector would lift the ban occasionally by calling out "Benedicamus Domino" midway through meal to which everyone would reply "Deo Gratias" and then talking would commence. This happened on major feast days, Sunday dinners, and at other meals if the rector chose to do so. The manuductor marked these occasions by writing "Deo Gratias" or simply "DG" beside the mealtime in the novitiate diary.
The juniorate was not as spiritually intense an experience as the novitiate, yet the men's spiritual formation continued. Blum still spent an hour each morning in meditation. He attended daily Mass with the others. He made his examination of consciousness twice a day. Blum joined the other juniors for a half-hour of spiritual reading each day. He recited the Litanies of the Saints with the community each evening. The rector at the seminary set aside one day per month for the juniors as a day of recollection, devoted chiefly to prayer. Two 3-day retreats and an 8-day retreat punctuated each year in the juniorate.

The juniorates were a source of concern for Jesuit superiors. The easing away from the novitiate's hyper-strict regimen supervised by a novice master plus the granting of more freedom of action to the young men—most of whom were 20-21 years of age—opened the door to lapses of discipline and devotional backsliding. An old saying from the period held that:

- Young novices look holy but are not.
- Young scholastics don't look holy and are not.
- Young Jesuit priests do not look holy but are.
- Old priests look holy and are. 198

The juniors were young scholastics and therefore had a reputation for straying from devotional discipline. The monthly days of recollection and semi-annual retreats served to reorient behavior. A former Junior from the 1940s admitted years later that it was "surprising how a person living under the same roof with his God can slip in a mere six months' time from the realization of his primary focus." 199

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198 Lord, *Played By Ear*, 152.
Juniors ran the risk of becoming too immersed in athletic activities. The Society of Jesus enabled the problem by encouraging athletics among its young men, games seen as providing an outlet for restless energy and contributing to the classical goal of *mens sana in corpore sano* (sound mind in a sound body). But the juniors sometimes struggled to maintain Aristotle's virtuous mean between the vicious extremes. On November 21, 1937, the seminary received word from Rome that juniors in the American Assistancy must cease playing a form of competitive football called pass ball, and they were expressly forbidden from forming leagues for any of their athletic sports. When a competitive treasure hunt was held among the Florissant juniors on July 2nd of the following year, the junior beadle (the equivalent of the novitiate’s *manuductor*) admitted in the house Diary that "the excitement and team spirit worked up during the hunt, sometimes goes rather hard on charity." The juniorate at St. Stanislaus, however, was better than most. Father Francis Preuss, S.J. served as prefect of studies during Blum's time there, and he received a glowing report after a visitation in 1935, the Jesuit examiner declaring, "I would rank the Florissant Juniorate as probably the best in the Assistancy."

Blum moved routinely through his two years at the juniorate, participating in all its customary activities. On November 14, 1937, Blum took his turn delivering a carefully composed and memorized sermon in Latin from the pulpit at dinnertime. His topic was

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200 "Juniorate Diary," Volume 1, p. 278.
202 "Directions on the Juniorate [in] Florissant," Saint Stanislaus Seminary Collection, Subseries 2.2, Box 343, Folder 65, Jesuit Archives Central United States. This report is not dated but believed to be from 1935 because specific recommendations made in the report were followed through upon later that year. See Missouri and Chicago Provinces of the Society of Jesus, *The Province News-Letter*, October 1935.
sin and hell. As in the novitiate, Blum was subject to assignment to offices. In the spring of 1938, he served alongside another junior as engineer for Charbonniere. The rector may have assigned Blum to the job because of his practical experience working on the family farm in Defiance. The engineers performed routine maintenance at the villa and served as project managers for tasks that mobilized work parties among the men. Blum installed showers in the bath house, lightning rods on the buildings, and he repaired the pump house motor as well as the bridge on the path leading to Charbonniere. By the summer of 1938, St. Stanislaus had been Blum's home for four years. Soon he would leave its secluded environs for the next stage of the long Jesuit formation process.

A phil at SLU

On Tuesday, August 16, 1938, Virgil Blum boarded a yellow bus with the rest of the departing juniors and travelled twenty miles from Florissant into the heart of St. Louis, Missouri. The bus deposited them on West Pine Boulevard at DeSmet Hall, an imposing Victorian Gothic structure built in 1898 on the campus of the Jesuits’ St. Louis University (SLU). It was home to the philosophate for the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus. Here Blum would spend three years pursuing his licentiate in philosophy (the equivalent of a master's degree) and enduring challenging classes conducted in Latin. He ceased being a junior and assumed the title of philosopher, or phil for short.

The phils experienced a mix of continuity and change in moving to DeSmet Hall. Just as at the juniorate, most of their week was devoted to studies. The daily spiritual

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203 "Juniorate Diary," Volume 1, p. 277.
204 "Juniorate Diary," Volume 1, p. 297; Volume 2, pp. 4, 17-19.
regimen from the Juniorate carried over as well: meditation, Mass, Examens, the Litanies of the Saints. They continued to eat meals in silence, but now in the company of the rest of SLU’s Jesuit community. The refectory had a pulpit from which assigned scholastics still read to the diners, their mispronunciations still corrected by a prefect. Other things were different. A black suit with roman collar joined the distinctive black cassock as part of their wardrobe. Each man enjoyed his own room after four years of sleeping in a common dormitory. The phils now had access to selected newspapers and magazines. They could take walks in the city for exercise and, with permission, attend outside events. Socially, the philosophate in St. Louis marked their very limited re-introduction to the world.

Academically, the philosophate meant laborious study of philosophy through the lens of neoscholasticism, the normative Catholic philosophical-theological system during the interwar years. There is a danger in oversimplifying a complex tradition that had many contending strands; but in general, neoscholasticism represented a revival of the writings of the Catholic Church’s towering intellectual figure of the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the application of Thomistic ideas to a rapidly changing world.205 The scholastic revival is commonly traced to Pope Leo XIII and his 1879 encyclical Aeterni Patris, which celebrated Thomism as an antidote to the errors—nationalism, liberalism, skepticism—of modernity. For Catholics confronting a nineteenth century world in the throes of massive change wrought by industrialization and urbanization and

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beset by an intellectual milieu that challenged religious truths, the writings of Thomas
Aquinas seemed to offer reassuring stability. By 1914 Pope Pius X advised Catholics to
study the Angelic Doctor to the exclusion of the Church’s other great theologians. The
Jesuits played an important role in the neoscholastic revival of the nineteenth century and
its propagation during the first half of the twentieth century.206

Neoscholasticism had a powerful impact on the Catholic teaching of philosophy
because the system reconciled reason (i.e. human intelligence + will) with faith. In brief,
neoscholasticism represented the realism of the Greek philosopher Aristotle filtered
through Christian revelation. Aquinas’s great achievement was to synthesize
Aristotelianism with Christianity. The latter posited an objectively true divine law by
which God governed creation. The former championed an objectively true natural law
intelligible to human reason. The Thomistic synthesis held that through the natural law,
which God had also created, human beings could reason their way to understand aspects
of the divine law that governed the natural world. In other words, humans possessed the
innate ability to use reason to arrive at some eternal truths, such as the existence of God,
and to judge whether a human action accorded with God’s divine plan. For Jesuit
formation, philosophy was the gateway to theology. At the philosophate, the scholastics
took human reason as far as it could go in understanding the eternal law. In a few years

206 McCool, Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method, 84-87. Jesuit
Daniel Lord (1888-1955) did much to disseminate neo-Thomistic thought among American Catholics
during the first half of the twentieth century. Father Lord was an engaging writer, reminiscent of G. K.
Chesterston, who had a talent for rendering abstruse philosophical and theological ideas intelligible for a
popular audience. For example, see Daniel A. Lord, S.J., Armchair Philosophy (New York: The America
Press, 1918). In 1925 Lord took over Queen’s Work, a small Jesuit publishing house, and transformed it
into a Catholic media powerhouse, one that helped popularize neo-scholastic ideas through its vigorous
pamphleteering. On Queen’s Work, see William B. Faherty, S.J., “A Half-Century with the Queen’s
they would try to complete the journey when they arrived at the theologate for their theological studies.

Classroom instruction at the philosophate was very rigid and abstract, focusing on propositions, or theses, in various branches of philosophy—ontology, epistemology, rational psychology (i.e., the philosophy of human nature)—which the phils would systematically prove by reason. The process amounted to exercises in regurgitation. They memorized a thesis and applied syllogistic logic to demonstrate the proposition’s truth. Although adversarial thinkers were listed, the students never actually read their works. Any objections to a thesis were disposed of by distinctions 'in form.' Then, on to the next thesis. Every scholastic received annual examination by four faculty, the tests conducted in Latin. At the end of the three years came De Universa, a comprehensive oral examination on any of the propositions. Some students warmed to their philosophy classes more than others. Those possessing a mind suited to rapid navigation of abstract concepts combined with the ability to articulate objections and defenses in precise Latin, tended to prosper. Others struggled and felt alienated. One former scholastic recalled his classes as “a dialogue between the masters and a ring of bright students blinking back and forth brilliantly, delighting each other.”

Virgil Blum’s ‘B’ average in his philosophy courses suggest he did not occupy a place in the bright ring around the masters. Further evidence for his lack of distinction

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208 Ibid., 55.
209 McGloin, I’ll Die Laughing, 56.
211 Transcripts, Blum, Virgil Clarence; Office of the Registrar, St. Louis University (hereafter Transcripts). The author thanks the U.S. Central Province of the Society of Jesus for permitting access to Blum’s academic transcripts at SLU.
lies in his absence from the fall and spring disputations. In these exercises, outstanding students faced off publicly against each other in Latin in the debating tradition of the medieval universities. Blum’s name never appeared among the disputation participants listed in the province News-letter. Based on Blum’s later career interests, it is likely he viewed the disputations as a waste of time. His mind did not revel in the abstract, in ideas shorn from context. For Blum, ideas mattered insofar as they found application in resolving real-world issues. Years later, he would tell a fellow Jesuit at Marquette University that Catholic education needed to connect students’ knowledge of philosophy and theology with a knowledge of society and its problems. He urged Marquette to avoid courses where information was “swallowed and as readily regurgitated as proof of ‘knowledge’ at exam time.” Blum may have been remembering his philosophy coursework when he wrote this.

Fortunately for Blum and others in his position, philosophy was not the only subject studied during these years at SLU. Math and science courses, taught in English, were also woven into the curriculum. More importantly, the province gave its men the opportunity to pursue graduate work on the side in subjects that interested them personally and that could benefit the Society in the long run. For the first time in years, they sat in classrooms with non-Jesuits, including women. Blum chose history and political science for graduate study. His transcripts reveal that, in contrast to his philosophy classes, Blum achieved a solid ‘A’ average in courses pertaining to modern U.S. history and the American political system.

212 Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Adrian Kochansky, S.J., May 2, 1959, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, Miscellaneous, Political Science Department.”
Unfortunately for Blum and others in his position, performance in the philosophy courses had a lasting impact on the men's lives as Jesuits. For it was during his time in the philosophate that a Jesuit’s superiors determined whether the scholastic would pursue the Long Course or Short Course when he returned to study theology after completing his regency. Superiors marked out the best students in philosophy for the Long Course, a more rigorous curriculum on the path to priestly ordination. The rest entered the less demanding Short Course of study. Significance lay in the fact that only Jesuits in the Long Course would, at the end of their formation, be invited to take the fourth vow—the vow of special obedience to the pope. Taking the fourth vow enabled these Jesuits to hold high leadership positions in the order. Short Course Jesuits assumed a subordinate position within the Society, receiving the title *spiritual coadjutor*, the term coadjutor meaning “assistant”.

The distinction meant little in the day-to-day reality of life in a Jesuit community. Those who had professed four vows did not lord it over the spiritual coadjutors, yet the latter knew that doors were shut to them. They would never be entrusted with certain leadership roles such as rector or provincial. Spiritual coadjutor status could result in psychological harm to the Jesuits, manifested in a humiliating self-perception that they lacked what it took to be “true Jesuits.”

According to a former rector of the Jesuit community at Marquette University during the 1980s, consignment to the Short Course

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213 Another grade within the Society were the *temporal coadjutors*, or brothers, who committed their ministries to manual labor in support of Jesuit houses. They followed a separate course of formation after completing the common 2-year novitiate. Brothers professed the same three vows as the spiritual coadjutors. It is important to note here that despite the existence of separate grades, all the men were technically fully Jesuits under the by-laws; indeed, every novice was considered a Jesuit from the moment he entered the novitiate, which is why Jesuit tombstones contain three dates: birth, death, and the day the man entered the novitiate.

with denial of the fourth vow sometimes was a source of pain or anger that a Jesuit might carry with him for decades.\footnote{Gregory Carlson, S.J., interview by William Fliss, April 1, 2017.}

For Blum and his cohort of phils in the spring of 1941, the reality of the Long Course versus the Short Course still lay ahead. They now anticipated receiving their \textit{status} (assignment) for regency, the three-year period of teaching formation, usually spent at one of the province’s high schools.

\textbf{Campion}

Virgil Blum’s \textit{status} sent him to Campion Jesuit High School, a boarding school for boys and the alma mater of his older brother Victor. Blum remained there for the customary three-year duration of regency, arriving during the summer of 1941 and departing mid-1944. The boarding school was named after Edmund Campion, the sixteenth-century Jesuit martyr drawn and quartered at the command of England’s Queen Elizabeth. Beautifully situated at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, near where the Wisconsin River joins the Mississippi, Campion enjoyed an excellent reputation. Enrollment during the 1942-1943 school year set a record with 470 boarders and 19 day-students.\footnote{\textit{News-Letter}, October 1942.} “Give Campion a Boy and get back a Man,” was the school’s promise to Catholic parents across the Midwest.\footnote{Campion: A Jesuit Residential High School for Catholic Boys (Prairie du Chien, Wis.), spiral bound booklet with unnumbered pages found in Pamphlet File at Wisconsin Historical Society Library; Madison, Wisconsin. Although the booklet is undated, it shows Pope Pius XII on the frontispiece, which means it falls between 1939 and 1958. Other photos in the book suggest the 1940s.}

Campion was not just about molding Catholic boys. It also helped to mold the scholastics into effective participants in the Society’s educational mission. The regency period of Jesuit formation had not existed during Ignatius’s lifetime, emerging only at the
end of the sixteenth century and driven primarily by the desperate need for manpower to staff the Society’s rapidly growing school system. Necessity may have been the original impetus for regency, but over time the practice revealed worthy formational benefits for the scholastics themselves. It marked a welcome shift away from the self. After seven years of mostly interior development, regency directed the young men’s energies fully toward service to others. Moreover, it gave the scholastics an opportunity to practice skills that would be very useful in their ministries, such as independent time management and interpersonal communications. It was also a probationary test of personal responsibility. “I found myself holding a full-time job for the first time in my life,” recalled a scholastic who did his regency in the 1950s. “Taking on that kind of responsibility helped me mature personally and emotionally.”

Blum was among sixteen Jesuit scholastics assigned to Campion. Each performed multiple roles as teachers, coaches, disciplinarians, and coordinators of extracurricular activities. Believing that nothing disciplined the mind so well as the study of Latin, Jesuit educators made the language central to instruction at Campion. Freshmen attended two grammar classes per day. Blum taught Latin during his first two years at Campion before switching to math and history in his third year. He served as assistant prefect, or disciplinarian, for the senior division of boys during his first year, a post at which he apparently excelled as he ascended to become prefect for the senior division the following year. As such, he would have borne chief responsibility for maintaining order

218 McDonough, *Men Astutely Trained*, 527, 4fn
221 *Catalogus Provinciae Missourianae Anni 1942, 1943, 1944*. Sixteen scholastics are listed in the 1942 and 1943 catalogs but only fifteen in 1944.
222 Ibid.
among approximately 200 upper class teen aged boys. During his second year, Blum also served as assistant athletic director. He began a weekly bulletin that described events taking place in all the sports.\footnote{News-Letter, March 1943.} During the winter months, Blum managed the high school’s artificial skating rink.\footnote{Ibid.} In the late spring, he coached the tennis team.\footnote{News-Letter, June 1943.}

The scholastics’ spiritual formation continued during regency; however, maintaining focused spiritual practices amid such a hectic life could be challenging. A Jesuit who served his regency at St. Xavier High School in Cincinatti while Blum was at Campion recalled close surveillance by his Father Minister. The scholastics there rose at 5:00 a.m. and made a visit to the chapel before performing their hour of meditation in their rooms. The Father Minister knelt at the back of the chapel each morning to make sure the regents made an appearance, and he checked up on each of them at least once during their hour-long meditation.\footnote{Becker, The Re-Formed Jesuits, 326.} For Blum and for regents everywhere, daily Mass and the communal Litanies of the Saints perdured as did their examinations of consciousness prayed at mid-day and before bedtime. The Examen now must have been a different experience for the scholastics, each living such an active life where he exercised a leadership role and was expected to serve as an example to his students.

Blum’s time at Campion coincided with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and United States entrance into World War II. The war was an omnipresent reality. News of the war effort filled the Campionette student newspaper, the fate of alumni servicemen and clergy chaplains receiving frequent mention. All students took part in R.O.T.C.
activities. Two mornings each week the boys studied military tactics under the direction of a regular Army Captain.\textsuperscript{227} By early 1943, a Victory Program had been established, aligning the school's curriculum more closely with preparation for military service.\textsuperscript{228} By November 1943, aeronautical pre-flight courses using Army Air Corps training films were being taught in the sciences department as was International Morse Code.\textsuperscript{229} For the scholastics, the war tested some vocations. It could elicit feelings of guilt. One man assigned to Campion later commented, “We were religious under vows, men close to our priesthood, and hence exempt from enlistment. But it was hard to stand as a sort of marked group, not in uniform, not apparently serving our country; and we gladly turned in and worked in the truck gardens that were our mild contributions to our country’s need.”\textsuperscript{230} Blum left behind no personal reminiscences of his wartime regency; we do not know if he shared any of these feelings, being unable to directly serve the country he loved all the while knowing that several of his brothers back in Iowa had responded to the call.

The Jesuits of Virgil Blum’s generation tended to look back with fondness on their period of regency. One referred to it as “a halcyon time, a kind of honeymoon in ministry.”\textsuperscript{231} The scholastics first arrived at the school around the age of 25, with seven intense years of formation under their cassock cinctures. They were near enough in age to the boys to relate well to them and even to share their energy and enthusiasm. A highlight of the day was the period of recreation immediately following dinner when the

\textsuperscript{227} Murray, \textit{Seen and Unseen Worlds}, 20.
\textsuperscript{228} News-Letter, February 1943.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., November 1943.
\textsuperscript{230} Unidentified clipping, found in unprocessed scrapbook, Department of University Archives, Rare Books, and Special Collections, Creighton University.
\textsuperscript{231} Leonard, \textit{The Letter Carrier}, 70.
scholastics would gather in their recreation room and excitedly discuss the experiences of that day before returning to their rooms to grade assignments or plan the next day’s classes.\textsuperscript{232}

Blum left behind no recollections of his regency, but the memoir of J. Richard Murray, who attended Campion from 1943-1945, provides a picture of the school at that time.\textsuperscript{233} Even more ubiquitous than its semi-militarism was Campion’s emphasis on athletics. “If you liked sports, you liked Campion,” Murray later recalled.\textsuperscript{234} It was an exhilarating but exhausting existence, the boys over-scheduling themselves with extra-curriculars. Murray did not mention Blum by name, but he described the boys’ interactions with the “Jebbies” (i.e., Jesuits) that ran the school. He particularly appreciated their presence in the supervised study halls where the young scholastics were readily available to help the students navigate difficult homework. Murray attested to the close bonds that might develop between student and teacher. “The young Jesuit Scholastics were real men,” he remembered, “smart, tough, funny, and either athletic or very interested in sports, big brothers sorts of guys.”\textsuperscript{235}

Interest in sports would endure for many Jesuits of Virgil Blum’s generation. One of Blum’s students discovered this in 1977, shortly before Blum’s retirement from teaching at Marquette University, when he approached the Jesuit on the first day of class to say he would have to miss some of Blum’s mandatory quizzes due to track meets. The student was surprised when Blum greeted him by name and showed that he was clearly

\textsuperscript{232} McDonough, \textit{Men Astutely Trained}, 151.
\textsuperscript{233} Murray, \textit{Seen and Unseen Worlds}. Murray entered the Society of Jesus after attending Campion, but he left the order in 1956 just as he was beginning his coursework in theology.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 23.
aware of his identity as a runner and his record in the sport.\(^\text{236}\) That the student did not belong to one of Marquette’s traditionally high-profile teams, such as basketball, shows how closely Blum followed athletics at the university.

**Cursus Minor**

Virgil Blum left Campion in the late summer of 1944 for the culmination of his long Jesuit formation process: the study of theology leading to priestly ordination. For the scholastics of the era, it could seem like a step backward as well as forward, because they were leaving the exhilarating and semi-autonomous life of regency and returning to the role of classroom students enclosed within a thicket of rules while studying at a secluded location. Blum’s home for the next four years was St. Mary’s College in St. Marys, Kansas, a tiny community in the northeast corner of the state, about thirty miles outside Topeka. The Jesuits established St. Mary’s in the mid-nineteenth century as a mission for Native Americans. In 1931 it became the theologate for the Missouri Province, the faculty and student body having transferred there from St. Louis University.\(^\text{237}\) Blum would remain at St. Mary’s for four years of instruction, receiving ordination to the priesthood at the end of his third year.

The scholastics were now called theologians just as they had once been called philosophers. The Jesuit superiors designated each theologian as either in the *Cursus Major* or *Cursus Minor*. The former referred to the Long Course of study leading to the fourth vow, the latter the Short Course leading to spiritual coadjutor status within the Society. Long and Short did not refer to duration—every theologian experienced four

\(^{236}\) Peter Vrobel, interview by William Fliss, February 21, 2017.

\(^{237}\) *St. Mary’s College, St. Mary, Kansas, 1848-1948* centennial booklet, found in Missouri Province Collection, Bin 3.0064, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
years of instruction—but referred instead to academic rigor. The two groups did share
some classes together, but the core courses on dogmatic theology and sacred scripture
were taught separately and by different professors. The brightest faculty taught in the
Long Course, the less brilliant were assigned to the Short Course. Leo Coressel, S.J.
taught Short Course dogmatic theology during Blum’s time at St. Mary’s. A former
student of Coressel’s admitted in the man’s obituary in the Jesuit Bulletin that “He was
not the most brilliant teacher of theology at St. Mary’s.”

Blum embarked upon the Short Course when he arrived at the theologate. Direct
evidence of his reaction to this consignment has not survived, but he probably
experienced some degree of disappointment. After all, his older brother Victor had
completed the Long Course of theology at St. Mary’s. Victor was now a brilliant
geophysicist poised for an illustrious career at St. Louis University. He had taken the
fourth vow in February 1944, just a few months before Virgil arrived at St. Mary’s.

Arrival at the theologate resembled in some ways a return to the St. Stanislaus
juniorate, a realization that must have rankled some of the men, now 28 years old on
average, and with a decade of formation completed. Once more they lived in a secluded,
rural location with relatively few opportunities for diversion from their studies. Strict
rules governed St. Mary’s just as they had St. Stanislaus. A surviving list of 65

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239 “Personnel Record,” found in Victor J. Blum, S.J. File, Jesuit Archives Central United States. A
colleague of Virgil Blum’s at the Catholic League recalled being told, most likely by a Jesuit in St. Louis,
that Virgil felt himself to be living in his brother’s shadow. But a Jesuit colleague of Virgil’s at Marquette
has rejected the idea that Virgil saw himself as the inferior younger brother in the shadow of the great
Victor. See James Hitchcock email to author, September 18, 2015; and William Kelly, S.J., interview by
regulations attests to the bounded life of the theologian. The rules touched upon every aspect of life at St. Mary’s, including prayer, study, recreation, personal appearance, daily life in the community, care for the facilities, and communication with the outside world. As at the Juniorate, the theologians had Thursdays off, which they would spend as a group two miles from the seminary at a place called Pawnee—St. Mary’s equivalent to the Charbonniere villa on the St. Stanislaus property. Here they could relax through activities such as hiking, playing sports, napping, reading or writing.

Most of Virgil Blum’s week at the theologate focused on coursework. The seminary provided him with a thorough grounding in the neoscholastic theology of the period. He studied the various branches of Catholic theology: dogmatic theology (doctrines of faith), moral theology (God’s laws for human beings), ascetical theology (the quest for spiritual perfection), and sacred scripture (the Old and New Testaments). Latin predominated in the classroom. As with Blum's coursework in philosophy, much of theology was reduced to theses that he had to learn and demonstrate at exam time. More than syllogistic logic was employed, however. A Jesuit who entered the Society around the same time as Blum later summed up the thesis method in the theologate as “a conclusion stated at the very beginning, proven primarily from affirmations of the magisterium, confirmed by scriptural texts interpreted by dogmatic theologians, bolstered by selected passages from the Fathers of the Church.”

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240 “Theologate Regulations, St. Mary’s College, October 1958,” found in folder Documents-Theologate-Regulations, St. Mary’s College Archives, Missouri Province Collection, Bin 3.0065, Jesuit Archives Central United States. Although this list appeared 10 years after Blum left the theologate, the same behaviors would have been circumscribed in the late 1940s. If anything, the decade after Blum’s departure would have witnessed a gradual easing of some restrictions.
241 McGloin, I’ll Die Laughing, 119-120.
In the theologate, the Thomistic synthesis reached fulfillment as the scholastics looked beyond human reason alone to reason’s cooperation with grace and revelation (as interpreted by the Catholic Church) in plumbing the depths of God’s divine law. The coursework completed construction of an intellectual system intended to guide the men throughout their ministries. In the words of historian Philip Gleason, it was “a stable, universal and certain system of thought.” It provided the intellectual foundation for a comprehensive Catholic worldview that unified and rendered intelligible all facets of creation. It was a worldview that the fully formed Jesuits would be expected to develop in others.

Academically, Blum fared about as well in the theologate as he had in the philosophate, maintaining a “B” average in his coursework. He received an “A” in Liturgical Theology, taught by Gerald Ellard, S.J., a prominent leader in the era’s liturgical reform movement that sought to involve the Catholic people more directly in the celebration of the Mass. Blum also took side courses in canon law, Church history, and archaeology. He and his fellow theologians received special training in hearing

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244 Transcripts.
confessions, which culminated in a unique examination, *Ad Auds*, where the examiners took the role of penitents and thought up strange sins to confess.²⁴⁶

During Blum’s second year, he took a Seminar on Social Problems and Movements that focused on Solidarism, an economic system of thought associated with the German Jesuit economist, Heinrich Pesch (1853-1926).²⁴⁷ Solidarism emerged in the early twentieth century as a Catholic alternative to the polar extremes of socialism and laissez faire liberalism. Solidarism rejected both the inevitability of class conflict and the enthronement of the individual economic actor, seeking instead a harmony of interests based on the notion of the common good. In a sense, Solidarism was an expression of the neoscholastic worldview applied to the economy. Pesch’s thinking had influenced Pius XI’s celebrated social encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931).²⁴⁸

Systems such as Solidarism and papal utterances like *Quadragesimo Anno* reflected a flowering of Catholic social thought and teaching during the first half of the twentieth century. This body of thought offered to modernity Catholic solutions for the problems of economic inequality, social strife, political tumult, and moral decay. Pius XI hoped to actualize Catholic teachings in the troubled world by launching a program in 1922 called Catholic Action.²⁴⁹ Key to its success would be the mobilization of the

historically passive Catholic laity. Pius XI supported the development of a lay apostolate based on the idea that all Catholics, through their participation in the mystical Body of Christ, had a responsibility to act in the world on behalf of the Church.

Catholic Action never was a cohesive movement. Its implementation varied from diocese to diocese and its programs were a broad array of both top-down and grassroots efforts. Yet Catholic Action reflected the optimism of the Catholic Church from the 1920s into the 1950s, especially in the United States.\(^\text{250}\) This may surprise early twenty-first century readers who are more familiar with a narrative of the American Catholic Church characterized by declension, where the Church is perceived as a diminishing institution mired in abuse scandals. During Virgil Blum’s formation, by contrast, the Catholic Church in the United States was a robust and militant institution. American Catholics exuded confidence that their Church could save the modern world.\(^\text{251}\) After being in cultural exile for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Catholicism offered remedies to a Western culture upended by the First World War and pummeled by the Great Depression.\(^\text{252}\) Although Blum never explicitly linked his later public efforts as education reformer and founder of the Catholic League to Catholic Action, the

\(^{250}\) During Blum’s time in formation from 1934-1948, he was periodically exposed to Catholic Action, through extracurricular activities undertaken by the scholastics, speakers brought in to address them, and periodical literature made available to them in the recreation room.


movement’s rhetoric clearly influenced him. The notion of an active laity would be central to Blum’s later writings. He would continually stress the need for lay Catholics to organize themselves, and he expressed frequent frustration with any Catholics seemingly content to wait for leadership from the bishops and priests.

**Jesuit formation assessed**

As Blum prepared to be ordained to the priesthood in 1947, the 34-year-old Jesuit could look back on thirteen years of Jesuit formation. This process produced astutely trained men, to paraphrase the title of Peter McDonough's history of the American Jesuits in the early-mid twentieth century. McDonough's book offers the only collective portrait of American Jesuits of Virgil Blum's generation. Although many American Catholics before the Second Vatican Council held the Jesuits in awe because of their intense intellectual and spiritual training, Jesuit formation during these years has since come under criticism. Despite the seemingly complimentary title of McDonough's book, his work is critical of the Jesuits from the 1930s-1950s, including their formation process.

The American Jesuits emerge from McDonough’s book as almost pathetic figures, steeped in an educational program unchanged from an earlier century, one incapable of producing men who might cope effectively with the social and cultural changes taking place in the twentieth century. McDonough’s bleak view of Jesuit formation may be overstated. Trained as a political scientist and not as an historian, McDonough seems to fall prey to the temptation to approach this period with an *a priori* conclusion drawn from his understanding of his present. Writing from the near side of the dramatic changes that took place in Catholicism following Vatican II, McDonough fails

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to treat this pre-conciliar period on its own terms. Instead, he seems predisposed to view the Society of Jesus during these decades as a naïve organization out of touch with where the modern world was ineluctably headed and with the sort of men it needed. To fill in his portrait of Jesuit formation, McDonough relied heavily on oral history interviews that he conducted with men of Blum’s generation. He alludes to over 200 persons in his Preface, but he does not list their names. McDonough cites only a few of them in his notes and these anonymously, leaving the reader wondering about his criteria for selection.

Over a quarter-century has passed since the appearance of Men Astutely Trained, rendering it impossible for another scholar to reconstruct a similar body of interviews, but a look at the published recollections of sixteen 20th century American Jesuits who had entered the novitiate by 1951 reveals a more ambivalent picture of formation than McDonough depicted. These witnesses can be divided among three groups. Three of the Jesuits presented formation as a predominantly positive experience. Six left a decidedly negative portrayal of their formation. The remaining seven fell somewhere in between, voicing a mixture of sentiments laudatory and condemning.

The formation process appears in a very positive light in the accounts of Daniel Lord, Joseph McGloin, and Avery Dulles. Lord entered the novitiate in 1909 and is most remembered today as author of the 1930 Production Code adopted by the motion picture industry. Lord’s autobiography, *Played By Ear* (1955), provides an upbeat portrayal of Jesuit formation, light-hearted and sentimental, full of Lord’s trademark sense of humor. He alludes to some difficulties in formation—the challenges of living in community, the dreariness of theology classes—but these are buried within a narrative of useful development. McGloin entered the novitiate in 1936. He was not yet forty when he wrote *I’ll Die Laughing* (1955), a memoir specifically about his Jesuit formation experience. McGloin’s account brimmed with his gratitude to the Society for admitting him to its ranks. His book, like Lord’s, carried an *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat*: signs in those days of official endorsement by the Catholic Church. Skeptical readers might dismiss McGloin’s work as a piece of recruitment propaganda for the Society of Jesus during the 1950s, but one has no reason to doubt the sincerity of the author’s testimony. The third recollection is from Cardinal Avery Dulles’s autobiography *A Testimonial to Grace* (1996). A Catholic convert, Dulles was son of Eisenhower’s secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, and nephew to Allen Dulles, first director of the CIA. Dulles entered the novitiate in 1946. He had nothing derogatory to say about his formation. Dulles considered himself privileged to have attended the novitiate, expressed a great regard for his exposure there to *The Spiritual Exercises*, and found his later studies in the philosophate to have been delightful.

By contrast, pre-conciliar Jesuit formation received a much darker portrayal at the hands of John McNeill, Robert Drinan, William Leonard, Francis Peters, Gary Wills, and
Daniel Berrigan. McNeill entered the novitiate in 1948 after serving in World War II, some of which he had experienced as a prisoner of war. In his autobiography, *Both Feet Planted in Midair* (1998), McNeill claimed the novitiate experience reminded him of life as a POW. McNeill was critical of the length and intensity of formation. He recalled how “We used to joke that the Jesuits considered ordination as a reward for a well-spent life.”\(^{255}\) McNeill would later be expelled from the Jesuits for openly expressing his homosexuality and lobbying for changes in how the Church regarded gays and lesbians. Robert Drinan entered the novitiate in 1943 and would serve as dean of Boston College’s Law School before embarking on a political career as a Democrat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Drinan’s biographer, Jesuit Raymond Schroth, tells of a time when Drinan visited his old novitiate in Stockbridge, Massachusetts and commented to one of the novices there, "I couldn’t wait to get out.”\(^{256}\)

Schroth has almost nothing positive to say about the Society’s old formation process, and his portrayal of Drinan’s formation is influenced heavily by William Leonard’s autobiography, *The Letter Carrier* (1993). Leonard entered the novitiate in 1925 and would spend most of his career teaching theology at Boston College. A leader in the liturgical reform movement, Leonard attended Vatican II, and he interpreted his Jesuit formation through the Council’s lens. Leonard criticized the isolation of his training, its tendency to “create a kind of introversion, an immaturity amounting almost to naiveté.”\(^{257}\) Jesuit formation emerged from Leonard’s memoir as essentially misguided, a kind of failure for not having anticipated the reforms of Vatican II. To his


\(^{256}\) Schroth, *Drinan*, 45.

credit, Leonard did not caricature the formation process, a temptation to which Francis Peters occasionally succumbed in *Ours* (1981). Satirical in style and very entertaining to read, *Ours* was Peters’ portrait of his life as a Jesuit from his entrance into the novitiate in 1945 through the beginning of the theologate when he chose to leave the Society. He would later enjoy a distinguished career at New York University as a scholar in the comparative study of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. While Peters appreciated the juniorate’s humanistic education, he expressed almost complete alienation from the spiritual side of formation, leading both Peters and the Jesuits to conclude he did not have a vocation to the priesthood.

Like F. A. Peters, Gary Wills left the Jesuits while a scholastc. He would go on to become a prominent journalist, public intellectual, and historian, joining the faculty at Northwestern University and eventually sharing memories of Jesuit formation in his spiritual memoir, *Why I am a Catholic* (2002). Wills entered the St. Stanislaus novitiate in 1951 (17 years after Blum) and departed the Society in 1957 during his philosophy studies. The prodigious Wills did not find the philosophate challenging; instead, the “sterile and mechanical” curriculum bored him. He reserved his harshest condemnation, however, for the novitiate. From his post-conciliar perch in 2002, Wills decided that “The novitiate of that dark pre-Vatican II era was a decidedly anti-intellectual place.” The reading there was “pious and lachrymose,” the overall experience silly, “weird” and even “a joke.” Wills objected especially to the novices’ immersion in Scripture without any accompanying Scripture scholarship to guide their

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259 Ibid., 31-32.
understanding. Like Peters, Wills left the Society of Jesus with no regrets; but unlike Peters, Wills came away with his faith in God, Christianity, and the church intact. The final example of a Jesuit who in hindsight denigrated his formation experience was Daniel Berrigan, probably the most famous American Jesuit to emerge from the 1960s. Berrigan became a pop culture icon through his anti-Vietnam War efforts, especially his involvement in the Catonsville Nine draft file burning protest, which made him a fugitive from the law and earned him a spot on the FBI’s Most Wanted List. Berrigan would go on to become a prominent author, poet, and social activist. His 1987 autobiography, written in a style of prose poetry, offers a scathing indictment of the pre-conciliar formation process. Images evoking sclerosis dominate the pages. For Berrigan, the novitiate produced “a kind of wooden Indian Jesuit, a caricature of the real thing; carved out boldly by someone who specialized in such artifacts.” Berrigan decided the juniorate was not bad, redeemed by a “sound library” and “friendships forming”, but the philosophate had no redeeming qualities, a place Berrigan claimed where, “Life for most of us was reduced to mere endurance” and where the young Jesuits were “transformed, despite all goodwill, into…a drifting mass of weedy minds.” Berrigan described the newly ordained Jesuits of his cohort as “very nearly the last of the Stonehenge Men.” During Berrigan’s Jesuit formation, the United States dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, events that transformed Berrigan’s consciousness and set him on the path to becoming a leading peace activist. Berrigan’s memoir reflects his

261 Ibid., 97, 102.
disappointment in the Society of Jesus for not appreciating the momentousness of these events and responding accordingly.

The third grouping of recollections by American Jesuits falls somewhere between these largely positive and negative poles. John LaFarge and Gustave Weigel were notable for their relative silence on the subject. LaFarge, who entered the novitiate in 1905, hurried past his Jesuit formation in his autobiography _The Manner is Ordinary_ (1954) to focus on his role as the American Church’s leading apostle to African Americans. LaFarge simply chose not to reflect upon the impact his formation had upon him.

Gustave Weigel, who entered the novitiate in 1922, never wrote a memoir, but his biographer Patrick Collins recorded how Weigel’s sister, with whom he was extremely close, remembered him as being happy in the novitiate and juniorate. Weigel became a leading theologian and advocate of ecumenism. Ironically, Weigel’s ability to take theology in new directions came from work he did in the philosophate that ran counter to its rigid regimen. There he discovered and devoured the works of Immanuel Kant and Joseph Maréchal, which later helped him to take the traditional Thomism he had received in the theologate in new directions. Jesuit historian John O’Malley gave only brief attention to his own formation years in _Lives of the Georgetown Jesuits_. O’Malley entered the Society in 1946 via the Detroit Province and underwent his training at New Milford, Ohio and West Baden Springs, Indiana. O’Malley complained of some poor teachers in the juniorate, but he valued deeply the fluency he achieved there in Latin. O’Malley spoke positively of his time in the theologate, noting that by the late 1950s the instruction at West Baden Springs, Indiana had become remarkably current with the
trends in France and Germany in the years preceding Vatican II, suggesting that there was variation in the quality and emphasis of instruction among the theologates.

Walter Burghardt and Donald Gelpi were two other men whose recollections fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between celebration and denunciation. Walter Burghardt entered the novitiate in 1930 and later became a celebrated theologian, specializing first in patristics (the study of the Church Fathers) and later in social justice issues and homiletics. In his autobiography, *Long Have I Loved You* (2000), Burghardt extolled the classical education he received in the juniorate, but he came down hard on his training in the theologate. Yet even here, Burghardt pulled back from completely dismissing his neoscholastic instruction, concluding instead that, “For those of us who were privileged to pursue graduate studies in theology later on, it was a well-organized, thorough beginning, open to developments we could not have anticipated at the time; for those not so fortunate, it left ever so many with several hundred theses and a method, much of which would fairly soon pass into history.”

Like Burghardt, Donald Gelpi would become a theologian. He entered the novitiate in 1951 and enjoyed a long ministry teaching at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley. Gelpi spent a significant portion of his memoir, *Closer Walk* (2006), describing his formation as a Jesuit. Intellectually, Gelpi spoke glowingly of the growth he experienced in the juniorate and regency. Spiritually, he was critical of what he saw as the Jansenist emphasis on sin and retribution that hung over the novitiate, but he credited the novitiate with leading him on the path to understanding *The Spiritual Exercises*, something that took him years to attain. Gelpi appreciated how Jesuit formation inculcated a sense of social justice: as a *secundianni* in

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1952 he came to realize that “I had joined an organization actively opposed to racism and bigotry and that I had a responsibility to join in that active opposition.” Gelpi reflected with disdain on the unflinching obedience instilled in the young men, and he recalled how his old novice master apologized to him many years later for having stressed such unquestioning conformity. Gelpi also criticized the intense surveillance that attended their formation as Jesuits.

The final two witnesses to Jesuit formation in the early to mid-twentieth century, George Riemer and J. Richard Murray, both chose to leave the Jesuits while scholastics. In this regard, they followed the same path as Peters and Wills; however, their experiences were not nearly so negative. Riemer left the Society of Jesus before the end of his philosophy studies, while Murray departed during his first year in the theologate. Riemer entered the novitiate in 1940 and three decades later he offered his recollections on Jesuit life in *The New Jesuits* (1971), which explored the future of the Society of Jesus in the wake of the tumultuous Sixties. Riemer seemed genuinely divided in his assessment, vacillating between intense nostalgia and unease. He fondly recalled the spiritual development of the novitiate, his love for *The Spiritual Exercises*, and the intense camaraderie that developed among the men throughout the formation process. The ex-Jesuit Riemer admitted that whenever he found himself near a Jesuit house, he would stop by the switchboard to scan the residents’ names, looking for old friends. The scholastic Riemer had discovered his deepest desire was to become a writer, but he concluded that he would never have the freedom as a Jesuit to become the kind of writer he wanted to be. Riemer never regretted his decision to leave, and he found his fond

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memories of formation, at least from the perspective of 1971, haunted by a notion that blind obedience to the Society’s rules had somehow worked to dehumanize him. J. Richard Murray entered the novitiate in 1945 and shared his memories over a half-century later in *Seen and Unseen Worlds* (2014). Unlike Riemer, Murray was never haunted by a sense of dehumanization. Instead, Murray grew to doubt his own vocation to the priesthood, in part because of the thesis method that dominated Jesuit pedagogy. He recalled that by the end of his philosophy studies, “I had too little room for thinking on my own. Frankly, I was sick of pre-cooked theses.” When Murray faced four more years of the method in theology after completing his regency, he chose instead to leave the Society, departing on friendly terms and with many happy memories.

The spectrum of attitudes toward formation exhibited by these men shows the complexity of the subject and the difficulty in generalizing about it. Together, these recollections do not necessarily overthrow McDonough’s negative assessment of the process, but they serve to leaven it or at least to show that memories were more conflicted than he might suggest. How men responded to formation depended in part on what they brought to the experience in terms of personality and their willingness to submit to authority. Except for LaFarge, who barely mentioned his formation, and Weigel and Drinan who never really wrote about it, the experience clearly had a profound and lasting impact on the men, including those who left the Society and could have harbored grievances against it. For example, F. A. Peters, after lampooning the novitiate with surgical precision, confessed suddenly and without facetiousness, “Vow Day was

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264 Murray, *Seen and Unseen Worlds*, 142.
the purest, most perfect pleasure I have ever experienced in my life.”

Even John McNeill, alienated from the Society by his openly gay lifestyle, went out of his way to comment, with a hint of pride, that at least eight of the high school students he taught during regency chose to enter the Jesuits as novices.

A common theme emerging from Jesuit memoirs of the period is the important role individual Jesuits played in the men’s lives, usually in the form of a teacher or superior who took a special interest in a young man and to whom the Jesuit looked back with gratitude. The oppressive side of the formation process could be mitigated by individuals who made a difference in the men’s lives, oftentimes by operating outside the established curriculum. Walter Burghardt expressed gratitude for his professor of rhetoric in the juniorate who, knowing Burghardt’s love for Greek, introduced him specially to the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, thereby setting his pupil on the path toward becoming a patristics scholar. One of Gustave Weigel’s professors in the philosophate encouraged him to explore Kant and Maréchal, thinkers who would shape Weigel’s pioneering theological work. In a similar way, John McNeill recalled fondly how his rector at the philosophate, recognizing McNeill’s philosophical acumen, introduced him to the progressive and controversial writings of French philosopher Maurice Blondel. Donald Gelpi stood in awe of his professor in the juniorate, C. J. McNaspy, whom Gelpi held up as the aspirational and model Jesuit. Addressing the deceased McNaspy in his memoir, Gelpi said “I met you at the precise moment in my life when I needed to meet a genius,

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265 Peters, *Ours*, 144.
an enthralling teacher, a linguist, a historian, a classicist, a liturgist, an art critic, and a polymath.”

Most of these 16 Jesuits who published memories of formation were exceptional in the sense that their trajectories departed from the norm. Only Daniel Lord, Joseph McGloin, John O’Malley, and Donald Gelpi followed the formation process through all its stages and for the prescribed amount of time. The others all deviated from the norm in some way. John LaFarge was already an ordained priest when he entered the novitiate and therefore experienced an abbreviated formation. Avery Dulles skipped the juniorate because he already held a degree from Harvard. John McNeill had his juniorate and regency shortened because of his previous life experiences. Jesuit superiors flagged some of the men as particularly brilliant and directed them on uncommon courses. For example, Robert Drinan spent his three years of regency studying for his law degree at Georgetown University instead of teaching in a high school classroom. Gustave Weigel and Walter Burghardt each spent only one year in regency before being whisked away to the theologate. Other men—Riemer, Peters, Murray, Wills—left the Society by 1957, making them exceptional cases.

Most Jesuits left no account of their experiences in formation. One suspects they were too busy in ministry to reflect upon it. Only once did Virgil Blum in his vast correspondence and considerable publications ever refer to his formation in the Society of Jesus. The comment came in 1972 in a letter to the editor of the National Jesuit News, a post-Vatican II newspaper intended as a forum among Jesuits. Blum lamented the fact

266 Gelpi, Closer Walk, 50.
267 Both attended the Society’s flagship theologate near Woodstock, Maryland. Burghardt’s superiors had intended him to study at Belgium’s University of Louvain, but the gathering war clouds in Europe prevented this from happening.
that U.S. Jesuits had never been adequately educated in the processes of U.S. democracy. He said, “The negative theme of my generation’s whole training was ‘God deliver us from sociology and politics, from the social and political problems of man!’ We were trained in irregular Greek verbs, philosophy and theology, not in the problems of our inner cities, of war and peace.”

This single comment is like a bitter stab at the Society of Jesus, illuminating the resentment of a talented man whose talents did not happen to lie in what the Society valued most. Blum was not one of the stars in philosophy or theology. Blum’s comment also reflects his intense frustration at that point in his ministry as he tried to rouse his fellow Jesuits to organize and engage in interest group democracy. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that Blum achieved his later successes despite his pre-conciliar Jesuit formation and not because of it. Blum took the hard-working ethos of the Society to heart. The Jesuits’ formation process helped to create a pious, disciplined man. Blum appears never to have deviated from his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. No scandal in his personal behavior ever stalked him. Blum was outspoken and unafraid to argue with anyone who crossed him even if it risked embarrassing or discomfiting other Jesuits; but he always proved obedient to the Society's directives. He willingly surrendered his own life to God through the Society of Jesus, and he directed his talents and remarkable energy—both as educator and political activist—toward furthering what he perceived to be God’s greater glory on Earth.

Nevertheless, Blum's Jesuit formation did sow seeds of later trouble in his public career. McDonough’s criticism of the rigid, authoritarian style of the Society during the period, a criticism echoed in some of the Jesuit memoirs, does resonate for Blum in the

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sense that the Jesuits became his normative model for how a human organization should operate. This was not problematic in the context of the university classroom where a mutually accepted hierarchy reigned (i.e., I am the teacher, you are the student), but it led to difficulties when Blum assumed a leadership role among the laity. The Jesuits did not train him well to lead others in the more collaborative environment that characterized the modern workplace. This deficiency would become most evident in his leadership of the Catholic League where Blum sought a level of obedience from others contrary to the working spirit of a modern non-profit organization, especially one that relied heavily on volunteers. He tended to interpret dissenting opinions or courses of actions as acts of personal disobedience. A curious paradox emerged in which Blum could genuinely wish that the American Catholic laity show personal initiative and shake off its historic reliance on priests and bishops to lead them; and yet, at the same time, Blum could maintain a personal leadership style that brooked no dissent from the people he led.
CHAPTER 3: Priest and Political Scientist, 1947-1954

On ordination day, June 18, 1947, at the St. Mary’s College chapel, Virgil Blum rose to his feet when his name was called. He responded “Adsum,” (“Here I am”) before approaching Bishop George Donnelly of Kansas City to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. By custom, Blum then walked over to his father, J.P., kneeling in a front pew of the chapel, ready to receive his priest son’s first blessing.269 Had Virgil’s mother yet lived, she too would have been kneeling there to share in her son’s blessing, but pious Elizabeth had died only the year before.270 Virgil Blum was now a Jesuit Father, a notable achievement in Catholic culture. Soon after ordination, Blum returned to Shelby County, Iowa, to celebrate his first High Mass as a new priest. The Faithful thronged to towering St. Joseph’s Church in Earling to celebrate yet another vocation from the Colony.

Blum’s formation in the Society of Jesus was not yet complete, and he faced additional advanced training before he could take his place within the Jesuits’ system of higher education. One more year of theological study awaited Blum at St. Mary’s, followed by a last stage in formation called tertianship, leading to him making his final vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the Society of Jesus. In earlier generations, Blum might then have been assigned immediately to a college or university; but the twentieth century witnessed a rising expectation for educational credentialing, the doctorate becoming the normative degree for Jesuit faculty in higher education.

270 Her grave and headstone lie at St. Joseph’s Cemetery; Earling, Iowa.
received permission to pursue a Ph.D. in political science, marking him as one of the relatively few Jesuits specializing in the social sciences. Just as there was a pecking order among the Jesuits’ colleges and universities, so too did a hierarchy exist among the disciplines taught there, with theology and philosophy enjoying the highest status. The Jesuits held the social sciences in lesser esteem, a fact that frustrated Blum but also goaded him to greater exertions. By the time Blum received his doctorate at St. Louis University in 1954, he had identified secularism as the gravest threat to the United States and to the Catholic Church, and he committed himself to employing the social sciences, especially constitutional law, in their defense. Virgil Blum had emerged from his long formation and education primed to become what a later generation might call a culture warrior.

**A fully formed Jesuit**

Father Blum returned to St. Mary’s after ordination for one more year of instruction. The theologians’ fourth year focused on the sacraments and scripture, with the new priests loaned out periodically to nearby Kansas parishes to help with pastoral work.\(^{271}\) Blum’s final examination at the end of the fourth year was a 2-hour ordeal conducted in Latin and covering the entire Thomistic synthesis, all seven years of philosophy and theology. When Blum finally departed St. Mary’s in 1948, he also carried with him a master’s degree in History with a minor field in Government. Blum had chipped away at this degree since the philosophate. During regency, Blum had spent his summers away from Campion, continuing his coursework at St. Louis University. The province’s *News-Letter* reported Blum back in St. Louis for a few days at the end of his

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first term in the theologate in order to finish his thesis and take his M.A. examination, leading to his graduation on January 18, 1945. Blum received permission to continue taking graduate courses on a part-time basis in history and political science during his third and fourth years of theology, suggesting that Blum's Jesuit superiors had validated his own personal intellectual interests and planned for him to gain a doctorate in those fields in preparation for teaching at one of the Society’s universities.

Before Blum could devote himself entirely to doctoral work, he had to complete his last stage in Jesuit formation, a ten-month period called tertianship. Unlike regency, which was a later addition to the formation process, tertianship originated with Ignatius of Loyola. The Society’s founder described it as a “school of the heart” meant to counteract the “school of letters.” Ignatius’s thinking here was that after so many years of intellectual study, the Jesuit needed to reinvigorate himself spiritually. Tertianship, therefore, was basically a return to the novitiate where the men re-immersed themselves in prayer and contemplation to the exclusion of everything else.

Blum spent his tertianship at St. Joseph Hall in Decatur, Illinois, located at the center of the state, between Springfield and Champaign. It was one of the Missouri Province’s newest facilities: Blum’s group of tertians was only the second class to pass through St. Joseph Hall. It occupied a large castle-like building on a parcel of land at the northern edge of Decatur. The province had acquired the property in 1946, formerly the

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273 Becker, The Re-Formed Jesuits, 331-332.
274 Tertianship denotes a third stage, but the third stage of what? It is the Jesuit’s Third Probation. The First Probation was the brief period immediately before entrance to the novitiate community. Second Probation was the 2-year novitiate experience. See Becker, The Re-Formed Jesuits, 331. For an explanation from the period, see “The New St. Joseph Hall Tertianship and Retreat House,” 1947, found in the Pamphlets and Retreat Schedules envelope, Missouri Province Collection, Bin 3.0055, Jesuit Archives Central United States.
site of a children’s home run by the Knights of Pythias fraternal order. The structure required extensive renovation. The rapidity of its completion spoke to the province's pressing need for space and reflected the growing number of Jesuit vocations in the midwestern United States in the 1940s.

Father Blum received orders to arrive at St. Joseph Hall by 6:00 p.m. on August 2, 1948. He probably came straight from St. Louis where he had just completed a summer graduate course at SLU on The Modern Democratic State, earning an “A.” Twenty-seven other priests joined Blum for the tertianship, many of them familiar faces from throughout his formation. Included among them was Francis Ring of Minnesota, who, fourteen years earlier, had arrived at St. Stanislaus novitiate alongside Blum on the same day. Life in tertianship bore a striking resemblance to the novitiate. It too began with the Long Retreat—the full 30-day experience of *The Spiritual Exercises*. Although these Jesuits had by now experienced 50 retreats rooted in Ignatian spirituality, no one had undertaken the Long Retreat since his first month in the Society of Jesus. It must have been a much deeper experience for them in view of all the intervening events in their Jesuit lives.

The Long Retreat set the tone for the remainder of the tertianship. The men were kept busy, but the pace of their life at St. Joseph Hall was more relaxed than during other periods in formation. Recalling his own tertianship, Daniel Lord, S.J., remarked “For the last time in my Jesuit life I knew relative leisure, time to think and time to pray and time

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275 Transcripts. St. Louis University, Office of the Registrar (hereafter Transcripts).
276 Just like at the Juniorate, one of the men was assigned as *beadle* (secretary) for the tertian class and had to keep a handwritten diary of its activities, a veritable gold mine of details about daily life in tertianship. See Beadle’s Diary, Records of St. Joseph Hall, Decatur, IL, Missouri Province Collection, Bin 3.0056, Jesuit Archives Central United States (hereafter Beadle’s Diary).
to plan and time to look forward to life and its possibilities.\textsuperscript{278} Upon completing tertianship, Jesuits were expected to devote themselves entirely to their ministries, laboring ceaselessly \textit{Ad Majorm Dei Gloriam}, until—having become too old or infirm to continue in active ministry—they retired with a final assignment, summed up in a Latin phrase appearing alongside their names in the annual province catalog: \textit{Orat pro Soc.} (He is praying for the Society.)

Blum’s tertian master at St. Joseph Hall was familiar to him: Daniel Conway, S.J., who had served as rector and president of St. Mary’s College during Blum’s first two years in the theologate. Conway played a role like that of Novice Master Danneger at St. Stanislaus, guiding Blum’s spiritual development and completing his instruction in how the Society of Jesus operated. The morning after the tertians arrived, Conway handed out the books that would occupy their hearts and minds for the next ten months.\textsuperscript{279} They were a combination of spiritual texts and texts on Jesuit governance. The tertians read from three spiritual authors: Louis Lallemant (1588-1635), Adolphe Tanquerey (1854-1932), and Antonio Arregui (1863-1942). Lallemant was a French Jesuit who had stressed the spiritual life at a time when the Society was expanding rapidly, and the busy Jesuits of the early seventeenth century risked becoming detached from their spiritual moorings. Tanquerey was a French Sulpician priest, best known as a dogmatic theologian, but whose later work on ascetical theology became a classic studied in seminaries. Arregui was a Spanish Jesuit who served twenty years as tertian master at Manresa, the site where Ignatius once experienced mystical visions. The remaining reading focused on the

\textsuperscript{278} Lord, \textit{Played By Ear}, 247.
\textsuperscript{279} Beadle’s Diary, p. 22.
governance of the Society of Jesus. Together the tertians would complete their understanding of the Society’s corporate mission and its rules of operation. They studied the Constitutions of the Society, an Epitome (summary) of its laws, and a letter on tertianship written by the recently installed Father General of the Jesuits, Jean-Baptiste Jannsens. Within a year or two of their leaving tertianship, each of these Jesuits would make his Final Vows in the Society. These administrative studies prepared the men to take their place as active and knowledgeable participants in a community of Ours.  

Solitude and isolation marked the tertians’ life at St. Joseph Hall. Upon their arrival, the men were given five days to write any letters they wished to send to friends or former associates; afterwards, they were permitted to write only to their parents unless they received special permission from the tertian master. Father Conway also controlled their access to outside information. On Wednesday, November 4, 1948, he circulated a newspaper among the tertians so they could learn the outcome of the nation’s presidential election. It would not have been surprising to find Blum, the student of political science, first in line to read the paper. On Thursday, January 20th, Conway permitted the tertians to listen to President Truman's inaugural address on the radio. 

Even so, the men were not otherwise completely bereft of contact with the outside world. Every two weeks, they were sent to local parishes on Sundays to help celebrate Mass. This culminated in a Lenten assignment where each tertian spent the 40-day season of

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280 "Ours" was a descriptive term applied to Jesuits by Jesuit superiors. It appeared often in documents from the period and referred to their exclusive and corporate identity as Jesuits. (e.g., “Ours shall act in thus and such a manner...”)
281 Beadle's Diary, p. 22.
282 Ibid., 28a, 35.
Lent away from St. Joseph Hall serving at a parish in the Midwest. Blum spent his Lent at Sacred Heart Parish in Florissant, Missouri.283

Blum’s formation as a tertian was intended not only to buttress his own spiritual resolve before embarking on his life’s work as a Jesuit; here Blum also learned how to give retreats to others based upon the Ignatian principles he himself had practiced as a retreatant over the previous fourteen years. The giving of *The Spiritual Exercises* to others was the Society’s oldest charism. Blum and his fellow tertians studied how best to give preached retreats to groups of laypersons. These retreats were a very condensed version of the Long Retreat, customarily experienced over the period of a weekend. The tertians practiced formulating and delivering the brief conference talks that filled a Jesuit retreat. Since St. Joseph Hall also served the Missouri Province as a retreat house for the Catholic laity, it provided an opportunity for the tertians to give their first retreats in a monitored environment. The entry in the Beadle’s Diary for January 6, 1949, refers to Father Blum as retreat master for a group of 14 laymen from the communities of Paxton and Loda, Illinois, marking Blum’s first effort at preaching a retreat to others.284 He would give another retreat in May, shortly before completing his tertianship at St. Joseph Hall and departing for what would turn out to be 41 years of active ministry in the Society of Jesus.

**The political scientist**

Virgil Blum’s *status* upon completing formation was to join the Jesuit community at St. Louis University where he would continue his coursework in Government and

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283 Ibid., 35a.  
284 Ibid., 33a-34.
American History in pursuit of a doctoral degree. The Midwest Province’s catalog for 1950 lists Blum as assigned to the Jesuit Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) based at the university. The ISS had been created in 1944 as the research and teaching complement to the Institute of Social Order (ISO), established only a few years earlier by the American Jesuits to be a think tank for the social apostolate—the Church’s effort to craft and organize Catholic solutions to America's social problems. The ISO/ISS initiatives revealed a growing Jesuit realization that professional social scientific training was needed to confront modern problems. Although the Society of Jesus still held the study of theology and philosophy in highest esteem and directed its finest minds toward those disciplines, it had begun encouraging training in the social sciences. In this regard, Blum’s pursuit of political science made him something of a pioneer. Many years later, speaking at the celebration of his golden anniversary in the Society of Jesus, Blum mentioned that he was only the second man in the Missouri Province to go into political science. Blum’s assignment to SLU shows that his province was beginning to support men whose interests and enthusiasm lay in the social sciences.

Given the indefatigable energy Blum would exhibit throughout his ministry as a Jesuit, he must have seemed like a greyhound straining in the slip during his final months of formation. He burst on to SLU’s political science department full-time in the fall semester of 1949, gaining an “A” in each of his four courses. The absence of any

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286 On the ISO and ISS, see McDonough, Men Astutely Trained, pp. 12, 38, 112, 174-181, 280-283. McDonough’s treatment of these entities is insightful, but his narrative of their history is partial and disjointed. A thorough history of the ISO/ISS remains to be written.
287 Blum’s unpublished remarks to Marquette’s Jesuit community at the 50th anniversary of his entering the Society of Jesus, 1984, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Jubilee (50th Anniversary), 1984.” Efforts to uncover the identity of the first man have not been successful.
documents recording Blum’s direct thoughts before 1953 make it difficult to date the marriage of his intellectual interests with the crusading spirit he would later exhibit on behalf of Catholic education and culture in the United States. However, based on a remark Blum made in a 1976 interview, the 1949-1950 academic year at SLU was pivotal, because that is when Blum took a 2-semester course in Constitutional Law taught by Dr. Carl Taeusch. Taeusch was a Harvard-educated philosopher (and Baptist minister) then teaching as a visiting professor at SLU. Although Taeusch’s area of specialization was business ethics, he was clearly an effective lecturer on constitutional law. The course captivated Blum who would himself teach the Constitutional Law course at Marquette University to undergraduates for many years.

Blum credited Taeusch with inspiring his life’s work as a legal scholar defending Catholic rights in American society, especially in the field of education. Blum’s earlier coursework in church history familiarized him with the long Catholic struggle in the United States to establish a parochial school system amidst a hegemonic Protestant national culture, while Blum’s early years spent in Defiance offered first-hand experience of the struggle. Although the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution forbade federal legislation establishing a national religion, and despite individual states having disestablished any remaining state churches by 1833, the common schools that developed in the North during the 1830s included generically Protestant religious instruction. These state-supported, de facto Protestant schools offended Catholic leaders who in turn sought public funds to build their own Catholic educational system. Archbishop John Hughes of New York emerged in the 1840s as the most vocal supporter of public funding for

parochial education. Hughes argued that the New York public schools were, in effect, Protestant schools that undermined the faith of Catholic children. He reasoned that if these essentially religious schools received public money, then so should Catholic schools. Hughes lost the battle, and American Catholics in succeeding decades lost the war as nativist fears and the evolving concept of the separation of church and state quelled any Catholic efforts to secure a share of public funds.\footnote{Harold A. Buetow, \textit{Of Singular Benefit: The Story of Catholic Education in the United States}. (London: McMillan, 1970), 138-140; On church-state, see Philip Hamburger, \textit{Separation of Church and State} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).}

Taeusch took this familiar narrative and re-interpreted it for Blum through the lens of constitutional law. Taeusch introduced Blum’s class to the idea that Catholic school children attending parochial schools were being deprived of their constitutional rights by the fact they could not enjoy the benefit of the taxes their parents paid to support public education. According to this interpretation, legislation that prohibited the use of public funds for parochial schools violated the children’s constitutional right to the free exercise of their religion. Children exercised their religious freedom in choosing to attend a school that supported their religious faith, but truly free exercise of religion depended upon equal application of the laws; and in this case, the laws for provision of education were not being applied equally. The state was punishing children for their religious belief by excluding them from the benefits of the law based upon their membership in a sectarian group. That this argument resonated powerfully with Blum is not surprising given his experiences in Defiance, Iowa. Young Virgil would have grown up knowing that his parents were paying local school taxes, all of which went to educate the Protestant kids in town, but none of which supported his own education or that of his
siblings and friends at St. Paul’s School. What Taeusch provided was a constitutional argument against what Blum must have always perceived to be an injustice; that the state was, in effect, treating Catholic school children and their parents as second-class citizens. This belief would remain central to Blum’s mental universe until his dying day.

If the 1949-1950 academic year proved pivotal for Blum, then the following one would be equally vital. He spent the next year enrolled as a student-at-large at the University of Chicago. The Society of Jesus was not averse to sending its men for special training at secular schools provided the schools were top rate. The University of Chicago had far and away the best political science department in the Midwest; from the 1920s into the 1960s, it was second only to Harvard in national rankings. The university in general enjoyed a reputation for intellectual gravitas, graduate programs marked by an exhilarating atmosphere of intense concentration and exertion. In Chicago’s forceful president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, the Jesuits encountered a kindred spirit, even if a pagan one. Hutchins was a tireless advocate of studia humanitatis, having inserted a rigorous Great Books program into the heart of Chicago’s curriculum. Marquette University had invited Hutchins to deliver its Aquinas Lecture in 1949, in which he stated, “Catholics must be eager that Europe and the West should not only survive, but also revive and reacquire a deeper conception of human civilization than the one recently current, which centers around a religion of progress by resourceful greed and technological mastery of non-human nature.” This sentiment elided beautifully with

292 Robert Maynard Hutchins Papers, Box 373, Folder 1, University of Chicago Archives.
the world-saving hope of neoscholasticism, and it must have had its Jesuit hearers nodding vigorously in agreement. Another selling point for Chicago in considering Blum’s assignment was the presence on the political science faculty of a devout and outspoken Catholic, Jerome Kerwin, who shared Blum’s concerns about the rights of Catholics in American society. Kerwin and Blum would become friends and stay in touch over the following years.²⁹³

In addition to Kerwin, Blum encountered two other professors at Chicago who would exert even greater influence on him intellectually.²⁹⁴ The first was the department’s chairman, C. Herman Pritchett. Two years before Blum’s arrival in Hyde Park, Pritchett had published a controversial book, *The Roosevelt Court* (1948).²⁹⁵ It proved to be a pioneering text in behavioralism, a powerful movement that would grip the political science profession until the 1960s.²⁹⁶ Pritchett analyzed the Supreme Court’s non-unanimous decisions over the long presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and employed rudimentary statistical methods to reveal voting blocs on the Court. He treated the Court’s decisions as “value statements which could be examined as votes on public policy issues.”²⁹⁷ In doing so, Pritchett challenged the prevailing orthodoxy holding that judges acted primarily on their reading of the law when issuing opinions. Pritchett

²⁹³ See for example Kerwin to Blum, March 27, 1957 and Blum to Kerwin, April 7, 1959, both in Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 1, folder titled “Correspondence, Miscellaneous, Political Science Department.”
²⁹⁴ Blum singled out these two men for mention a few years later in a letter to his provincial describing his academic pedigree while arguing for a new assignment. See Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Father Provincial, November 30, 1954, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1952-1954.”
²⁹⁶ For Pritchett’s own reflections on behavioralism and his role in it, see his interview by Gordon Baker in Michael A. Baer, Malcolm E. Jewell and Lee Sigelman, eds. *Political Science in America: Oral Histories of a Discipline* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 107-120. The interview also provides an insider’s look at the workings of this influential department, which boasted luminaries such as Hans Morgenthau and Leo Strauss.
suggested instead that personal attitudes often shaped justices’ positions. Justices brought their own policy preferences to the cases under consideration, and these predilections largely determined their judgments. Judicial behavioralism resonated with Blum, although it would be a mistake to classify him as a behavioralist given how the movement developed in subsequent years. But within the context of Catholic religious freedom, Blum saw truth in judicial behavioralism. It fed his conviction, voiced often in later years, that American judges tended to eschew good law in deference to their own anti-Catholic biases.

The second professor to influence Blum at Chicago was Robert Horn who, in his Civil Liberties classes, exposed the Jesuit to ideas that Horn later published in *Groups and the Constitution* (1956). Horn argued that the freedom of association was one of the most important civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. The right of citizens to associate voluntarily in pursuit of a common objective was central to the modern American political experience. Horn’s affirmation of pressure group politics—including, notably, the efforts of religious groups—encouraged Blum to ponder how Roman Catholics might form political associations to safeguard their rights and identity in a society where they constituted a minority of the population, yet a minority large enough (roughly a quarter) to be potentially quite influential in the nation’s political affairs.

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298 For historical definitions of behavioralism see Somit and Tanenhaus, *The Development of Political Science*, 176-180, and Raymond Seidelman, *Disenchanted Realists: Political Science and the American Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015) 149-151. Although the idea of judicial behavioralism resonated with Blum, it would be incorrect to label him a behavioralist when it came to the political science profession. Behavioralism developed a heavy emphasis on quantitative methods, which Blum did not use, as well as a belief that political science should not concern itself with moral or ethical questions, a notion alien to Blum’s mind. Blum’s former student and colleague, Jack Johannes, has stressed Blum’s opposition to the broader behavioralist tendency in the profession. See John D. Johannes, interview by William Fliss, January 7, 2021.

Blum's role in forming Citizens for Educational Freedom and later the Catholic League may be understood as an attempt to actualize this idea imbibed at the University of Chicago.

Jesuits like Blum on independent assignment at a secular school were not set up to live on their own. Instead, they temporarily joined the nearest Jesuit community. The closest community to Hyde Park was located four miles west of campus in a house on Paulina Street, home to the Lithuanian Province of Jesuits in exile from their native country. These Jesuits had been living or studying in Western Europe at the time of the Second World War. Cut off from Lithuania first by the war and then by Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, the men had ministered to Lithuanian refugees across Western Europe. Superior General Jannsens decided to form a separate Lithuanian American province for the displaced men, its headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, home to a significant chunk of the Lithuanian diaspora. The Lithuanian Jesuits on Paulina Street had been living in the house for only two years when Blum joined their community. He was one of ten Jesuits living in the community that year and the only American, the rest being Lithuanian except for a Brazilian Jesuit who, like Blum, was studying at the University of Chicago, but in the field of physics. Blum observed the rules of the house, shared in its chores, and took part in its communal spiritual practices. Latin would have provided a convenient means of communication with the other men, many of whom were probably quite vocal in expressing fierce anti-Communism.

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301 Catalogus Provinciae Missourianae Societatis Jesu Anni 1951, pp. 33-34.
Blum returned to SLU in the summer of 1951 and completed his coursework in political science the following spring. In 1953 Blum’s provincial assigned him to Creighton University to begin teaching political science while he finished writing his dissertation, which he successfully defended for his doctorate, conferred on June 1, 1954. Blum’s dissertation was titled “Legal Aspects of Equality and Religious Liberty.” The 757-page behemoth, spread over two volumes, offered a close analysis of 43 court cases and sought to answer the central question: “To what extent have the state and federal courts denied to individuals the free exercise of religion guaranteed by state and federal constitutions?” Blum concluded that most, though not all, courts had denied individuals their constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom. Despite the sweeping nature of the question, Blum’s conclusion was narrowly focused. Almost all the cases under review concerned freedom of religion in the area of welfare legislation involving the education of children, particularly the use of public funds to provide them with textbooks, school lunches, and transportation.

Blum’s dissertation was topical in that the question of whether such welfare benefits could be extended to parochial school students had been receiving increased public and legal attention. The failure of American Catholics in the nineteenth century to obtain public funds for their elementary schools led the Church to create a vast network of self-sufficient diocesan school systems. By the early twentieth century even these had come under attack in places, most notably Oregon where an alliance of Protestant and Scottish Rite Mason groups passed legislation in 1922 requiring all children to attend the public schools, effectively putting an end to private education in the state. A congregation

\[302\] Virgil C. Blum, “Legal Aspects of Equality and Religious Liberty” (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 1953), 11.
of teaching sisters called The Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary joined forces with the nonsectarian Hill Military Academy to challenge the law. The resulting case wound its way up to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in *Pierce v. Society of School Sisters* (1926) declared the Oregon law unconstitutional, ruling that while the state could regulate schools it could not dictate parents’ choice of schools. The Supreme Court’s decision was a resounding victory for Catholic education, and the success of *Pierce v. Society of School Sisters* re-kindled in some American Catholic hearts the hope that state aid for parochial schools might someday survive legal scrutiny. These advocates sought to chip away at public opposition by steering clear of direct legislative aid to the church schools and focusing instead on welfare benefits for the children such as free textbooks and transportation. Legal challenges arose nevertheless, leading to many of the court decisions that Blum analyzed in his dissertation.

Blum praised those rulings, a minority of the total, that upheld welfare benefits for parochial school children, and he attacked the majority that struck them down, criticizing these rulings from the civil rights perspective of religious freedom. Blum argued that these adverse rulings on welfare benefits violated the children’s right to freely exercise their religion. Important for Blum’s reasoning was the federal case *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940), which had incorporated the free exercise of religion clause of the First Amendment into the Fourteenth Amendment, thereby protecting an individual’s religious freedom against violations by the states. Almost all the decisions Blum analyzed for his dissertation were state decisions; but because of *Cantwell*, they were subject to federal civil rights interpretation. Equally important for Blum’s line of attack was the

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legal principle that civil rights depended not only on freedom from prior restraint but also freedom from subsequent restraint. As an example, Blum pointed out that freedom of speech meant little if, after being allowed to speak your conscience, your opponent was permitted to bash your head in. For Blum, an equivalent situation occurred when legislatures or courts withheld welfare benefits from parochial schoolchildren: in effect, they were denying parochial schoolchildren such things as state-funded textbooks and transportation—benefits automatically extended to public schoolchildren—simply because the children exercised their religious freedom in choosing to attend a school that promoted their religious values. By making benefits contingent on students not choosing to attend a parochial school, the legislatures or courts violated the children’s civil rights. In other words, the children could not exercise religious freedom because they faced the negative consequence of denial of benefits. Most of the state legislatures and courts had denied these welfare benefits to parochial schoolchildren because their state constitutions had been amended in the nineteenth century to expressly forbid public aid to parochial education or sectarian institutions. Blum attributed these amendments to the nation’s legacy of Anti-Catholicism. In a lengthy historical digression, Blum linked these constitutional amendments to a mid-late nineteenth century context in which a hostile Protestant majority feared the growing Catholic minority in its midst and sought to undermine its potential to influence public life.

Blum’s dissertation revealed a growing tension between the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause in the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution contains both clauses, to wit “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;” Tension lay in how
these clauses should be interpreted. Blum argued that the Founders understood establishment in the narrow sense of prohibiting the existence of a federal church. He saw the Establishment Clause as predicated on the Free Exercise Clause and therefore secondary to it in importance. Blum opposed the idea of broadening the Establishment Clause to prohibit any government aid to religion. Instead, Blum endorsed what he believed to have been the Founders’ original vision of church/state relations in which the state accommodated religion and cooperated with churches for the public good. He was alarmed by a recent legal trend toward a very high wall of separation between church and state.

Blum’s alarm centered on the case *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), a major U.S. Supreme Court ruling that dealt directly with the question of welfare benefits for parochial schoolchildren. The 5-4 decision concerned a New Jersey law providing parochial school students with free bus transportation. The Supreme Court upheld the law. Writing for the majority, Justice Hugo Black likened bus transportation to other public services extended to the schools such as sewage disposal and police protection. Black’s opinion delighted many Catholics and fueled anti-Catholic outrage, but it handed parochial education only a tactical victory. Catholics faced strategic defeat in the ruling’s larger ramification. Bus transportation had survived legal scrutiny, but Black offered in the majority opinion an *obiter dictum* that defined the Establishment Clause broadly and raised the wall of separation in no uncertain terms: “Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another.... No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called,
or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion.”

Black’s line of reasoning incensed Blum. Not only had the Court failed to recognize that the children’s religious freedom was at stake, but the ruling also potentially stymied any further progress toward procurement of state aid for parochial education.

*Everson* seemed to reject any notion that government might accommodate religion and cooperate with churches for the public good. Blum labeled the Court’s stringent interpretation the “no aid doctrine,” and he argued that it turned the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses into adversaries; moreover, it guaranteed dominance of the former over the latter. The Free Exercise Clause was the foundation of religious freedom, but the Supreme Court was now using the Establishment Clause to turn freedom of religion into freedom from religion. Blum predicted accurately that the Court's interpretation would work “to secularize the public schools of our nation, to remove God and all things that directly suggest God from the classrooms of our public schools.”

Blum feared the Supreme Court was moving toward outright hostility toward religion in its First Amendment interpretation, a trend he believed revealed the growing secularization of the judiciary. Judicial behavioralism had resonated with Blum in Pritchett’s classroom, and here he saw it at work in an alarming way, with justices taking their own anti-religious values and imposing them on the nation. Blum thought they did this, either consciously or unconsciously, because of sympathy to a pernicious ideology first propounded by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Roscoe Pound in the early twentieth

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306 Ibid., 749.
century called sociological jurisprudence. It favored the interpretation of laws through the lens of the social welfare needs of the community. Blum labeled this approach pragmatic, a word freighted with negative connotation, suggesting John Dewey’s philosophy of Pragmatism, popular among America’s secular intelligentsia. Unlike the Thomistic synthesis, which discovered truth in creation’s participation with an eternal natural law, Pragmatism found truth in careful investigation of data and experience without reference to anything supernatural. For Blum, sociological jurisprudence rested on a rejection of objective norms or absolutes. Law itself became nothing more than a social institution that changed and expanded in response to new empirical situations. Blum believed that such an ideology ultimately produced legal opinions based on jurists’ own prejudices and their personal definitions of complex terms like social welfare and religion. As a believer in a natural law against which positive (man-made) laws should be measured, Blum despised the subjectivity that now entered jurists’ interpretations, believing that human beings cast free from the moorings of any moral system that recognized a source of objective truth outside of humanity would drift and bob on the sea of their own prejudices and short-sightedness, spelling doom for a democracy built on religiously inspired ethical values and principles.

The secular threat

Sociological jurisprudence was for Blum one manifestation of a larger secularist world view that threatened the United States. By the time Blum entered public life, he


had identified secularism as the greatest threat to the nation. The Jesuit did not come to
this conclusion on his own nor was he a lone Catholic voice crying in the wilderness.
Earlier writers had tracked the menace, and by 1947 the U.S. Catholic bishops saw fit to
issue a powerful statement against it. The bishops defined secularism as “the practical
exclusion of God from human thinking and living.” From secularism issued dire
consequences for every unit of society, from the individual to the international
community. The timing of the bishops’ statement is significant. Only two years earlier
had the world emerged from the most cataclysmic conflict in history, costing tens of
millions of lives and causing widespread destruction across Europe and Asia. Moreover,
a new conflict was taking shape—only the year before had Winston Churchill warned of
an iron curtain descending across Europe, presaging a Cold War between East and West.

At this pivotal moment which saw the world trying to rebuild itself in the face of
new dangers, the Catholic bishops of the globe’s most powerful country tried to offer a
path forward. They believed peace and prosperity depended upon acceptance of God’s
dominion over the world, a belief at odds with secularism, which fundamentally denied
that it was God’s world and not humanity’s world. Secularism exiled God from human
life, limiting one’s life view to “the human here and now in exclusion of man’s relation to
God here and hereafter.” Secularism was an insidious solvent dispersing the natural law,
authored by God, that maintained peace. The consequences were obvious. The bishops
believed secularism had enabled pernicious ideologies such as fascism, Nazism, and
communism to take root and flourish, leading to devastation. A better world could never
be built if individuals were not brought back to God and an awareness of God.

Realizing that the United States must play a leadership role in the postwar world, the bishops adopted a pastoral tone in their statement and counseled the nation’s citizens on the imperative of resisting secularism. Individuals needed to regain a sense of sin and ground their actions in a personal responsibility to God. The bishops pointed out the ill effects of secularism on the family, blaming it for society’s rising divorce rate and juvenile delinquency. In the workplace, secularism led to rapacious owners and managers, exploited labor, and an attempt by the state to control rather than encourage cooperation for the common good. The bishops did not believe that secularism was synonymous with atheism, although all atheists were secularists in their estimation. Secularists did not always deny God and they could even give God lip service in public statements. Instead of denying God outright, these secularists effectively disregarded him in their hearts. This disregard, this displacement by worldly values, grew even in the hearts of Catholics.

The U.S. bishops believed that the greatest harm inflicted by secularism was in the field of education. Public school leaders now positively excluded God from the school, thereby breaking with an historical American tradition that had recognized religion’s importance in the training of youth. A philosophy of education that omitted God undermined the ability of these future adults to recognize their personal and social responsibility to God. Catholic schools carried on the hallowed tradition of religious education despite efforts to undermine them. The bishops warned that secularists “would invade the rights of parents and invest the state with supreme powers in the field of education; they refuse to recognize the God-given place that parents have in the education of their children.” The bishops’ statement on secularism, especially regarding
education, resonated with Blum and its ideas remained operative in his mind for the next 40 years, finding expression through his correspondence and publications. Blum had emerged from the Catholic Colony in Shelby County as a staunch supporter of parochial education, but he did not embrace the narrow anti-Protestantism that afflicted some American Catholics. Blum looked beyond the traditional Protestant-Catholic antagonism and perceived the real menace to be a secular drift in American society, leading toward an absolutist secular state that used the public schools to indoctrinate future generations into believing that their rights came from the state and not from God.

Earlier Catholic critics had pointed out this danger. Blum admired the popular English historian and Catholic convert Christopher Dawson whose core belief, at the heart of all his work, was that any society or culture that loses its spiritual roots, however prosperous it may seem, is actually a dying society or culture. This resonated with Blum for whom the preservation of Catholic education was key to the long-term health of American society. Blum agreed completely with Dawson’s assertion that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had gone from securing religious liberty to being used to achieve the complete secularization of American culture. Another historian and Catholic convert, Carlton Hayes, had emerged by the time of the Second World War as a leading critic of secularism in American life. Hayes was an early Catholic proponent of

311 Dawson was one of the few thinkers that Blum alluded to directly in his correspondence and writings and on more than one occasion. He was especially taken with Dawson’s 1961 book The Crisis of Western Education; see for example Blum to Chester James Antieau, June 14, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 2, folder title “Correspondence A, 9/1962-8/1963.”
interdenominational alliances to combat secularism. Blum’s career was marked by a willingness to forge these interfaith bonds in defense of religious freedom for all.

The most eloquent Catholic voice on the danger of secularism in the United States as well as the foremost commentator on church-state relations in the postwar era was Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray. Remembered most often today as the principal drafter of *Dignitatus Humanae* (1965), the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Political Freedom, Murray had begun writing on political theory in the early 1940s, and he became a noted public intellectual over the next decade. He would elaborate upon some of the ideas stated by the U.S. bishops. Murray wanted to dispel misunderstandings among both Protestants and Catholics concerning Catholicism and the separation between church and state in America. He sought to alleviate Protestant fears that U.S Catholics were bent on merging the two and establishing a Catholic confessional state. At the same time, Murray wanted to correct misguided Catholics who viewed the modern liberal constitutional system of the United States as irreconcilable with Catholic tradition. For Murray, Catholicism did not conflict with the American political system. He argued that the United States was the world’s best setting for Catholic political freedom because its government derived from the Thomistic natural law consensus of the Middle Ages and not, as many European Catholics believed, from Protestant strains of

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315 Two influential articles were John Courtney Murray, S.J., “Religious Liberty—The Concern of All,” *America* 78, no. 18 (February 7, 1948): 513-516 and John Courtney Murray, S.J., “Separation of Church and State: True and False Concepts,” *America* 78, no. 19 (February 14, 1948): 541-545
social contract theory (e.g., Locke, Rousseau) that had produced the French Revolution with its disruptive legacy for the Catholic Church. The political monism of these social contract theorists had led Europeans to reject the existence of objective truths grounded in a common human nature that God made intelligible to human reason. By contrast, the founders of the United States had made such truths the foundation of their political system. The First Amendment to the Bill of Rights guaranteed religious freedom by recognizing the temporal sphere as being distinct from the spiritual sphere. Catholics could not legally hijack the state and coerce their neighbors into becoming Catholics, but neither could the state interfere with Catholics freely exercising their religion. The great danger with the American system, however, lay in the possibility that secular liberals would use Jefferson’s unfortunate phrase about “building a wall of separation between Church & State” to stop citizens from exercising their religious freedom in the public square.\textsuperscript{316} For Murray and Blum, this danger seemed imminent, and they already detected it in court cases that denied state aid to children attending non-public schools.

Murray’s arguments did not ease the concerns of all Protestants, nor did they satisfy every Catholic. Fearing how some of Murray’s writings might be interpreted in Rome, his Jesuit superiors in the mid-1950s ordered him to cease writing on political matters. Murray complied in obedience to the Society. But by decade’s end, with Catholic John F. Kennedy emerging as a major presidential candidate, the Jesuits lifted the ban and Murray reentered public debates, his face appearing on the cover of \textit{Time}

https://founders.archives.gov/?q=jefferson%20danbury%20baptists&s=1511311111&r=5
Magazine and a collection of his essays published in an influential book titled *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*.\(^{317}\)

Blum was well versed in Murray’s work, and there is no record that he objected to anything Murray wrote. At one point Blum provided a bibliography of Murray’s political writings to a correspondent who in turn wrote to the theologian seeking re-prints of the articles.\(^{318}\) Blum was channeling Murray in 1954 when he impressed upon his own provincial the need for Catholics to defend democracy’s fundamental principles: “These principles are grounded in the Natural Law to which Jefferson appealed in the Declaration of Independence. But these principles are almost universally, or at least very extensively, rejected by the exponents of secular liberalism and its offspring materialism.”\(^{319}\)

Both Murray and Blum saw these exponents on the march in the postwar United States as secularists joined with some Protestants in a new wave of anti-Catholicism. The education debate was at the heart of it. In the wake of the Supreme Court’s 1947 *Everson v. Board of Education* decision that upheld a New Jersey law providing free bus transportation to parochial school children, a group of Protestant civic leaders allied with like-minded Jews and sympathetic non-believers to form Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (POAU), a vocal organization


\(^{318}\) T. Rayber Taylor to John Courtney Murray, S.J., October 9, 1953, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 24, folder title “Correspondence, Taylor, T. Rayber, 1953-1966.”

\(^{319}\) Blum to Father Provincial, November 30, 1954, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1954.” Blum met Murray at a Seminar at Marquette University in May 1956 at which they both spoke, but they do not appear to have become correspondents. The eulogist at Blum’s funeral Mass claimed that Blum and Murray were friends. See John P. Schlegel, S.J., “Remembering the Man from Defiance” A-4.5 series 9, Rev. Virgil C. Blum, S.J. file, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.
that Murray referred to wittily in his own writings as PU. But the single loudest anti-Catholic voice in the immediate postwar period belonged to Paul Blanshard, whose 1949 bestseller *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (based on articles he had begun publishing in 1947) defined Catholicism as a political and institutional problem that Americans needed to solve. Blanshard followed this up in 1951 with *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power*, in which he drew parallels between the Catholic Church and the Soviet Union.\(^\text{320}\)

POAU and Blanshard represented an erudite form of anti-Catholicism popular with the liberal *intelligentsia*. It was light years away from the lowbrow, prurient anti-Catholicism of Maria Monk. Historian John McGreevy has argued that Catholicism helped define the terms of mid-century American liberalism, operating as a foil for an emergent liberal consensus about the meaning of American democracy.\(^\text{321}\) Liberals viewed Catholicism as a significant threat to democracy, ranking it right alongside racial segregation and communism/fascism. By the postwar era, culture had emerged as a vital concept, the term having shifted in definition since the nineteenth century from a focus on arts and intellectual cultivation to an understanding of the shared webs of meaning that wove through a society and knit its citizens together in communal life. For American liberals, democracy could grow only in a culture that was non-hierarchical and non-dogmatic, one marked by the scientific method and a spirit of open inquiry. In their view, the neoscholastic emphasis on natural law that Blum had imbibed during his long formation as a Jesuit and that Murray explicated in his eloquent writings could not be


reconciled with democratic culture. The neoscholastic worldview, despite some chinks in its armor, remained the dominant organizing intellectual principle in the minds of mid-century American Catholics.322

Exacerbating matters for liberals was the Catholics’ historical tendency in the United States to separate from mainstream society. The early immigrant Catholic communities had responded to White Anglo-Saxon Protestant hostility by creating a kind of parallel Catholic society, replete with its own schools, hospitals, professional organizations, and the like. Some liberals wondered how American democracy could resist fascist and communist threats if a quarter of the nation’s population remained unassimilated, spatially and culturally. The spatial separation was breaking down in the postwar era as American Catholics, having fought alongside Protestants in World War Two, shared in the postwar economic prosperity and began moving out of their urban ghettos. But for liberals, Catholics still possessed the wrong cultural mindset. The popularity among educated liberals of Theodore Adorno’s *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) attested to the threat posed by Catholicism.323 Adorno suggested that the submissiveness to authority exhibited by German Catholics had enabled Hitler’s rise to power. Liberals who read Adorno’s indictment of Catholicism in tandem with Paul Blanshard’s work— which drew parallels between the authoritarianism of Soviet Russia and the Catholic Church—may be forgiven if they came away questioning the capacity of American Catholics to be good democrats.

Murray emerged as the leading Catholic defender in the church’s war of words with its critics in the United States. William F. Buckley once quipped that Murray was the Jesuits’ intellectual Big Bertha gun occasionally rolled out to blast anti-Catholics such as the popular Protestant writer Norman Vincent Peale. Blum watched these exchanges and, by the mid-1950s, was poised to add his own voice to the discussion, although he would keep it focused mostly on the constitutional right of Catholic school children to receive public education funds. Unlike Murray, Blum was not an advanced theologian or political philosopher. The difference between the two men can be captured as that of the thinker versus the doer. Murray voiced philosophical arguments in his urbane prose. Blum echoed these in his forceful rhetorical style and carried his own pugnacious personality into the public square where he lobbied for concrete policies that drew strength from Murray’s sophisticated writings.

This is not to say that Blum lacked ideas. Blum was not a political philosopher, but he had a good grasp of how the American system of government worked. From the beginning of his public career Blum emphasized the role of public opinion in determining what gets achieved. He sought to shape a favorable public opinion of the Catholic position, and he believed that this was best achieved through the language of civil liberties. Blum eschewed pro-Catholic arguments that were based on simple justice or tradition; instead, he couched everything in terms of religious freedom and constitutional rights. In Blum’s view, Catholics should receive public money to educate their children not because it was the fair thing to do or because Catholics deserved it considering their tradition of service to the nation, but because Catholics were fully American citizens who

possessed a right to educational funds through proper interpretation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. Blum was adamant in making constitutional arguments the basis of any exchange with critics. For example, when a Protestant organization called the Christian Action Guild challenged Blum to a debate on public funding for parochial schools in which it was clear that they would be emphasizing the well-worn notion that Catholic schools engaged in thought control, Blum refused their challenge, stating that any debate would be a waste of time if the First Amendment was not the basis of discussion.\(^3\) Blum recognized earlier than many of his Catholic contemporaries that postwar America had entered an era of increasing sensitivity to civil rights, and he stressed the need for Catholics to defend their religious freedom by adopting the constitutional language and tactics of the civil rights movement.

Blum may have bristled at the writings of Adorno and Blanshard, but one line of thought running throughout his own writings suggests that he shared some of their concern about Catholic authoritarianism. Appearing early in Blum’s writings and rising like a crescendo as his career unfolded was a frustration at the political passivity of lay Catholics. Blum struggled to get American Catholics involved in the democratic process. In his personal correspondence, Blum blamed their reluctance to participate on the authoritarian culture of Catholicism. He lamented to the president of the Jesuit Educational Association how “our whole tradition, education and orientation in authoritarian organization have to a great extent incapacitated us for life in a democracy.”\(^4\) Blum believed that most American Catholics held back from direct action

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\(^3\) Blum to Frederick Johnson, November 22, 1961, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, J, 9/1961-8/1962.”

on political matters and tended to adopt the position of their parish priest. Blum sought to
educate Catholics—especially the parents of parochial schoolchildren—in how to be
active democrats. For Blum, the failure of American Catholics to overcome their political
docility would have grim consequences: “[W]e are allowing the Bill of Rights to be
eroded by our passive attitude. If ever we lose all our rights in America, we shall have no
one but ourselves to blame.”

The road ahead

Armed with his doctorate, Virgil Blum embarked on his educational ministry
among the Jesuit community at Creighton University. In addition to teaching in the
classroom, Blum saw a public role for himself. He felt deeply passionate about the civil
rights of Catholics in American society, particularly in the field of education. Blum
envisioned a public career where he would use his talents not only to write and speak on
public policy issues that touched the Catholic community, but also to act as a public
intellectual trying to bring Catholic influence to bear on the social problems of the day.

Blum committed this vision most clearly to writing a few years later in a letter to
Father Leo Brown, S.J., director of the Institute of Social Order (ISO), the American
Jesuits’ think tank for the social apostolate. Brown had invited Blum to St. Louis to
participate in a 2-day conference of social scientists on the topic, “The Church and the
Social Order.” Blum’s letter offered more than a polite acceptance of Brown’s invitation.
He used it to share his thoughts in what can be considered a kind of mission statement
that would guide Blum for the remainder of his life.

327 Blum to William C. Kessel, January 6, 1959, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 2, folder title
328 Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Leo C. Brown, S.J., March 27, 1959, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 2, folder
title “Correspondence, Incoming and Outgoing, 9/1958 - 8/1959.”
In Blum’s customary direct fashion, he went right to the heart of the matter:

“What are the most pressing social problems that confront us?” Blum’s response revealed his maverick tendencies and his willingness to criticize other Catholics and his own religious order. He admitted that his answers would be different than those offered by others. He did not name names, but he was probably thinking of Jesuits like Louis Twomey and Claude Heithaus on the matter of race relations or Brown himself on unionization and the rights of workers in an industrial economy. Blum did not view race or labor relations as most pressing. “[A]t the risk of being a nonconformist,” he said, “I would like to suggest that the most pressing problem that faces America today is the secularization of American society.” Blum immediately proposed that the best solution to this problem was for Catholics to influence American social development; or, more specifically, for Jesuit social scientists to bring their philosophical and theological principles into contact with American society. The Jesuits’ track record so far had been lamentable. “I simply do not think that Catholic thought is effectively influencing the direction in which American society is moving today. While our society is being secularized we are exerting very little influence in the way of positive contributions that will moderate, if not stem, this trend.”

Blum understood his own role to be that of social influencer, taking the Catholic system of thought that he had spent fifteen years developing within himself and finding ways to apply it to American society. As a political scientist, Blum would try to articulate Catholic-inspired solutions to the problem of secular drift, focusing first on what he knew

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329 Blum told Brown that Jesuit failure could be blamed in part on the Society’s low opinion of the social sciences, at least in comparison to its traditional regard for philosophy. Philosophy held pride of place in Jesuit education, but Blum criticized academic philosophy as divorced from the social, political, and economic realities of the world.
best—church/state relations and the preservation and strengthening of religious schools. Blum’s identification of secularization as America’s hegemonic problem set him apart from other Jesuits associated with the ISO. Compared to racial strife or industrial relations or family economics, secularization was more of a cultural issue than a social one. Rather than seeing Blum as an aspiring social influencer, it may be more accurate to interpret him as a potential influencer of political culture. In 1954 Blum was poised to become an early Catholic fighter in America's culture wars.

Virgil Blum’s natural pugnacity joined with the nurture of his upbringing and educational and spiritual formation to produce a potentially fearsome culture warrior. Life on an Iowa farm instilled Blum with a powerful work ethic. From his parents Blum inherited a deep and unshakable faith in the Catholic Church. His years spent living in Shelby County’s Colony, and most especially in Defiance, rendered Blum highly sensitive to attacks on Catholicism and made him quick to see Catholics as an embattled minority struggling against outside efforts to impose second-class citizenship upon them. The Jesuits took Virgil’s intelligence and purposefulness and molded him into a clear-thinker and highly disciplined man. The Jesuits also energized Blum by placing a chip on his shoulder: The Society of Jesus had denied Blum the Cursus Major leading to four vows, and it valued political science far less than it valued philosophy or theology. One senses that throughout his public career Blum was always trying to prove himself to the Society of Jesus.

Facing a renewed anti-Catholicism in the late 1940s that flowed from secular as well as Protestant sources, Blum became politicized. This did not have to happen. Once he achieved his doctorate, Blum could have just pursued a routine life in Jesuit higher
education. He could have taught his political science courses year after year and participated in departmental and campus committee life until death or dotage found him. Instead, Blum chose to commit his life to political action. He would not restrict his energies to the classroom and campus service; Virgil Blum would take his political theology into the public square and attempt to influence the nation’s cultural direction.
Chapter 4: Crusader for Non-Public Schoolchildren, 1954-1973

As a political science professor at Creighton University in 1954, Virgil Blum was but another newly minted Jesuit Ph.D. beginning his career in the Society’s extensive American educational system. Within a few years, however, Blum’s writings brought him national attention as an articulate spokesman advocating public funding for children attending non-public schools. By the 1960s, Blum had evolved from being primarily a political scientist that taught Catholic students about their civil liberties into becoming a political lobbyist that mobilized the Catholic laity for direct action in an American democracy dominated by interest groups. In 1959 Blum joined with Catholic parents in the St. Louis area to found Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF). Blum quickly became the organization’s chief strategist and its spiritual heart. Through his many public speaking engagements and extensive correspondence with like-minded Catholics and non-Catholics across the United States, Blum helped CEF grow into a nationwide organization that pressured politicians at the state and federal levels to provide public funding for children attending non-public schools. Over the next decade, Blum helped pilot CEF through a rapidly shifting landscape, one marked by profound political and cultural changes in American society and within the Catholic Church. Despite some heady moments, CEF’s overall trajectory proved downward, its hopes stymied by fierce external opposition, internal squabbles, Church politics, adverse U.S. Supreme Court decisions; and, from Blum’s perspective, an unwillingness among Catholic parents to get involved in the democratic process. Blum would re-evaluate his public ministry in the early 1970s. He stood poised to break away from CEF and strike out in a new direction,
one that he viewed as the last hope for saving Catholic education in America, and thereby saving democracy itself.

Mobilizing American Catholics in defense of parochial education through the exercise of their civil rights remained Blum’s principal objective until the day he died. Blum was a blend of the idealistic and the practical. As a vowed religious engaging in political debates, Blum truly believed that his work furthered the Greater Glory of God. Taking to heart the Ignatian principle that God is best served where the believer’s influence is most extensive, Blum always strove to achieve the widest scope for his actions. He entered public life with the belief that American Catholics deserved the same constitutional freedoms as any other minority group in society, especially the freedom of religion as expressed in the right of parents to receive public funding to educate their children in God-centered schools. Blum never wavered in this core belief, which led him to be criticized over the years as the peddler of simplistic nostrums that defied the complicated realities of the American legal environment.

Despite Blum’s enduring idealism, a shrewdly practical streak came to guide his actions. Blum emerged publicly as one of the first advocates of educational vouchers, yet Blum kept his finger to the political winds, and over time supported whatever policy—provided it was legal and ethical—seemed likeliest to further the end he sought.330 Blum

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330 Here at the outset, it is important to distinguish the different forms that provision of public funding for non-public education might take. First there was aid for auxiliary services to school children such as bus transportation and textbooks. Tuition aid came in two distinct forms: tuition tax credits and tuition grants. Tax credits allowed parents to deduct an amount spent on non-public school tuition from their taxes owed to government. Tuition grants represented direct payment of public money for tuition. Grants could come in two forms, the first can be referred to simply as a tuition grant and the other as a voucher. Both are provided to the parents on the child’s behalf; however, the grant is a reimbursement made directly to the parents. With vouchers, parents never encounter the money directly; instead, parents sign a voucher representing a sum of tuition money and give the voucher to the school of their choice. Under a voucher system, parents serve as a conduit between the public treasury and the school. The distinction may seem
understood that under the American system of federalism, education policy was
determined at all levels of government: local school boards; the legislatures of the
individual states; the U.S. Congress; and state and federal courts, leading up to the U.S.
Supreme Court. Blum was not chained to any single policy prescription. If public
provision of bus transportation or textbooks was the best starting point for advocacy, then
that is what he labored to achieve. If tuition tax credits seemed likeliest to pass through a
legislature and survive judicial scrutiny, then he championed those. If educational
vouchers had the greatest chance of success, then he lobbied hard for them. In short,
Blum came to advocate whatever means seemed possible at that political moment to
further realize Catholics’ constitutional right to public funding for education.

A new home

To achieve his ideals, Blum believed that he first had to get out of Creighton
University. Soon after receiving his doctorate, Blum began clamoring for a transfer to
Marquette University, its larger Jesuit sibling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Blum saw
Creighton as a dead end. The presence there of only three political science majors on
average each year meant that Blum would never teach the specialized courses needed to
educate American Catholics in their civil liberties. “I feel like the member of a losing
baseball club who can’t get into the game because he happens to be outside the ball
park,” Blum told Adrian “Coach” Kochanski, S.J., Marquette’s new dean of liberal arts
and Blum’s old pal from regency. Making matters worse, Blum’s heavy teaching load
at Creighton, consisting of general courses, was not conducive to research and writing. A

unimportant, but the difference could be significant given the constitutional nuances courts often apply
when ruling on cases.

331 Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Adrian Kochansky, S.J., March 19, 1955, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1,
folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1955.”
Jesuit friend teased Blum, "Here you are scarcely dry behind the ears from your PhD – you go to a cow-college and decide to become a cowboy. Not even will you so much as review a book which is definitely in the field of your research work." Though probably meant in jest, the remark undoubtedly stung Blum, goading him to continue lobbying for a transfer.

The reluctance of Blum’s superiors to transfer him revealed a tension within American Jesuit higher education. Not all Jesuit schools were equal. A definite order of prestige existed, with schools such as Georgetown and Boston College at the top and the others ranged beneath them. Over time this had built up resentment among Jesuit administrators at the smaller colleges and universities. They were very sensitive about bigger schools being permitted to raid the best Jesuit talent from among them. Creighton’s Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, William Kelley, S.J., opposed Blum’s transfer on the grounds that Creighton was not a ‘farm’ school for Marquette or any other university. Kelley shared this letter with Blum who in turn objected strongly to their provincial. Blum slipped effortlessly into the lecturing mode that in later years would annoy many American bishops: “It is not our primary purpose to promote the welfare of Creighton, Marquette, or any other educational institution,” Blum reminded his provincial. “[T]he determinative consideration in assigning the personnel of the Society is—how can the cause of Christ and the good of his Church be most effectively promoted.”

332 E.R. Volmer, S.J. to Blum, December 12, 1955, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1955.”
333 Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Father Provincial, June 10, 1955, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1955.”
Marquette University was anxious to acquire Blum for its growing political science department. “Be sure, Virg, that I shall keep beating the drum for you,” reported his old friend, Coach. Blum lobbied his provincial hard with reasoned arguments in favor of a transfer. Blum believed Marquette would provide him with the scope of action he needed to make a difference. It averaged sixty political science majors to Creighton’s three. Furthermore, at Marquette Blum could regularly teach civil liberties and constitutional law courses, which would enable him to stay on top of the changing case law that informed his publications. Marquette’s success at placing undergraduates in graduate programs for political science and public administration at the likes of Harvard, Chicago, and Michigan meant that Blum would be prepping these students to bring much needed Catholic political values to secular schools. Blum singled out Marquette’s School of Journalism for special mention, the “J-School” being Marquette’s highest profile program (outside of Theology) at the time. Blum believed courses in constitutional law and civil liberties might become popular electives among the aspiring journalists. He relished the thought of exposing these future shapers of public opinion to arguments in favor of Catholic rights. Finally, Blum pointed to the presence of the many Lutheran students at Marquette, viewing them as natural allies in the fight against secularism. Blum believed they could benefit from learning correct constitutional principles to support their own school systems.

Blum’s Jesuit superiors relented. Despite the no-raiding policy, the Wisconsin Province’s status for 1956 reported Blum reassigned from Omaha to Milwaukee, where

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334 Adrian Kochansky, S.J. to Blum, June 27, 1955, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1955.”
335 Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Father Provincial, March 17, 1955, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1955.”
he arrived at Marquette University shortly before fall classes began. Marquette would be Blum’s home for the rest of his life. His departure from Omaha came with losses as well as gains. No longer would Blum be able to regularly visit his aging and ailing father, Peter Blum, who lived only 60 miles away in Shelby County. Lost too was the intimacy he had enjoyed with students at Creighton, something that proved difficult to recreate to the same degree at a much larger school like Marquette. While Blum certainly befriended students at Marquette, his relationships with them were not as deep as the ones he developed at Creighton. Blum dealt with so many students at Marquette that it was difficult to really get to know them.\footnote{Virgil C. Blum, S.J. to Mr. Robert Reilly, April 16, 1959, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 2, “Correspondence O-Z, 9/1958 – 8/1959.”}

The friendships Blum made at Creighton reflect an aspect of Jesuit life that was important to the men of his generation: The opportunity to befriend and guide young people was a cherished feature of their work. Because the men were priests in addition to being teachers, they could also assume the roles of confessors and spiritual directors. In addition to helping one student land her first job, Blum convinced her to become a daily communicant at Mass. She later wrote to him, “Thanks, again, a million for everything 1953-1958. You are the very ‘bestest’ friend.”\footnote{‘Dot’ to Blum, September 9, 1958, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Correspondence D-F, 9/1957 – 8/1958.”} In another instance, Blum pleaded with a former student—at the request of her exasperated parents—to break up with her un-intellectual and non-Catholic boyfriend.\footnote{Blum to B., January 1, 1957, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title, “Correspondence, 9/1956 – 8/1957.”} Blum’s most important relationship from Creighton, however, was his friendship with a student named Quentin Quade. Recognizing Quade’s brilliance, Blum encouraged the young man to pursue an academic
career instead of becoming an attorney. Blum would later recruit Quade to teach in Marquette’s political science department, where Quade became Blum’s closest friend. In addition to playing a significant role in Blum’s life, Quentin Quade would become a major figure in the history of Marquette University.  

The activist writer

Soon after receiving his doctorate in 1954, Blum quickly published three scholarly articles that appeared in law journals.  Informed by his dissertation research, these were the kind of publications one might expect from a new assistant professor of political science with an interest in constitutional law and religious freedom. But at the same time, Blum began writing pieces pitched to a popular audience. He knew that few people read law reviews, and he wanted desperately to be read. Blum had no desire to spend his career producing specialized articles and monographs that were fated only to be perused by lawyers or dissected by graduate seminars. He was an activist in academic dress. Blum sought a wide audience in the hope that he might win it over to his point of view and stir it to action. His first work in this vein was a 22,000-word pamphlet titled Your Child’s Religious Liberty, a plea to Catholic parents to get involved in the democratic process.

Blum began submitting shorter articles to popular Catholic magazines and newspapers with titles like The Voice of St. Jude and Our Sunday Visitor. Such

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339 Quade was among the first generation of laymen to occupy powerful positions in Marquette’s administration. In 1974 Quade became executive vice president under President John P. Raynor, S.J. See Thomas J. Jablonsky, Milwaukee’s Jesuit University: Marquette, 1881-1981 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007). The team of Raynor and Quade (1974-1990) presided over a successful era in Marquette’s history. Both men retired from their senior leadership positions at the same time. When Raynor died suddenly in 1997, Quade delivered the eulogy at his funeral Mass.

publications had significant circulations, but their readers were almost exclusively Catholic. Blum was therefore delighted in October 1957 when the major national magazine *U.S. News & World Report* chose to publish an excerpted version of an article that Blum had recently published in *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review*. Titled “Freedom of Choice in Schools”, Blum’s article presented some of the ideas from his dissertation, but it also contained public policy prescriptions. Blum emphasized the right of parochial schoolchildren to receive public funding to attend the school of their choice. Here Blum was expressing the ‘child benefit theory’, which held that public financial support should go directly to the child instead of to the school. Blum repeated the constitutional argument he had presented in his dissertation which held that unwillingness to extend educational benefits to parochial schoolchildren violated the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause by demanding that children give up their religious freedom in order to receive welfare benefits. He turned the tables on anti-Catholic critics by arguing that public aid to non-public schoolchildren, instead of undermining democratic culture, furthered democracy by ensuring the diversity and freedom that a healthy democracy needed. Blum argued that democracy was based on the existence of alternatives and was therefore threatened by an educational system that concentrated power into state hands and forced children to conform. Such a system encouraged totalitarianism. Blum proposed two policies that would uphold children’s civil rights, both based on the idea of providing a direct subsidy to the child. The first was to extend tax credits to parents who enrolled their children in non-public schools, thereby relieving the financial burden of having to pay twice to educate their children. Under the second option, children would receive tax money in the form of a certificate (also called a voucher) that they could turn
over to the school of their choice. Blum argued that the certificate plan was as constitutionally sound as the G.I. Bill of Rights, the enormously popular postwar legislation that had provided veterans with money to attend colleges and universities, including schools operated by religious denominations.

The article in *U.S. News & World Report* thrust Blum onto the national stage. He found himself something of a celebrity, receiving both fan mail and hate mail. Most of the letters were positive, and Blum was heartened by what he perceived to be a groundswell of support for his program. It was uncommon to find a Catholic voice, let alone that of a priest, within the pages of a secular magazine. An admirer from Union Grove, Wisconsin, wrote to Blum, “The joy which every Catholic feels when a printed article by a Catholic priest appears in a public magazine knows no bounds.”

Blum’s article also benefitted from good timing. It is doubtful whether the publishers of *U.S. News & World Report* would have reprinted Blum’s piece had the Soviets not launched their Sputnik satellite into orbit only three weeks earlier. Sputnik shocked the United States and provoked public soul-searching among Americans anxious to understand how the Soviet Union had beaten the United States to this technological achievement. Part of the blame was laid squarely on an American educational system perceived to be deficient. In this context, *U.S. News & World Report* probably published Blum’s article because it suggested a new way to invigorate American education.

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341 Patricia Bahan to Blum, January 6, 1958, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, A-C, 9/1957-8/1958.”
Blum’s article was the distillation of a book-length manuscript, *Freedom of Choice in Education*, published the following year by MacMillan press.\(^{343}\) Blum’s book offered an in-depth justification for the tax credit or certificate plan. Blum asked the Jewish intellectual Will Herberg, author of the recent bestseller *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, to write the preface. Herberg agreed, but with some reservations. As a firm believer in pluralism in education, Herberg shared Blum’s belief that non-public schools played a vital role in American society; but as a self-described conservative, Herberg believed that Blum’s plan was too radical for widespread acceptance, concluding, “[I]t is not (unless I am gravely mistaken) a real possibility.”\(^{344}\) Nevertheless, Herberg wrote the book’s preface, downplaying any disagreements with Blum. Herberg’s objection was a common refrain that rang in Blum’s ears throughout his career. Many others would also dismiss the certificate or tax credit plan on the grounds that it was just not politically realistic.

Blum cannot take credit for devising the certificate (voucher) plan. In *Freedom of Choice in Education*, Blum traced the idea to two articles published separately in 1955 by University of Chicago professors, Proctor Thomson and Milton Friedman.\(^{345}\) Thomson never built on his work; however, Friedman would go on to feature educational vouchers in his libertarian classic, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962). Blum never met Friedman, and only twice does he seem to have exchanged letters with the future Nobel Laureate in Economics. The first exchange came in 1957 when Blum sent Friedman a copy of his breakout article, seeking comment. Friedman had few comments to make. He praised

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\(^{344}\) Will Herberg to Blum, November 3, 1957, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, G-L, 9/1957-8/1958.”

Blum for his “excellent job of exposition, presentation and analysis.”³⁴⁶ Both men favored the voucher plan, but they approached it from different angles. The academician Friedman dealt with the political economy of vouchers while Blum the activist concentrated on the constitutional issues and sought to mobilize support for vouchers at the grassroots.³⁴⁷

In 1963 Blum published a slightly revised edition of Freedom of Choice in Education. The book would remain his most well-researched and documented contribution to the literature on school choice. Most of Blum’s subsequent writings would be shorter pieces. In his lifetime, Blum produced hundreds of articles, speeches, and newspaper columns about educational topics, most having to do with public funding for children attending non-public schools. He published additional books in later years, but they tended to be glorified pamphlets, averaging perhaps 100 pages in length and lacking citations. Over time, Blum came to resemble a pamphleteer of the American Revolutionary era, firing off his literary broadsides into the public square.

**Early Catholic responses to Blum**

Blum’s emergence into the public eye in the mid-1950s produced mixed responses within the Catholic community in the United States. Blum’s superiors in the Society of Jesus seemed to support his work and largely left him alone—after all, this is

³⁴⁷ The second exchange came in 1968. The two men had clearly not remained in touch. Blum introduced himself as if they had not corresponded a decade earlier, commenting, “While a graduate student at the University of Chicago in 1950, I first came across your writings proposing tuition grants for children who attend nonpublic schools—subsidizing the demand, as you put it.” Unless Blum’s memory was in error, this suggests that Friedman’s ideas had been circulating before the 1955 article. Friedman responded, “I have of course known about you and your activity.” See Blum to Milton Friedman, November 26, 1968, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, 1968-1969”; and Milton Friedman to Blum, December 26, 1968, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, E-M, 9/1968-1988.”
what it had trained Blum to do: employ his gifts for the Greater Glory of God as guided by the discernments of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*. The American Catholic hierarchy, in the form of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), welcomed Blum as a new voice on education matters, but it quickly grew alarmed by Blum’s approach and methods. He received a cool reception from Robert Drinan, the rising Jesuit jurist in the United States. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Blum’s writings struck a positive chord with a minority of enthusiastic Catholic parents who gravitated toward him in the spirit of Catholic Action.

The Society of Jesus granted Blum freedom to pursue his educational advocacy work. Blum’s primary ministry, of course, was to teach political science classes at Marquette and to participate in university life; but if that work did not suffer, he was encouraged to take an active role in public life. Blum’s superiors permitted him to travel widely for speaking engagements, and they allowed him to use the honoraria he received to print additional copies of his writings for widespread distribution. In the 1960s, the Jesuits granted Blum the use of his own telephone in his office so that he could stay in touch with a host of contacts lobbying for educational reform. Blum was essentially working two full-time jobs—as a professor of political science and as a political activist. Fortunately, he possessed the work ethic and physical stamina to succeed. Blum’s workday began at 7:30 a.m. and continued until midnight, sometimes without a break for lunch. He was not necessarily alone in these exertions. A Jesuit contemporary would comment years later about the men of Blum’s generation in the 1940s and 1950s: “Well,

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349 Blum to Dorothy Strake, November 17, 1965, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, S-Z, 9/1965-8/1968.”
most of us were still fairly young, we had plenty of energy, and apostolic opportunities seemed endless. Perhaps we were workaholics. It doesn’t seem to me that we suffered from the self-questioning that came in with the sixties. Nor did loneliness…. There was too much we wanted to do…. The Jesuits supported Blum’s activism because they saw it as a form of apostolic service. His efforts on behalf of Catholic education served the church in America.

Having dedicated himself to battling publicly for the rights of Catholic parents across the country, Blum knew that he must remain in communication with the church’s hierarchy as represented by the National Catholic Welfare Conference. The NCWC spoke with the unified voice of the Catholic bishops in the United States. Originally formed during World War One to facilitate the mobilization of American Catholics for the war effort, the NCWC had grown by mid-century into an administrative body encompassing multiple departments. Its staff served the church as advisors and consultants. Given the nature of Blum’s work, most of his dealings were with the NCWC’s Education and Legal Departments. Blum had sent a copy of his dissertation to the Legal Department in 1954,

351 Blum became a political advisor on matters touching Jesuit higher education. In the summer of 1959 Blum became deeply involved in the fight over the ‘Risser Amendment’ in the Wisconsin legislature, which would have provided room and board grants at state expense to students attending the University of Wisconsin system. Students at private colleges and universities were ineligible to receive the grants. The legislation threatened Marquette’s enrollment, leading the university to fight the measure, with Blum at the forefront. The Risser Amendment was defeated. This battle was Blum’s first practical foray into influencing specific legislation through pressure group politics.
352 The organization’s name evolved throughout the twentieth century. It began as the National Catholic War Council. In 1919 it became the National Catholic Welfare Council. In 1922 the word Council was changed to Conference under pressure from the Vatican because Council suggested that the group possessed a legislative function Rome did not recognize. In 1966 the NCWC split into two complementary organizations—the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), the latter being a secretariat charged with establishing public policy based on the bishops’ pronouncements. In 2001 the two entities reorganized to form a single organization, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).
and he often mailed copies of his new articles and pamphlets to the Education Department.

Blum’s communications with the NCWC would always remain cordial in tone, but serious disagreements quickly surfaced, and discriminating observers could detect these differences in print publications. To the staff at the NCWC, Blum bordered on being like a firebrand who lobbed incendiary opinions into the public square that threatened to sow discord among the laity and endanger progress toward securing public funding for Catholic education. To Blum, the NCWC staff was timid and defensive in temperament, failing to fully appreciate the constitutional rights of American Catholics and the importance of building a strong public opinion in favor of those rights. Blum’s first pamphlet, *Your Child’s Religious Liberty*, worried Monsignor William McManus, Assistant Director of the Education Department, who told Blum that it provided “pat and easy answers to problems whose solution, as far as I know, is extremely complex.”

A six-hour meeting between the two men in Chicago in December 1955 failed to sway either man. McManus refused to help Blum distribute his pamphlet, either through the NCWC or the influential National Catholic Council of Women (NCCW). Blum, in turn, complained to a friend that McManus lacked the courage to support Blum’s position on constitutional grounds. Blum’s argumentative nature was easily provoked, and he never yielded an inch in his exchanges with the NCWC.

Relations soured further in 1956 when Blum published two controversial articles. In the March issue of *The Voice of St. Jude*, Blum criticized the White House Conference

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353 Monsignor McManus to Blum, December 12, 1955, Blum Papers, sub-series 2 box 5, folder title “Correspondence, National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), 1955-1956.”

354 Blum to Donald J. Thorman, May 21, 1956, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, 1/1956-8/1956.”
on Education, a gathering of 600 educational professionals and 1,200 non-professionals that President Eisenhower had convened the previous November to discuss problems facing American education. The conference report spoke of non-public schooling as an accepted part of the American educational tradition, but it did not explicitly affirm parents’ constitutional right to send their children to nonpublic schools. Blum interpreted the silence as an implied rejection of that right. Monsignor McManus, who had served on the Conference Committee, took offense at Blum’s attack on the White House Conference, and he condemned Blum’s criticism as uncharitable in a letter to the magazine’s editor.355 McManus was convinced that if a poll were to be taken of the attendees it would reveal near unanimous support for the idea that parents enjoyed a constitutional right to send their children to nonpublic schools. Blum stood his ground in a letter to McManus. He viewed the attendees’ opinions as irrelevant. Blum argued that in the war for public opinion official reports that did not explicitly support an idea always implied its rejection. He told the Monsignor “Some of the most effective weapons of propaganda involve the subtle use of implication.”356 McManus riposted by calling this “a rather tough standard of criticism and hardly designed to fit into a wise and prudent plan of public relations.”357 Later that year, the publication of Blum’s provocative piece, “Should the POAU be unopposed?” in The Homiletic and Pastoral Review led George Reed from the Legal Department to dash off an alarmed memo to the NCWC’s general-

355 Monsignor McManus to Editor, April 16, 1956, Box 4, Folder 37 (Blum, Virgil Folder), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Education Department, The American Catholic History Research Center (hereafter ACUA), The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
357 Monsignor McManus to Blum, June 12, 1956, Box 4, Folder 37 (Blum, Virgil C., S.J., 1955-1966), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Education Department, The American Catholic History Research Center (hereafter ACUA), The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
secretary, Monsignor Carroll.\footnote{Mr. Reed to Monsignor Carroll, November 9, 1956, Box 33, Folder 10 (Information Media: Publications, 1956), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of the General Secretary, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.} The gist of Blum’s article was that political success in the United States depended upon individual citizens organizing into groups and laboring ceaselessly to shape the public opinion that cued politicians on how to vote and that guided jurists in their court rulings. The POAU understood this reality; and it acted accordingly, effectively controlling the public debate on education. Blum called on the Catholic minority in the United States to form a new, well-staffed organization that would confront POAU at every turn and wrest control of public opinion. Reed interpreted Blum’s article as an attack on the NCWC, implying that it was not doing its job properly and that another organization may be needed. Reed was annoyed that Blum had failed to recognize the NCWC’s work in opposing POAU; and as an attorney, Reed feared that Blum’s article would encourage lay Catholics to launch ill-advised legal actions in the hope of shaping public debate. Monsignor Carroll ordered Reed to prepare a memorandum critical of Blum and to send it to key individuals, including Blum’s provincial, the president of Creighton University, and two archbishops.\footnote{Monsignor Carroll to Mr. Reed, November 30, 1956, Box 33, Folder 10 (Information Media: Publications, 1956), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of the General Secretary, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.}

The NCWC’s reaction to Blum in the mid-1950s must be understood in the larger context of the American Church’s evolving position on federal aid to non-public education. Until 1944 the NCWC had opposed any type of federal aid for fear it would lead to state control of the Catholic school system. In a seminal address that year, the Education Department’s Director, Monsignor Hochwalt, signaled a change in the church’s position. Hochwalt argued that the problems facing Catholic educators—
insufficient facilities, a growing shortage of the teaching sisters who historically had enabled the system to succeed, and the need to improve the quality of Catholic schools to remain competitive with public schools—demanded that they seek their share of federal aid. The NCWC formalized the policy in a 1948 statement; however, despite this favorable stance toward federal aid in principle, in practice the NCWC found itself opposing the specific measures that emerged because they invariably excluded non-public schoolchildren. The NCWC’s position was that it was better that nobody should receive federal aid for education than that federal aid should be distributed unfairly. Congress failed to pass direct federal aid for education in the early-mid 1950s and not just on account of Catholic opposition. The race issue loomed large as Northern anti-segregationists opposed any federal funding of the South’s unjust educational system. Moreover, Republican President Eisenhower entered office in 1953 opposed to federal funding for education.360

Ike’s position would gradually change. The challenges facing education had prompted the President to convene his unprecedented White House Conference on Education in 1955.361 Educators across the country met to discuss how the United States could possibly educate the tremendous number of children being produced by the postwar baby boom. Given the Catholic Church’s firm opposition to contraception, the problem was especially acute for Catholic schools. From 1940-1960, enrollment at Catholic elementary and secondary schools rose at a rate three times higher than that of the public

361 President Roosevelt had convened a White House Conference specifically on Rural Education in 1944 but Eisenhower’s Conference encompassed education nationwide.
schools. By 1960, one out of every nine schoolchildren in the United States attended a Catholic school.\textsuperscript{362} Most of the participants at the White House Conference expressed support for federal aid to education. They wondered how primary and secondary educators could possibly succeed in their jobs without infusions of money from the federal government, especially in a Cold War climate that stressed the importance of scientific education in battling the Soviets.\textsuperscript{363} Catholic educators too hoped for a slice of the pie, and some believed that the survival of Catholic education depended upon it.

The NCWC found itself walking a tightrope. On the one hand it was obliged to vocalize the Church’s claim to a share of educational funds; but on the other hand, it realized that parochial education was a hot-button issue for many Protestants, and the NCWC did not want to undermine its own efforts by unduly provoking the opposition. It chose to pursue a quieter, behind-the-scenes approach that seemed to pay off in 1958 with passage of the National Defense Education Act. The NDEA was a response to the Soviet launching of Sputnik, and it included federal loans to non-public schools for instructional equipment and laboratory remodeling. The NDEA marked a victory for the NCWC even if it was only ‘emergency’ legislation and therefore did not represent an ongoing commitment to federal financial support.

The NCWC shared Virgil Blum’s hope that Catholics could win their rightful access to public funding for education; however, in the delicate political climate of the 1950s, it viewed Blum’s voice as more of a threat than a boon. Some in the NCWC were annoyed to see the bellicose Blum barge into the public square and champion his


certificate plan using confrontational language that threatened to rouse the Church’s enemies to new heights of opposition. Blum seemed poised to undo the NCWC’s quiet efforts at progress. George Reed summed up Blum as “an over-zealous Jesuit who has no legal background, but who considers himself and is considered by many as an outstanding authority on the Church-State relationship.”

The NCWC’s Legal Department was especially concerned about Blum’s lack of legal training because Blum couched his arguments in constitutional terms and often referred to court precedents in his polemics. In the wake of Blum’s breakout article in *U.S. News & World Report*, the department analyzed the case law that Blum cited to support his claim that the certificate plan faced no real constitutional difficulties. William Consedine, the chief counsel, and his associate George Reed concluded that these cases could not be applied as Blum was applying them. Blum may have possessed a doctorate in political science with an emphasis on constitutional law and civil liberties, but he had never really been trained in the subtleties of legal interpretation. Blum’s dissertation at St. Louis University was essentially a legal treatise, and yet his dissertation committee contained no jurists, being filled instead with professors of political science and public administration. In other words, the legal foundations upon which Blum drew his easy conclusions were not firm. The lawyers at NCWC were especially concerned at how Blum conflated the certificate plan with the G.I. Bill of Rights. From a constitutional

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364 Monsignor Carroll to Mr. Reed, November 30, 1956, Box 33, Folder 10 (Information Media: Publications, 1956), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of the General Secretary, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

365 Mr. Consedine to Monsignor Hochwalt and Father Hurley, November 5, 1957, and Mr. Reed to Mr. Consedine, November 5, 1957, both in Box 4, Folder 37 (Blum, Virgil C., S.J., 1955-1966), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Education Department, The American Catholic History Research Center (hereafter ACUA), The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
perspective, the two policies were very different, the G.I. Bill being based on an
obligation owed for service to the state while Blum’s certificate plan rested on a
debatable interpretation of the religious liberty of schoolchildren. The NCWC was not
averse to the certificate plan in principle. It recognized the plan’s simplicity and popular
appeal; but it concluded that the necessary constitutional groundwork and public opinion
were not yet in place. Echoing the concern of Will Herberg, the NCWC deemed vouchers
too radical for the present moment. Key bishops received the Legal Department’s memos
about Blum in case the topic was raised at episcopal gatherings, but the NCWC chose not
to issue an official policy statement on Blum’s work.366

Blum’s lack of legal training may also account for the cool reception he received
from Robert Drinan of Boston College’s Law School. Drinan was a few years younger
than Blum and something of a prodigy who would shortly be made dean of the law
school, a position Drinan held until 1970 when he left Boston College for a controversial
career as a congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives.367 In early 1956 Blum
wrote to Drinan seeking comment on his work. If Blum hoped to find a fraternal ally in
Drinan, he was disappointed. After expressing polite praise and admiration for Blum’s
writings, Drinan proceeded to pour cold water on Blum’s constitutional interpretations.368
Drinan believed that Blum fundamentally misinterpreted the Everson decision if he took

366 William R. Consedine to Bishop Emmet M. Walsh, November 6, 1957, Box 4, Folder 37 (Blum, Virgil
C., S.J., 1955-1966), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Education Department, The
American Catholic History Research Center (hereafter ACUA), The Catholic University of America,
Washington, D.C.
367 As will be discussed later, Blum’s and Drinan’s paths increasingly diverged over time. They illustrate
how Jesuit contemporaries could take distinct paths in the wake of the changes that overtook the Society of
Jesus after the Second Vatican Council.
368 Robert Drinan, S.J. to Blum, February 2, 1956, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title
“Correspondence, 1/1956-8/1956.”
it to mean that denying auxiliary educational benefits to Catholics was always a violation of their constitutional rights. Drinan doubted that any constitutional right to distributive justice for Catholic parents could ever be proven. The Supreme Court had clearly embraced an absolutist separation of church and state, making it dangerous for Blum to keep insisting that Catholics possessed rights under the Constitution that they did not have. Drinan counseled Blum to stop arguing in terms of constitutional rights and emphasize instead the inherent justice and fairness of the Catholic position, which he believed would resonate over time with the inherent justice and fairness of the American people. Though they remained on cordial terms, Blum and Drinan had little direct correspondence after this. Neither publicly attacked the other by name, but Blum complained about Drinan in letters to friends, and each man criticized the other indirectly in his writings. For example, in his 1963 book *Religion, the Courts, and Public Policy*, Drinan surely had Blum in mind when he urged Catholics to avoid the temptation to oversimplify the issues. “An obsession of any group about its own rights,” Drinan wrote, “is likely to impair the good citizenship and, indeed, the civility of such a group.”

Blum viewed his fellow Jesuit Drinan as a prime example of a defeatist Catholic who voluntarily resigned himself to the status of second-class citizen in the United States. Blum commented to a correspondent that Drinan “quite definitely suffers from a severe case of Catholic-second class citizenshipitis.” The idea that Catholics should passively accept anything less than their full constitutional rights as citizens was anathema to Blum. While he believed that Catholics must choose their legal battles very carefully in terms of

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the civil liberties cases they initiated or backed, Blum was adamant that parents of non-
public school children should never cease clamoring publicly for their constitutional
rights and lobbying their legislatures for aid. Passivity would never win the war. Blum
never deviated from his belief, which he first expressed in his dissertation, that
sociological jurisprudence guided the American judiciary. Judges looked ultimately to
society for cues on how to rule. Blum was convinced that through organization and
incessant lobbying, the parents of non-public school children could bring American
society around to viewing educational benefits for their children as a desirable course of
action. Sensing this, the judges would eventually, so Blum believed, cease overturning
legislation on account of the supposed wall of separation between church and state and
begin to rule in favor of these children’s constitutional rights.

Robert Drinan and the staff at NCWC may have refused to provide public support
for Blum in the 1950s, but the Jesuit from Defiance received a much warmer welcome at
the grassroots. A minority of Catholic school parents responded with eagerness to Blum’s
writings and proved ready and able to actualize his ideas. A nucleus of parents from the
St. Louis area coalesced to form a lay pressure group called The Fair Share Plan under
the leadership of Martin and Mae Duggan and Vincent Corley. In 1958 Martin Duggan
wrote to Blum to praise the Jesuit for his writings and to mention their idea.\textsuperscript{371} Blum had
been contemplated such an organization for some time, and had recently encouraged a

\textsuperscript{371} Blum’s response has survived. He wrote, “You [sic] losing no time in organizing a private group to
secure equal rights of children whose parents elect to send them to independent schools--nice going. Is this
the idea that you wish to try out on me? Tell me more about your organization....” Blum to Martin Duggan,
September 30, 1958, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin &
Mae, 1958-1973.”
Years earlier, when Blum was a doctoral candidate at SLU, he had exchanged letters with Archbishop Ritter of St. Louis in which Blum had suggested to the Archbishop that he form a diocesan committee of parent activists with sub-committees at the parish level to lobby for public funding for Catholic education. It was just as well that Ritter had not followed Blum’s advice, because The Fair Share Plan was an even better idea. By not being part of the archdiocese, the group had no explicit link to the institutional church. This would broaden its appeal and hopefully attract non-Catholics who sent their children to private schools.

Blum quickly became the guiding force within the new organization. It had the potential to be the ideal instrument for shaping public opinion on educational freedom. Blum’s first recommendation was to abandon the name The Fair Share Plan in favor of one that emphasized freedom of mind or religion instead of asserting fairness or justice. The group decided upon Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF). Blum’s writings had attracted the Duggans and Corley to him; but in connecting with Blum, CEF’s leaders were also following the pattern of the Catholic Action movement in which lay activists hitched their service to a clerical mentor/advisor. The Jesuit Daniel Lord

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372 Blum to R.F. McShane, July 21, 1958, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, M, 9/1957-8/1958.”
374 Blum to Martin and Mae Duggan, May 13, 1962, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin & Mae, 1958-1973.”
375 Blum’s relationship with CEF bears some resemblance to that of Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand’s relationship with the Christian Family Movement, another American Catholic Action effort of the era. See Jeffrey M. Burns, *Disturbing the Peace: A History of the Christian Family Movement, 1949-1974* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 48-56. Both Blum and Hillenbrand served as the intellectual and spiritual centers of their movements. Blum advised a powerful married couple that served as leaders in CEF, Martin and Mae Duggan, while Hillenbrand counseled a similar couple at the heart of CFM, Pat and Patty Crowley. Although the two organizations existed simultaneously there is no evidence of communication between them. Blum seems never to have pursued an alliance with the Christian Family
had been the most visible example of American Catholic Action with his highly popular Sodality of our Lady movement. In the minds of at least some of its members, CEF was a direct expression of Catholic Action. In 1963 Mae Duggan joked to Blum, “Please forgive an over-worked and sometimes overwrought CEFer. What have you got us into! Why for almost four years now, we have done nothing but eat, think and sleep parents [sic] rights in education. And for what? Well, for Catholic Action ala Fr. Lord.”

Blum had much to offer CEF. He was a prolific and fluent writer and a forceful public speaker that never tired of debating the issues; and he was well networked with like-minded people across the nation. Blum responded to admirers’ letters by urging them to form CEF chapters to lobby their own state legislators for aid for parochial schoolchildren. Blum took the lead in forming a Wisconsin CEF chapter in Milwaukee in 1960. With CEF chapters beginning to emerge across the country and with a Roman Catholic candidate running for President of the United States, the future may have seemed bright for the cause of public funding for non-public schoolchildren.

The rise of CEF

The early-mid 1960s was a prosperous period for Blum and the CEF. Membership grew, and the organization contributed to legislative victories in some states while exerting itself nationally on behalf of federal aid for non-public education. But in its quest to grow and influence, CEF had to contend with four challenges. One challenge existed at the top: President John F. Kennedy, despite being a Roman Catholic, opposed federal aid to non-public schools. A second challenge was CEF’s need to distinguish its

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Movement despite its obvious potential as a seedbed for support for CEF. This may reflect the siloed nature of Catholic Action efforts in the United States.

376 Mae Duggan to Blum, January 24, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin & Mae, 1958-1973.”
position from that of the Southern segregationists who had earlier seized upon school choice as a means for circumventing the desegregation process heralded by the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*. Association with racist segregationists threatened to undermine support for Blum and the CEF elsewhere in the country. A third challenge lay in CEF’s struggle to appear to be an interfaith organization. Although the group succeeded in attracting non-Catholics to its ranks, a persistent belief that CEF was simply a front for the Catholic bishops dogged its lobbying efforts. In a similar way, CEF in its early years had to overcome a reputation for being overzealous. With varying degrees of success, Blum and the CEF navigated these challenges. They benefited from the evolving public stance of the Catholic hierarchy on federal funding for parochial schools. By the middle of the decade, with the establishment of a CEF national office in Washington DC and the passage of President Johnson’s ESEA legislation in 1965, Blum and the CEF were approaching their zenith. However, apparent progress cloaked problems. Internal disagreements foreshadowed a difficult road ahead.

Since Al Smith’s defeat in 1928, no Catholic had headed a major presidential ticket, making John F. Kennedy’s candidacy through the Democratic Party in 1960 the subject of much public discussion, especially JFK’s views on religion. Kennedy was determined to distance himself in the public mind from any notion that Catholic Church authorities might dictate his actions in office. Because the debate over educational funding had become a proxy for church/state relations, journalists sought Kennedy’s views on the issue. In a *Look* magazine article in 1959 Senator Kennedy made clear that while he supported the idea of auxiliary aid (e.g., bus rides, textbooks) to Catholic
schoolchildren as defined by the *Everson* decision, he was a firm believer in the strict separation of church and state as expressed in the exclusion of non-public schools from federal funding measures. One of Blum’s Catholic admirers in Texas, the owner of a car dealership in Dallas, wrote to the Jesuit, “I wish some erudite person, proficient with a pen (yourself for instance) would take the ‘pipsqueak’ apart.”377 Blum criticized the separationist Kennedy in an interview for *The True Voice* in Omaha that was picked up and disseminated by the National Catholic News Service, but he held his heaviest fire for a wider outlet. After candidate Kennedy held a news conference on September 8, 1960, proposing a federal educational spending program that pointedly excluded non-public schoolchildren, Blum prepared a withering rebuke for publication in the *New York Times*. Cardinal Spellman of New York, the nation’s leading Catholic churchman, intervened through his archdiocesan Secretary of Education to have Blum withdraw the letter before it could be published. Spellman felt that more could be accomplished by working behind the scenes than by airing Catholic differences in the Gray Lady’s op-ed columns.378 The Cardinal’s reticence may also have been due in part to his memory of the highly publicized row he had with Eleanor Roosevelt in 1949 when he accused the former First Lady of anti-Catholicism, creating a backlash of bad press that compelled a humiliated Spellman to visit Hyde Park in an effort at damage control.379 Blum’s attack on Kennedy threatened to produce a similar public reaction. Blum reluctantly withdrew his letter.

377 Ed Maher to Blum, February 20, 1959, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 21, folder title “Correspondence, Maher, Edward, 1958-1960.”
378 Blum to Monsignor John Voight, October 17, 1960, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 4, folder title “Correspondence, M, 9/1960-8/1961.”
When the newly elected President Kennedy unveiled his education program, with its denial of aid to non-public schools, at a press conference on February 20, 1961, the Catholic bishops and the NCWC became more outspokenly critical of Kennedy. Although behind-the-scenes efforts at compromise continued over the next two years, a more adversarial spirit manifested itself in public between the White House and the Catholic hierarchy in the United States. In this new environment of more vocal opposition, opinion of Blum at NCWC softened somewhat. Perhaps Blum could prove useful. Monsignor Hurley of the Education Department wrote to the NCWC’s general-secretary, “Father Blum is a crusader. No one can object to that, and, personally, I think he will do much to cause the type of groundswell that will in the long run be helpful.”

Blum stayed in touch with the NCWC and was not shy about offering advice. He was critical of the bishops’ desire to secure low-interest educational loans from the President along the lines of NDEA. Blum wanted the American church to shift its focus to the constitutional rights of parents and children. The certificate plan remained his greatest hope at this point. Blum seized upon part of Kennedy’s education program—a plan to offer 200,000 federal scholarships modeled on the G.I. Bill of Rights to college students, including those attending private institutions—to push his certificate plan. He wrote directly to the episcopal chairman of NCWC’s Administrative Board that Kennedy was “all but inviting parties interested in parochial elementary and secondary education to propose that the federal government make direct tuition grants to parents of individual

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381 Monsignor Hurley to Monsignor Tanner, March 1, 1961, Box 78, Folder 16 (Organizations, Secular: CEF), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of the General Secretary, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
school children for part payment of tuition.” Because Kennedy’s opposition to parochial education had always focused on direct aid to schools instead of indirect aid to children, Blum believed that the President could endorse the certificate plan politically without being judged as violating any campaign promises. However, the NCWC was not prepared to publicly endorse a certificate plan in this context; and the opportunity, much to Blum’s chagrin, passed. Kennedy was never able to pass a federal education bill, in part due to Catholic opposition. The administration of Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon Johnson, would prove more sympathetic to the interests of parochial education and would succeed in enacting the first major federal education legislation.

A second challenge facing CEF at the outset was its association in the public mind with the effort of Southern segregationists to use the certificate plan to indirectly fund all-white private schools and academies in order to keep the races apart despite the integrationist ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. This issue had plagued Blum even before CEF’s creation. In the wake of Blum’s breakout article in *U.S. News and World Report*, some correspondents criticized him for championing the same political tool that racists were using in the South. Blum responded to one critic, “Obviously, I do not like to be associated with the segregationists’ issue, particularly as one proposing ways of avoiding integration in the schools of the South.” Blum was personally opposed to racial segregation and referred to the practice as immoral and evil. Yet he was unwilling to abandon the certificate plan to achieve freedom of religion for schoolchildren just

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382 Blum to Most Reverend Karl J. Alter, March 9, 1961, Box 78, Folder 16 (Organizations, Secular: CEF), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of the General Secretary, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

because Southerners were using it for a nefarious purpose. At first, Blum was evasive. He argued that since four Southern states had already begun pursuing certificate plans before his article came out, he did not see how his article, by proposing a new plan for parochial schoolchildren, advanced the segregationist cause. Blum’s standard response to anti-segregationist critics became one of emphasizing that Southerners had the constitutional right to pursue their own plan, however distasteful it may be personally. Blum lumped the segregationists into the same category as communists. “[W]e do not propose to scuttle the Bill of Rights because the communists abuse these same fundamental guarantees of freedom for their own evil purposes.”

Blum advised CEF to remain aloof from the desegregation issue. When the CEF Board, on which Blum sat, received a letter urging the group to publicly champion desegregation in the South, Blum responded, "Certainly, we should regret when our fellow citizens use freedom of the Bill of Rights for immoral purposes, but we should not on that account restrict the freedom of all American citizens." Blum’s reluctance to publicly align CEF with the black civil rights movement was also tactical. He exhibited concern for what a later generation might term “mission creep.” Blum believed that if CEF was to make any headway it must avoid being drawn into side issues, and for Blum desegregation was a side issue. Another example of Blum guarding against side issues emerged when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against bible reading in public schools in its 1963 decision, *Abington School District v. Schempp*. Despite Blum’s antipathy for the secular drift that he saw working in the *Schempp* decision, he advised against CEF.

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issuing any public statement denouncing the ruling. Blum’s communication advice for CEFers was simple: Stay on message. Focus on the religious freedom of parents and children attending non-public schools.

Blum kept track of Southern developments in school choice. Georgia had first begun investigating tuition grants to avoid integration in 1951 and other states followed suit in the next few years.\textsuperscript{386} Contributing to Blum’s dislike for the segregationist cause was the hypocrisy evident in the Southern statutes. They explicitly prohibited parents from spending these grants at sectarian schools; for Blum, this reflected the region’s traditional anti-Catholicism. When the segregationist South’s leading proponent of the certificate plan—a newspaper editor from Virginia turned political activist named Leon Dure—wrote to Blum in mid-1959, the Jesuit waited a long while before answering Dure’s letter. The two men corresponded over a nine-month period beginning in December 1961. Blum put aside his combativeness and maintained a polite exchange with Dure, helped no doubt by the Virginian’s principled opposition to the Southern ban on public aid to sectarian schools. Respectful of religions as charitable organizations but not particularly religious himself, the libertarian Dure seems not to have carried any of his region’s anti-Catholic baggage. He was hopeful that parochial schools might be included in future Southern legislation. Blum chose not to argue with Dure about the immorality of racial segregation. The two men disagreed cordially over the constitutional basis of school choice. Dure believed that arguments should be grounded in the freedom of assembly—the right of people to associate with whomever they choose. Blum

believed, of course, that the debate should always be advanced in terms of religious freedom.\footnote{For more about Blum’s and Dure’s dueling freedoms, see Jim Carl, \textit{Freedom of Choice: Vouchers in American Education}, 91-92. The constitutional argument based on freedom of association would meet its demise in two U.S. Supreme Court decisions from 1964 and 1968.}

Blum’s willingness to correspond with Dure was probably influenced by practical considerations. Dure represented a valuable and knowledgeable source of information about developments in the South. Moreover, Blum in early 1962 was interested in gauging the likelihood of Southern congressional support for a federal tuition grant program. Congressman James Delaney of Brooklyn, sympathetic to Blum’s cause, was planning to propose legislation for federal tuition grants to parents of elementary and secondary school children. Blum’s inquiry suggests he was open to an informal alliance with segregationists. Dure expressed his belief that most Southern congressmen would never support spending federal money on primary education. That Blum never continued his correspondence with Dure past summer 1962 might reflect his own conclusion that the South had nothing to offer his cause.

That the two men did not stay in touch may also be due to the escalating drama of the African American civil rights movement. Blum’s thinking about the movement seems to have evolved. It became increasingly difficult for Blum to categorize desegregation as a side issue. Dure’s rejection of the idea that Southern whites opposed forced integration on racist grounds—“[T]his whole concept I am convinced, is false,” he once told Blum—rang increasingly hollow in light of news footage showing police fire hoses turned on peaceful demonstrators and attack dogs unleashed on non-violent protestors.\footnote{Leon Dure to Blum, December 21, 1961, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, D-F, 9/1959-8/1960.”} By late
1963, in the wake of the recent March on Washington led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Blum told a correspondent, “[I]t is becoming increasingly important for CEF to make known in some dramatic fashion that it opposes the use of tuition grants for the purpose of maintaining segregated schools. I think it is apparent that if the tuition grant system could be used for this purpose, it would never be adopted as national policy.”  

CEF finally adopted a mildly worded resolution at its national convention in Minneapolis in 1965. Composed by Blum, the resolution affirmed CEF’s support for educational benefits for all children regardless of race, and it recognized the government’s right “to establish educational standards and to use legitimate means to effect the desegregation of all schools.”

A more challenging obstacle to CEF’s success than its association with segregationists was the group’s identification with the Catholic Church. Although CEF began as a grassroots movement of Catholic parents from the St. Louis area operating in a spirit of Catholic Action, from the outset the group and its Jesuit mentor sought to broaden the movement’s appeal and recruit parents from other religious groups that shared the same concern about the fate of God-centered education. This was not a cynical ploy to appear interfaith; the group was genuinely welcoming of non-Catholics. Blum was enthusiastic at the idea of CEF becoming a truly non-denominational group. He had been networking among like-minded non-Catholics for years. At first Blum was

\[\text{389 Blum to John Donovan, November 29, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, D, 9/1963-8/1964.”} \]
\[\text{390 Blum to Donald Zirkel, August 6, 1965, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 4, folder title “Correspondence, X-Y-Z, 9/1964-8/1965.”} \]
\[\text{391 Blum’s breakout article in } U.S. \text{ News & World Report } \text{won him non-Catholic admirers. The President of the American Council of Christian Laymen wrote, “I am one of those fundamentalist Protestants who feel that the Catholic religious viewpoint is much closer to ours than that of the apostate leadership of organized Protestantism as represented by National Council of Churches and its constituent} \]
reluctant to even be publicly associated with CEF for fear that this would play into the hand of anti-Catholics. He told the emerging group, “If it should become known even in Catholic circles that there is a priest, particularly a Jesuit, in the background of your organization, it might work harm to the effectiveness of your group. This would be particularly true if organizations such as the P.O.A.U. should gain knowledge of my activity.”

But Blum could never remain silent, and through his publications and lobbying he soon became CEF’s most recognized spokesperson.

No record of the religiosity of CEF’s nationwide membership survives—if such a thing ever existed, which is unlikely given that CEF remained largely a loose organization of state federations—but it seems certain that the group remained predominantly Catholic in its makeup even though many non-Catholics joined its ranks. A large body of parents from the Christian Reformed Church played a significant role in Michigan’s CEF organization.

Blum was delighted when a Seventh Day Adventist school principal got elected to the New York state board of CEF. The NCWC’s assistant general secretary commented to his superior that “a few of the most active denominations.” See Vern Kaub to Blum, October 28, 1957, sub-series 2, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, G-L, 9/1957-8/1958.” Beginning in 1961, Blum worked with Dr. M. E. Sadler, Chancellor of Texas Christian University, to forge a Catholic-Protestant alliance of institutions of higher learning to lobby for federal tuition tax credits for parents who sent their children to religiously affiliated colleges and universities. Blum tried without success to get the Jesuit Educational Association to throw its support behind the effort; and, despite verbal encouragement from his colleagues, Sadler struggled to get his own side involved as well, commenting at one point, “I am getting somewhat disgusted and am not going to do much more about it until someone else shows a desire to actually do something.” See Sadler to Blum, January 21, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, S, 9/1962-8/1963.” The Sadler-Blum alliance shows the limits of Protestant-Catholic collaboration at the time. Close cooperation between conservative Catholics and Protestants was still over a decade away.

participants [in CEF] are non-Catholic, especially a small town banker from Oklahoma who has been indefatigable and who will go anywhere in the country at his own expense in furtherance of the work.” Yet despite the presence of these non-Catholics in CEF, the group was never able to shake the perception, especially at the national level, that it was a lobbying front for the Catholic Church. Blum may have contributed to the problem. Monsignor Hurley from the NCWC’s Education Department noted a contradiction in the Jesuit’s behavior. On the one hand, Blum continually proclaimed the non-denominational identity of CEF and downplayed his own role within the organization; but on the other hand, he wandered the corridors of Capitol Hill in his Roman collar lobbying on behalf of CEF, and he wrote circulars letters to diocesan school superintendents urging them to back CEF. Small wonder perhaps that federal politicians came to pigeonhole CEF as a lobbying group representing Catholic interests.

A final challenge facing CEF was its members’ enthusiasm. Some CEFers responded to Blum’s call for action with eagerness bordering on zealotry, potentially undermining the organization’s effectiveness. Blum never encouraged extreme behavior, and he strove to squash questionable tactics. When CEF co-founder Vincent Corley—drawing inspiration from the NAACP’s sit-ins—suggested to Blum that CEFers use children to physically obstruct school buses in their states to win public bus funding, the Jesuit quickly nixed the idea. “Besides the element of danger involved,” he told Corley,

395 Monsignor White to Monsignor Tanner, January 5, 1962, Box 86, Folder 16 (Organizations, Secular: CEF), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of the General Secretary, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
“I doubt the advisability of using children in any physical contest of this nature.”

Blum admonished a CEF member from Rhode Island after he learned that she had bypassed her local bishop and written directly to Rome criticizing her bishop and other members of the Catholic Church hierarchy for inadequately supporting the movement. Blum asked her to write a follow-up letter to alleviate the situation. CEFers became gadflies in some Catholic dioceses. The Superintendent of Education for the Madison Diocese (Wisconsin) complained to a friend, “For hours I have had to sit at the telephone, listening to one of the rabid advocates in Madison rant and rave.” The exasperated priest wondered, “Who sanctions the CEF? Who controls the CEF?”

The American bishops and the NCWC were certainly aware of Blum and CEF. Vocal chapters were popping up in dioceses across the country. Blum used the honoraria from his many speaking engagements to mail copies of his writings to bishops, accompanied by letters urging financial support for CEF. By the early 1960s, every Catholic bishop in the United States would have recognized the name Virgil Blum, S.J.

The NCWC kept its distance from CEF. When a leader from Kappa Gamma Pi, the official honor society for Catholic women’s colleges, wrote to NCWC inquiring about the new organization, Monsignor Hochwalt, the Education Director, replied, “Citizens for Educational Freedom is not in any way officially connected with NCWC or for that

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398 Blum to Mrs. Sam Johnson, November 12, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, J, 9/1963-8/1964.”
matter with any official Church agency.” Hochwalt advised Kappa Gamma Pi not to involve itself by name with CEF.

The NCWC was reluctant to associate too closely with CEF, in part because it recognized that CEF would be more effective as a non-denominational group. More important in its considerations, however, was the realization that CEF’s immediate goal did not coincide with the NCWC’s. From the start, CEF’s leaders were committed to achieving a federal certificate plan, which the NCWC deemed politically inopportune, arguing that neither vouchers nor tuition grants enjoyed broad support among Catholic parents and political leaders. Furthermore, the certificate plan represented a full embrace of federal funding for education. Despite the 1948 statement that signaled the American church’s openness to receiving federal assistance, the cautious American bishops were still haunted by the specter of state control over Catholic education and therefore proved unwilling to support a policy that seemed so gratuitous in its surrender to federal funding.

Some Catholic CEFers believed that the NCWC should be doing more to further their cause, and they were not shy about expressing their unhappiness. The NCWC, however, was limited in what it could do. Since it was the official voice for a recognized, tax-exempt church, the NCWC could not cross the line into outright political lobbying. CEF on the other hand was not limited in this regard despite having many Catholics in its ranks. Monsignor Hochwalt understood his public role at the NCWC to be the

401 Mr. Reed to Mr. Consedine, November 5, 1957, Box 4, Folder 37 (Blum, Virgil C., S.J., 1955-1966), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Education Department, The American Catholic History Research Center (hereafter ACUA), The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
advancement of Catholic educational interests in the debates over proposed legislation. It was up to the legislators to initiate the legislation, and he had to be careful not to intrude into that process. His role was to comment on existing legislation, not to champion new ideas to be actualized in future legislation. Hochwalt appeared before Congress to articulate the view of the Catholic bishops on specific proposals, but he never used these appearances as opportunities to stray into new ideas absent from the legislation being discussed. Hochwalt sought to assuage the unhappiness of one critic by saying, “When tax remissions and rebates and G. I. formulae types of help are germane [sic] to the issues before Congress you can rest assured that I shall have something to say in these important areas.”

Such a perspective did not sit well with impatient members of CEF. The first encounter between the NCWC staff and lay leaders in the CEF was a disaster. When Vincent Corley from St. Louis and Professor Francis J. Brown from DePaul University visited with Consedine and Reed from the Legal Department in December 1960, the two lawyers left the meeting deeply disturbed by the men’s zealotry and inflexibility, especially that of Dr. Brown. Another visit a year later helped somewhat to alleviate the skepticism at NCWC. In this instance, CEF president David Ladriere and another CEF Board member met with Monsignor White, the NCWC’s assistant general secretary, while he was passing through St. Louis. White reported that they were anxious to be thought of well at the NCWC. He commented, “Father Blum’s name was hardly

\[^{402}\text{Msgr. Frederick G. Hochwaldt to Mr. William Slavick, June 22, 1961, Box 9, Folder 3 (Citizens for Educational Freedom, 1959-1965), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Education Department, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.}\]

\[^{403}\text{Memo from Mr. Consedine to File, December 21, 1960 and Memo from Mr. Reed to File, December 21, 1960, both in Box 86, Folder 26 (Organizations: Citizens for Educational Freedom), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) General Counsel/Legal Department, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.}\]
mentioned in the conversation. I did not get the impression that he was responsible for calling the shots. Brown was not mentioned at all.”

The NCWC recognized CEF as the offspring of Virgil Blum’s writings and so not surprisingly it came to view the group like it viewed Blum himself: a potentially useful ally whose long-term goal (equity for children in private schools) matched the NCWC’s, but an ally that needed to be handled carefully. By 1967 the NCWC’s chief counsel, William Consedine, expressed what might have been a consensus on the group:

“[CEF] on occasion has been helpful in local bus transportation disputes and other local issues relating to auxiliary services for children in private schools… On other occasions, the organization through enthusiasm, imprudence and lack of experience sometimes acts in ways with which we disagree. We have a reasonably good liaison with them and try without intruding to make them understand our point of view. On the whole, their purposes are worthy and despite inevitable differences, we think the organization can be of help if it stays in its own sphere.”

For the staff at the NCWC, the proper sphere for CEF was battling for favorable legislation at the state and local levels. Too strong a presence on Capitol Hill sowed confusion among senators and congressmen, especially when CEF’s message conflicted with the official position of the bishops. The tendency of some state chapters of CEF to publicly take sides in congressional campaigns also alarmed the NCWC. In some cases, Catholic CEFers actively sought the defeat of Catholic incumbents who did not support

405 William R. Consedine to Paul B. McMahon, June 28, 1967, Box 86, Folder 26 (Organizations: Citizens for Educational Freedom), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) General Counsel/Legal Department, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
their cause but who had helped the NCWC with other issues in the past.\textsuperscript{406} This willingness of Catholic CEFers to publicly attack Catholic candidates over education policy was a forerunner of the acrimonious assaults that would be mounted by anti-abortion Catholics against pro-choice Catholic candidates beginning in the 1980s. Ardent CEFers were the original single-issue Catholic voters.

Citizens for Educational Freedom grew in numbers and influence as the 1960s unfolded, and it contributed to some victories on behalf of parents of non-public schoolchildren. In November 1960 Blum reported to his local congressman that within its first year CEF had grown to 26 chapters encompassing 8,000 dues paying members.\textsuperscript{407} By early 1965, membership had swelled to 125,000 members and almost 1,000 chapters nationwide.\textsuperscript{408} At the national level in 1961 and 1962, CEF lobbied to prevent passage of President Kennedy’s discriminatory federal aid bills. At the state level, CEF racked up victories. In 1963 Michigan’s CEF fought successfully for fair bus legislation, and in 1965 its lobbying efforts helped pass the state’s Auxiliary Services Law that provided welfare and educational benefits to non-public schoolchildren. In Pennsylvania in 1965, the CEF state federation was instrumental in passing a fair bus law. In Wisconsin, Blum played an active role in the state federation he had founded. As early as 1962, CEF contributed to the Wisconsin state legislature’s passage of a fair bus law, although the state Supreme Court quickly struck down that legislation. In response Blum helped

\textsuperscript{408} Blum to Patrick Whelan, April 22, 1965, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 25, folder title “Whelan, Patrick, 1959-1966.”
coordinate a campaign to amend Wisconsin’s state constitution to allow busing services for non-public schoolchildren, an effort that culminated in a new busing law passed in 1967. Perhaps the greatest source of personal pride for Blum was his role in helping to pass legislation in 1965 that provided tuition grants to private college students in the Badger State. With CEF’s help, several other states from 1965-1968 would enact state college scholarship programs that were open to students attending private schools.409

In terms of CEF’s overarching strategy for providing aid to non-public schoolchildren, there were basically two paths it could take: the legislative and the judicial. The legislative path involved working diligently at all levels of government to enact laws that included aid for non-public schools and/or their students. The judicial path steered toward preparing a test case that could be pursued all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. It involved choosing an existing law that denied public aid to non-public education and—taking advantage of the postwar spirit of individual rights—challenging that law in the courts on the grounds of religious freedom, supported by a vigorous public relations campaign. The legislative path was certain to be slow and arduous, taking years to traverse. In contrast, the judicial path tempted CEFers with a shortcut to success. Despite Blum’s burning desire to see non-public schoolchildren win their constitutional rights, he favored the legislative path. Blum counseled patience when it came to the judicial route. The time was not yet ripe to risk a case going to the U.S. Supreme Court. Only after amassing legislative victories and gradually winning over public opinion could CEF consider shepherding a legal action to the highest court. To force the issue in the short term could produce an adverse federal decision that might set the movement back

for years; in the worst-case scenario, it could undermine the very existence of Catholic schools.\footnote{410 Blum to Paul W. Brayer, July 26, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, B, 9/1962-8/1963.”}

When it came to strategy, Blum proved to be at odds with Martin and Mae Duggan, the power couple that had played the biggest role in bringing CEF into existence. As early as 1962, the Duggans favored the judicial path, and they came to believe that their state of Missouri provided the ideal test case. A year later they were advising CEF to pour its energy into supporting a legal action in the Show Me State. Mae Duggan pleaded with Blum. “I have always felt that this crusade need not wait 20 yrs.” She assured the Jesuit, “Times are different. People are conditioned to accept sweeping changes..overnight..We watch a man orbit the earth..and without flicking an eyelash, we ask: ‘How many times.’ People are ready...will you back us up at the [annual national] Convention?”\footnote{411 Mae Duggan to Blum, June 26, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin & Mae, 1958-1973.” Blum believed U.S. Supreme Court justices Hugo Black and William Douglas to be downright anti-Catholic in their sympathies.}

Blum did not believe that public opinion was yet on their side. He refused to support the Duggans, and he tried to convince CEF’s midwife of the danger involved. Blum told Mae that if the organization pursued their idea, “it would in effect be placing its neck in a noose and daring [Supreme Court] justices such as [Hugo] Black and [William] Douglas to kick the barrel out from under our feet.”\footnote{412 Blum to Mae Duggan, July 10, 1963, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin & Mae, 1958-1973.”}

To the Duggans’ disappointment, CEF did not mobilize itself around a major court challenge in Missouri. This would not be the last disagreement between Blum and the Duggans.
Since CEF’s founding, St. Louis had been home to the group’s national headquarters. By 1964 some in the organization, including Blum, wanted to see the headquarters moved to Washington, D.C. where it would be better positioned to influence the national education debate. Such was the recommendation contained within a report submitted to CEF’s National Executive Board and Board of Trustees by two leaders from Minnesota, Timothy Fahey and James Keen.413 Their internal report is a valuable document, because it appears to be the only attempt ever made to gather information about the loosely organized CEF for the purpose of strategic planning. The report provided an illuminating snapshot of CEF in its fifth year of existence, revealing the group to be essentially a seven-state organization. Despite having supporters across the country, most of its dues paying members lived in Michigan, New York, Ohio, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Wisconsin. The organization needed to broaden its geographic appeal beyond the Midwest and Northeast and having an effective and conspicuous headquarters in the nation’s capital could contribute to this development. By year’s end, CEF did establish a national office in Washington, and it hired a full-time executive director to engage in lobbying and fundraising.

The timing was not coincidental, as the legislative path to federal aid for education had brightened under Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon Johnson, who appeared willing to include some provision for non-public schoolchildren in his legislative agenda called The Great Society. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 helped pave the way for federal educational legislation by taking the race issue out of the equation. The Act’s outright prohibition of segregation removed an important obstacle to congressional support in the

413 Timothy Fahey and James Keen to Members of the National Executive Board and Board of Trustees, June 25, 1964, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 11, folder title “Correspondence, Minnesota, 1964-1967.”
North. Title VI of the legislation was of most interest to Virgil Blum because it forbade discrimination in the provision of federally assisted programs, such as educational funds granted to the states for distribution. As the Civil Rights Act wound its way through Congress under the name of the Celler Bill, the question rose whether Title VI should include religion along with race, color, and national origin as grounds for prohibiting discrimination in federally assisted programs. The idea met with opposition, provoking Blum’s disgust. He told a congressional ally, “It is a bit fantastic that our Congress should now debate a Civil Rights bill which itself permits states which are the recipients of federal assistance to discriminate on the basis of religion.”\footnote{Blum to James J. Delaney, January 31, 1964, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 18, folder title “Correspondence, Dahany and Delaney, 1962-1973.}

Inclusion of religion in Title VI must have been a tantalizing prospect for Blum. Since federal law enjoys supremacy over state law, the measure could have contributed to the nullification of the anti-Catholic Blaine Amendments that many states had adopted in their constitutions in the late nineteenth century to prohibit parochial schools from receiving public aid. But within a few months, Blum had changed his mind and opposed the presence of the word religion in Title VI. Adopting the long view, Blum feared that its inclusion would ultimately prohibit a sectarian school that had come to rely on federal funds for its existence from even asking a prospective teacher about her religious belief. He told a correspondent, “Once a school can no longer select its own faculty members on the basis of their moral and religious commitments, the school will soon cease to be a Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish institution.”\footnote{Blum to Mr. F. Hunstiger, May 27, 1964, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, H, 9/1963-8/1964.”} Blum’s stance reflected his core belief that secularism was the gravest threat to American society. To include religion in Title VI of the Civil
Rights Act might prove beneficial in the short term; however, in the long run it would hand secularists a powerful weapon with which to undermine God-centered education.

President Johnson’s educational legislation came in the form of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The law was a pillar of his Great Society agenda that sought to eliminate poverty in the United States. Johnson recognized that inadequate educational opportunities contributed to poverty’s entrenchment. The individual states had struggled to provide adequate education for their citizens, resulting in a need for federal assistance. ESEA did not include vouchers or tuition grants, but it did include benefits for non-public pupils in some of its provisions. It provided money for the expansion of libraries in non-public schools as well as funding for supplemental services. Public money through the Act could not finance non-public school construction or pay teachers’ salaries, but it could be used to pay for “shared time” arrangements where non-public students visited the local public school for part of their day in order to attend classes in secular subjects that the public schools were better equipped to teach.

Blum was hostile to shared time in principle, warning an attorney friend in New York that “[S]hared time is nothing more, as Dr. Arthur Miller—the national director of the Lutheran schools—wrote me, than the dismemberment of church-related education.” Blum feared that over time it would be harder to convince parents not to simply send their children to the public school for the entire day. Nevertheless, Blum swallowed his hostility to shared time and chose not to oppose ESEA’s passage. He had opposed religion’s inclusion in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, but here his pragmatism carried the day. ESEA was a step in the right direction on the legislative path to winning

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over public opinion to federal aid for non-public schoolchildren. The Duggans were unwilling to join Blum in compromising on shared time and they opposed ESEA, which widened the rift between them. When CEF addressed shared time at its annual convention in 1965, Blum proposed a moderate resolution against the policy. The Duggans preferred a strongly worded denunciation of shared time and worked to defeat Blum’s moderate resolution. The CEF convention ended without the group having expressed any official position on shared time. Blum was angry at the defeat of his resolution because he believed it made CEF appear by default as pro-shared time, a perception that threatened the group’s relations with orthodox Jews in New York City, who were valuable allies bitterly opposed to the practice.\footnote{Blum to Mae Duggan, September 2, 1965, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin & Mae, 1958-1973.”} The rift between Blum and the Duggans widened further at the 1965 convention when the Jesuit supported the executive committee’s realignment of membership on the Board of Trustees to more accurately reflect the relative size and strength of the state federations. Missouri no longer merited two seats on the Board, and so Martin Duggan was not reelected, a move that incensed the couple.

“The basic problem with the Duggans,” Blum told a CEF leader from New York, “seems to be that they have never really become reconciled to the fact that CEF is no longer holding its executive meetings around their kitchen table.”\footnote{Blum to Mark Murphy, August 3, 1965, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 22, folder title “Correspondence, Murphy, Mark, 1962-1972.”}

President Johnson acknowledged the role that CEF had played in lobbying for ESEA when he invited the group’s president, Stuart Hubbell of Michigan, to the White House for the bill signing. With the establishment of a national headquarters in Washington D.C. and the passage of ESEA, as well the existence of even more promising
legislation taking shape in several states, CEF at mid-decade approached the height of its influence. But CEF’s days as a national organization were numbered. By the early 1970s a variety of forces would converge to neutralize the group’s effectiveness.

**Signs of the changing times**

In the 1960s Virgil Blum fought for the constitutional rights of American non-public schoolchildren during what would prove to be one of the most pivotal decades for the nation. The Sixties are accepted as a watershed period in U.S. history, filled with dramatic events that carried profound consequences for the country, quickening widespread changes in society and culture.\(^4\) For some Americans, especially those belonging to traditionally marginalized groups, the Sixties was a hopeful period of ascending liberalism that offered moments of liberation and glimpses of even greater possibilities for change, seemingly within their grasp. For others, the 1960s was a distressing time in which all manner of tradition came under critical scrutiny, where authority seemed challenged at every turn, and where citizens witnessed the rapid loosening of sexual norms.

Virgil Blum lived actively throughout this period, and his life offers the case study of a middle-aged Jesuit struggling to understand the far-reaching changes unfolding around him. Blum had to contend with significant transformations within his church, his religious order, and his university. Blum once told his superior-general in Rome that he was not an “old Father”—parlance for an inflexible Jesuit—but the course of these years

\(^4\) The decade is a tidy unit of periodization, and it is adopted here for convenience’s sake; but views differ over how the concept of ‘the Sixties’ as a period of upheaval and change should be connected with specific ranges of years. See M.J. Heale, “*The Sixties as History: A Review of the Political Historiography,*” *Reviews in American History* 33, no. 1, (March 2005): 133-152.
does reveal Blum refusing to move with the spirit of the times.\textsuperscript{420} Had someone in the 1960s asked Blum whether he was a liberal, the Jesuit might have answered yes; but Blum’s liberalism resembled what Philpott and Anderson have termed “Catholic political liberalism”; that is, the endorsing of liberal rights and institutions from a traditional Catholic perspective.\textsuperscript{421} Blum was devoted to liberal democratic institutions and he was a firm supporter of civil liberties, especially religious freedom, but only so long as these expressions of liberalism drew strength from Catholic tradition and were consonant with Catholic teachings. To paraphrase a distinction made by Philpott and Anderson, Blum is best understood as a Catholic liberal and not a liberal Catholic.\textsuperscript{422}

The beginning of the transformation of Blum’s church is often dated to 1962 when the Second Vatican Council met for its first session in Rome. Holding four sessions from 1962-1965, the ‘Council’, as it came to be called, changed the face of American Catholicism.\textsuperscript{423} Its significance as an agent of change can get overstated in the sense that the reforms it produced were not lightning out of a clear sky. In the words of historian Leslie Tentler, “[T]he chief mystery with regard to what followed the Council is not the direction of the change that occurred…. The chief mystery is rather the speed with which

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\item Blum to Pedro Arrupe, S.J., June 4, 1969, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Arrupe, S.J., Father General Pedro, 1969-1975.”
\item Daniel Philpott and Ryan T. Anderson, \textit{A Liberalism Safe for Catholicism? Perspectives from The Review of Politics} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 3
\item Ibid.
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\end{footnotesize}
that change occurred.” The reform ideas that the council fathers recorded in sixteen
documents can often be traced back to internal stirrings that long predated Vatican II, and
Virgil Blum was already sympathetic to some of these. While attending class at the
Missouri Province’s theologate in the 1940s, Blum had excelled under the instruction of
Gerald Ellard, a major figure in the liturgical reform movement, which advocated
celebrating Mass in vernacular languages instead of Latin. Blum had long admired the
political writings of John Courtney Murray who is credited for drafting Dignitatus
Humanae, the Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom that reconciled Catholic
political thinking with the heretofore frowned upon idea of religious pluralism. The
Council also sought to empower the laity with a new (at least for Catholics)
understanding of the church as the “People of God.” Blum, for his part, had already been
trying to empower the Catholic laity for years. And the Council’s favorable stance toward
ecumenism could be reconciled in Blum’s mind with his ongoing efforts to build
interfaith political coalitions.

Among the Council’s sixteen documents was Gravissimum Educationis, its
Declaration on Christian Education. Blum interpreted the document as affirming the work
to which he had so far devoted his life. The council fathers stated unequivocally, “Parents
who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy
true liberty in their choice of schools.” The Declaration also expressed support for
public subsidies to be paid in a way that allowed parents to follow their consciences in choosing a school for their children. Blum welcomed the document. Ever practical, his first thought was that it might help in recruiting more Catholics for CEF.426

Blum was alarmed at less salutary effects he saw flowing from the Council. One consequence concerned religious life; in particular, the Council’s call for religious orders to return to the sources of their foundation (ressourcement) and to reexamine their charism in the light of the modern world (aggiornamento). This collective soul-searching led orders of sisters, who over time had become predominantly teaching orders, to grant their sisters greater freedom in choosing their ministries. No longer was it assumed that a sister would spend her entire career teaching in the parochial schools. For administrators of American Catholic schools that were already understaffed and financially strapped, this development posed a most unwelcome threat. The sisters had to be replaced by far more expensive lay teachers.427 Blum could not accept the idea that the Holy Spirit might be guiding these women in new directions. “If this is not a passing phase—and I hope that it is—we had better start thinking in terms of seeing the almost total disappearance of religious orders of women from America.... Many of these nuns seem to have a suicide wish.”428

Even more threatening in Blum’s mind was the ongoing conversation among Catholics around the question of whether parochial schooling was even desirable

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426 Blum to Mr. J.B. McCaffrey, November 11, 1965, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, M, 9/1965-8/1968.”
427 For an excellent study of how the phenomenon played out in Los Angeles, see the chapter “The Dangers of History” in Mark S. Massa, S.J. The American Catholic Revolution: How the Sixties Changed the Church Forever (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75-102.
428 Blum to William Super, M.D., November 11, 1969, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 12, folder title “Correspondence, Montana, 1969-1971.”
anymore. Mary Perkins Ryan launched the conversation with *Are Parochial Schools the Answer?* (1964), to which her own response was an emphatic no. Ryan was an internal critic, the mother of five boys all educated at Catholic schools. She reexamined parochial education considering the spirit of *aggiornamento* (bringing the church up to date) that animated the Council’s proceedings. Ryan interpreted Catholic schools as relics of a bygone era, the reaction to an anti-Catholicism that no longer held sway in American society. For Ryan, parochial schools shored up the siege mentality of the American Catholic ghetto, a mindset that ran counter to the spirit of the Council. She held great hope that Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) classes offered by parishes would adequately form the faith of young Catholics who attended public school. Ever the optimist, Ryan imagined Catholic students working with other Christians and with Jews to foster a true humanism in the public schools “open to God even though not directly fostering belief in Him.” Monsignor James Donohue, education secretary at the United States Catholic Conference, shared Ryan’s faith in the CCD classes as an adequate substitute in faith formation for the religious instruction received in parochial schools. Donohue horrified Blum when he published an article in the Jesuits’ *America* Magazine in 1968 arguing that Catholics should phase out their own school systems and turn the money over to African American schools in the inner cities. Blum told the Assistant Superintendent of Schools in the Dubuque Archdiocese that Donohue’s article had

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430 Ibid. 40, 55-57, 146-148.
431 Ibid. 173.
angered and demoralized many CEFers.\textsuperscript{433} The Jesuit’s own contribution to the debate was \textit{Catholic Education: Survival or Demise?} (1969), in which Blum argued passionately for the survival of parochial schools and criticized the notion that CCD classes were an adequate substitute in forming young Catholics. Blum believed that by abolishing their school systems, Catholics would merely be trading their own ghetto for a secular ghetto. Very important for Blum was the connection between Catholic schools and vocations, not surprising coming from a person raised in the Colony in Shelby County, Iowa, with its extraordinary record of Catholic pupils choosing the vowed, religious life. Blum was convinced that a vibrant school system was a necessary seedbed for future vocations.\textsuperscript{434}

Vocations were on Blum’s mind in the wake of Vatican II. Between 1965-1975 the number of priests in the country declined by 10 percent, as fewer men entered the seminaries and many of the ordained chose to leave the ministry.\textsuperscript{435} Blum was never tempted to leave the Society of Jesus, but he watched many of his brother Jesuits depart.\textsuperscript{436} From an all-time peak of 8,338 American Jesuits in 1960, the number had dropped by 1970 to 7,055.\textsuperscript{437} A crisis of priestly identity gripped the church. The Council had offered a new conception of the role of the laity in the modern world, but it had not really provided an updated vision of priestly ministry.\textsuperscript{438} Blum provided his own

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\item[433] Blum to Rev. Russell Bleich, May 21, 1968, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder titled “Correspondence, 1968-1969.”
\item[434] Virgil C. Blum, \textit{Catholic Education: Survival or Demise?} (Chicago: Argus Communications Co., 1969), 19-22, 30-33
\item[435] Tentler, \textit{American Catholics: A History}, 316.
\item[436] Blum’s old pal from Regency, Adrian “Coach” Kochanski, eventually left the Jesuits. Blum tried to find humor in these departures, joking to one Jesuit friend, “Father Albertson did not only move to the University of California, he took unto himself a wife. ... I do hope, Paul, that you are not really tempted to follow Jim Albertson’s path…” See Blum to Paul Prucha, S.J., March 24, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1974-1978.”
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assessment when he wrote to the chairman of Gonzaga University’s theology department that “[W]hile upgrading the role of the hierarchy and laity, the Council ... downgraded the role of the priest and religious women. This ... is the cause, at least in part, of the identity crisis from which we now suffer.”

Vatican II also called into question the neoscholasticism at the foundation of Blum’s intellectual and theological formation in the Society of Jesus. The Thomistic synthesis that had underpinned the weltanschauung of most educated American Catholics since the late nineteenth century unraveled at the Council. Again, the development was not sudden. Reformers since the 1920s had been producing new scholarship based on theological sources other than the dominating thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. Advances in biblical studies and the study of the patristic era, as well as new theological understandings of liturgy, paved the way for the spiritual renewal of the 1960s. Catholic theology entered a period of widespread creativity at the Council. The aftermath did not have a strong impact on Blum’s spiritual life. He was a political scientist, not a theologian, and like some of his Jesuit contemporaries, he did not exert a great deal of effort keeping up with the latest theological ideas. He operated for the remainder of his life from within the comfortable womb of the Thomistic synthesis. But the decline of neoscholasticism would have a powerful impact on Blum’s university and on Catholic higher education in general.

Blum became more estranged from Vatican II over time, although he did not

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439 Blum to Kenneth Baker, S.J., October 9, 1969, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1968-1969.”
publish direct criticisms of it. For Blum, the Council’s costs grew to outweigh its benefits. In 1969 he had assured his superior general that he was not an old Father, but by the 1980s he had come to resemble one. The rector of his Jesuit community at that time would remember Blum as an old Father: “Virg would have been in that group at Marquette…. Virg would not have been a ringleader of grumpy-ism or making obstacles to things; but if people had gone down the list, they would have said Virg is not ringing the bell for Vatican II Catholicism.”\footnote{Greg Carlson, S.J., interview by William Fliss, April 1, 2017.}

Just as the orders of Catholic sisters reexamined their charisms in the light of the Council, so too did the Jesuits seek to discern the movements of the Holy Spirit at work in their order. In 1965 the Society of Jesus convened its 31st General Congregation since 1558 in order to select a new superior general. Pedro Arrupe (1907-1991) emerged as the Jesuits’ leader. He would play the chief role in effecting a major transformation of the world’s largest male Catholic religious order. Since its restoration after the Napoleonic Wars, the Society of Jesus had the reputation for being a paragon of order and conservative orthodoxy. In the wake of Vatican II, however, the Society earned a reputation for liberalism, to some radicalism.\footnote{For negative assessments of the Jesuits’ path, offered from within the church, see James Hitchcock, \textit{The Pope and the Jesuits: John Paul II and the New Order in the Society of Jesus} (New York: National Committee of Catholic Laymen, 1984) and Malachi Martin, \textit{The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).} Arrupe pushed the Jesuits to turn outward and engage fully with the modern world, especially on behalf of the poor and marginalized. The most famous American Jesuit at the end of the 1960s, Daniel Berrigan, was very different from the Jesuit celebrities of an earlier generation, such as Daniel Lord with his sodality movement or Georgetown’s Edmund A. Walsh with his School of
Foreign Service. Berrigan was a peace activist, a fugitive from the law who would eventually be caught and jailed for his protest actions against the Vietnam War.

The Jesuits’ educational apostolate, long at the heart of their identity, remained intact, but its emphasis shifted to increased engagement with the modern world in service to others, especially the poor. The 31st General Congregation, informed by the spirit of the Council, called for a reevaluation of the Jesuit formation process. In the United States, this signaled a movement away from the sort of life Blum had experienced at Florissant with its highly regimented days spent praying and reading classics under the surveillance of exacting masters. The novitiates, juniorates, and theologates relocated into urban areas so that the young Jesuits could better engage with the social realities and intellectual currents of the modern world. The men now entering the Society, products of postwar America, pushed the Jesuit leaders to make these changes. As a perceptive young priest commented to his tertian master as early as 1963, “Ours is probably the last class you will be able to take through the traditional tertianship.”

Arrupe advanced his vision for the Society of Jesus further in 1975 when the Jesuits completed their 32nd General Congregation. Its famous fourth decree dedicated Jesuits to the service of faith and the promotion of justice. Jesuits now had a duty to come to the aid of all victims of injustice in any form. The Society of Jesus had evolved from being an intellectual bulwark against Enlightenment ideas disseminated by the French Revolution into being a champion for the advancement of social justice.

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Blum’s feelings toward these changes in the Society of Jesus were mixed. He wholeheartedly endorsed the 31st GC’s call for revamping the formation process. His greatest desire was to see the core training of American Jesuits broadened beyond the classics to encompass instruction in interest group democracy and the shaping of public opinion. In principle, Blum welcomed the easing of Jesuit discipline. He told the president of the University of San Francisco, “[P]sychologically a man whose whole adult life has been lived in an authoritarian organization is not ideally equipped to comprehend problems in terms of democracy and to give leadership in carrying forward problems that must be resolved through the give and take of our democratic system of government.”

But Blum’s endorsement of greater freedom within Jesuit formation had limits. He came to believe that young Jesuits who claimed the right to determine their own assignments, to abandon distinctly clerical garb, and to live away from the community imperiled Jesuit identity. Blum was not enthusiastic about younger Jesuits branching out into new ministries that provided direct relief for the disadvantaged, and he viewed it as folly when scholastics clamored for the abandonment of the teaching apostolate in favor of working directly with the poor. “Schools are the instruments of change,” Blum declared, “social work in the ghetto is merely remedial.”

For Blum, the importance of Jesuit education lay in inculcating the virtues and teaching the skills needed by men and women who would then disperse throughout society and lobby for

\[447\] Blum to Edward Rooney, S.J., July 21, 1965, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 4, folder title “Correspondence, R, 9/1964-8/1965.” Blum’s critique of the educational process went beyond Jesuit formation to the curriculum within its schools. As early as 1961, Blum wrote to the principal of a Jesuit high school, “Certainly the classics have merit…” but “Turning out boys who are scholars in Greek and Latin, but who cannot make any contribution to better the society in which they live, is not in my opinion educating the young men as they should be educated.” See Blum to Thomas Hennessy, S.J., December 26, 1961, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 4, folder title “Correspondence, H, 9/1961-8/1962.”

good and just public policy.

Blum had devoted his life outside of the classroom to advancing the interests of non-public schoolchildren and their parents, and he did not believe that the changes wrought by Vatican II threatened his work. On the contrary, Blum saw his public career as completely in step with the Jesuits’ emerging emphasis on social justice. To Blum, the parents of non-public schoolchildren, who were being deprived of their constitutional right to choose a publicly funded school according to their consciences, were indeed victims of grave injustice. Blum simply lumped these parents, especially Catholic parents, into the same category as other groups in American society that faced discrimination, such as African Americans and Jews.

Sorting out Blum’s political sympathies amidst the turmoil of the late Sixties may be best accomplished through comparison with another Jesuit public figure, Robert Drinan. The two men were born only seven years apart and experienced the same pre-conciliar formation process in the Society of Jesus, except that Drinan spent his three years...

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449 While visiting Rome in August 1969, Blum briefly discussed his work with Superior General Arrupe, suggesting that the Jesuits could be more deeply involved. Arrupe invited Blum to visit him the following week with a prepared statement of what this might look like. In the wake of that meeting, Arrupe sent out a letter suggesting that the American provincials, who were to meet soon as a group, consider the idea of assigning one man from each Jesuit community to devote one-half of his time to building up support for public aid to non-public schoolchildren among the parents and alumni of Jesuit schools. Blum was unhappy when the provincials at their meeting simply referred the matter to a committee. The meeting’s organizer— and Blum’s own provincial—Gerald Sheehan, S.J., commented to Blum, “You seem to think that you or any other of the 35,000 Jesuits in the world can go to Rome and get Father General to issue a mandate to Provincials to do what each petitioner wants him to do.” Sheehan assured Blum that they were in fact considering the matter. The provincials evidently showed mild support for the idea by assigning a Jesuit to coordinate the selection of the men; but when Blum encountered this Jesuit a year later, the man made it clear that he was too busy to do the work. There was no follow-up, and the initiative died a quiet death. Blum was disappointed with the Society of Jesus for not actively supporting his work on behalf of parents and students from parochial schools. For more on this, see Blum to Gerald Sheehan, S.J. October 6, 1969; Sheehan to Blum, November 25, 1969; Blum to John Blewett, S.J., July 28, 1970; all of these in Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Arrupe, S.J., Father General Pedro, 1969-1975”.

years of regency attending law school instead of teaching at a Jesuit high school. Both Blum and Drinan were interested in politics, and each took a special interest in the relationship between church and state. Both men went on to have notable public careers: Blum as a prolific writer and the guiding force behind CEF and later the Catholic League; Drinan serving as dean of the law school at Boston College before becoming the first Catholic priest elected to the U.S. Congress, where he served in the House of Representatives from 1971-1981. The two men shared similarities on a personal level: Neither man spoke much about his childhood. Both appeared to be loners at heart, workaholics with no time for deep friendships. Each man proved willing to criticize his church’s leaders when the need arose. Both were single-minded in their pursuits and neither showed a great deal of patience with those who disagreed with them. Both tended to equate disagreement with disloyalty when it came from allies, especially as the two men aged. And both men experienced significant disappointments in their public lives; in Blum’s case the chronic setbacks he encountered in what sometimes seemed like a futile, almost Sisyphean, struggle to achieve school choice; in Drinan’s case, the abrupt end to his congressional career by order of Pope John Paul II, to which Drinan submitted in obedience.

Despite their remarkable similarities, the two men’s differences are more illuminating. In personality, Drinan was an easy conversationalist, full of jokes and wit. Blum could be charming, but he had little interest in small talk, preferring conversation about educational issues.451 Drinan was more personally ambitious than Blum, hoping at

451 The widow of Quentin Quade, Blum’s former student whom the Jesuit later recruited for Marquette’s political science department, recalls Blum’s presence at their house for social gatherings. Blum was most interested in taking her husband aside to have conversations about educational reform. Phyllis Quade, interview by William Fliss, May 17, 2017.
one point to become president of Boston College; Blum was content to shepherd others toward achieving policy goals. The two men also differed when it came to weightier matters. U.S. involvement in Vietnam played an important role in Drinan’s politicization as the 1960s unfolded. He became a vocal opponent of the war. Blum did not show much interest in Vietnam except insofar as federal spending for the war might affect the passage of tax credits.\(^{452}\) Drinan was a vocal supporter of the black civil rights movement. Blum supported African American rights, but he was most interested in that movement for what it might teach Catholics about how to achieve their own constitutional rights. Drinan enthusiastically supported the student protests that sprang up at universities across the country over the Vietnam War and other justice issues; Blum favored firm handling of student unrest. Blum was not as fixated as Drinan on helping the “little guy” unless the little guy was battling for his religious freedom. Blum never expressed interest in two of the issues that concerned Drinan: the plight of immigrants and the international movement for human rights. Drinan was a “blue sky thinker” when it came to state action, always wondering what other good things government can do.

Blum always harbored a fear of state control, especially when it threatened Catholic education. Drinan was explicitly partisan and held office as a loyal Democrat. Blum did not boast membership in either major party, preferring to remain nonpartisan in the hope that he might attract support for his crusade from both sides. In general, Drinan was sympathetic to the full range of social justice issues that marked the era and the political activism they produced. Blum welcomed the politicized spirit of the 1960s, but he wanted to see politicization of a specific kind, channeled for narrow purposes.

\(^{452}\) For example, see Blum to John P. Leary, S.J., March 14, 1966, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, J-L, 9/1965-8/1968.”
The Second Vatican Council and the liberal spirit of the 1960s had a transformative effect on Blum’s home, Marquette University. Blum taught at Marquette from 1956-1978, and he remained a member of its Jesuit community until his death in 1990. Jesuits of Blum’s generation were expected to maintain a very active role in university life. Blum served as chairman of the political science department, both from 1962-1965 and in other years as an interim chairman; and he eventually served on almost every conceivable university committee.\textsuperscript{453} Blum was deeply involved in the events of the period. When he arrived as an assistant professor in 1956, Marquette was still “contending with modernity” to borrow the titular phrase from an influential book on the history of Catholic higher education by Philip Gleason.\textsuperscript{454} Like other Catholic colleges and universities, Marquette sought to modernize its structure and institutional practices in order to attract students from the growing Catholic middle-class who might otherwise attend secular schools. Jesuit schools in particular—still using the \textit{ratio studiorum} curriculum, virtually unchanged for 300 years—had entered the twentieth century with a reputation for outdated practices.\textsuperscript{455} The Jesuit Educational Association (JEA) was established in the 1930s to help coordinate the modernization at American colleges and universities, especially in the establishment of graduate programs that could compete

\textsuperscript{453} Curriculum Vitae, circa 1977, A-4.5 series 9, Rev. Virgil C. Blum, S.J. file, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI. Blum should receive credit for establishing Marquette’s Study Abroad Program, today a successful and popular option for undergraduates at the university. It fell to Blum when the nascent program’s founder quickly left Marquette for a position in London. Blum ribbed his fellow Jesuit, “[Y]ou had a bloody lot to do with giving birth to the idea. Wish you were hear [sic] to help change diapers on this young chap that you sired.” See Blum to Joseph Christie, S.J., December 2, 1957, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 2, folder title “European Study Programs, Bowen, Mary Jeanne, 1958-1959.”


\textsuperscript{455} See Kathleen A. Mahoney, \textit{Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America: The Jesuits and Harvard in the Age of the University} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).
with those at secular schools.\footnote{On the JEA, see Paul A. FitzGerald, S.J., \textit{The Governance of Jesuit Colleges in the United States, 1920-1970} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).} Marquette and its siblings pushed to broaden their curricula and to make the doctorate the standard faculty credential. Blum would have appeared to some as a symbol of progress in 1956—a Jesuit arriving at Marquette with a PhD. in a social science such as political science.

Virgil Blum’s public career as an educational activist raised his reputation at Marquette. Within a few years of his arrival, he had become a valuable advisor to the university on church/state matters. Blum’s stock soared in 1965 when his years of persistent lobbying in the Wisconsin state legislature helped win passage of tuition grants for college students, including those attending private institutions. Marquette’s enrollment benefited from this program. In 1966 Marquette’s president, John P. Raynor, S.J., appointed Blum to a special Board of Academic Consultors, a group of five faculty invited to advise the president on academic matters.\footnote{John P. Raynor, S.J. to Blum, October 6, 1966, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Raynor, Rev. John, S.J., 1965-1973.”} Blum had the president’s ear, and he had no reservations about sharing his opinions.\footnote{Blum was a straight shooter in his communications with Raynor. In one example, while prefacing that “Only a friend would make the observations I’m going to make here,” Blum stated, “In the minds of many people in Milwaukee you have become known as the Marquette President who appoints mediocrities to office.” See Blum to John P. Raynor, April 9, 1969, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Raynor, Rev. John, S.J., 1965-1973.”} President Raynor, in turn, came to rely on Blum. In the spring of 1968, when a student group called \textit{Respond} mounted a series of protests in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination and issued a set of demands to the president for the dismantling of institutional racism at Marquette, Blum was part of Raynor’s inner circle of advisors. The President refused to yield to the students’ demands, but he gradually defused the situation by establishing what would
become the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) to address African American concerns. Raynor wrote to Blum to communicate his “personal appreciation for the valuable assistance and cooperation you gave me throughout the serious crisis on our campus over the past few weeks.... The long hours given to reach a proper solution to our problems—for the well being of our University and our students—were well spent, and I am grateful, Virg, for your help.” When rumors circulated that Raynor would shortly be replaced as president, Blum immediately sent a statement of support for Raynor to Superior General Arrupe, who ultimately chose to retain him in office.

The time when a superior general could remove the president of a Jesuit university in the United States would soon be over as American Catholic institutions of higher education moved toward greater independence from church authority. A seminal event in this process was the Land O’Lakes statement issued in 1967 by prominent Catholic educators, led by Notre Dame’s Theodore Hesburgh. Named after the Wisconsin community where the group met, the Land O’Lakes statement affirmed the need for Catholic universities to enjoy autonomy and academic freedom. In the words of Gleason, the event marked “a declaration of independence from the hierarchy and a symbolic turning point.” By the end of the decade, Jesuit schools were severing their legal ties with the Society of Jesus in favor of a new governance structure that saw the presidents appointed by lay boards of trustees. Marquette’s governmental transformation reached fruition on September 11, 1970, when the Jesuit community incorporated as a separate

459 Jablonsky, 326-327.
460 John P. Raynor, S.J. to Blum, June 1, 1968, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Raynor, Rev. John, S.J., 1965-1973.”
462 Gleason, Contending with Modernity, 317.
entity. The Jesuits no longer owned the university; instead, they became its chief benefactor, providing money, faculty, and administrators to a non-profit corporation called Marquette University.  

Marquette’s release from direct control under the Society of Jesus was not a smooth transition, especially from the point of view of the Jesuit community. Blum was in the thick of it, serving first as chairman of the Separate Incorporation Committee and then later serving on the board of directors for the new entity, Marquette Jesuit Associates, Inc. For many Jesuits in the community, the break was deeply traumatic, and it exacerbated an ongoing identity crisis within their ranks. Blum emerged as a liaison between the larger Jesuit community and President Raynor. He desperately sought face-to-face gatherings between the Jesuits and the university administration to ease the transition. He told Raynor, “I spend many long hours trying to maintain a close relationship between the members of the Jesuit community and the University…. Unless such positive efforts are made by the University Administration, it is going to become increasingly difficult to maintain the allegiance of the Jesuits to the University.”

A tangible concern revolved around salaries. Not only was the Jesuit community contributing a large sum of money to Marquette each year, but many of its faculty members, some of whom had been teaching for decades, would be paid a salary that was far less than their lay counterparts received.

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463 Jablonsky, 309-310.
465 Because they had taken vows of poverty and lived in community, the Jesuits did not receive their salaries individually. All money went to the community, and the Jesuits would submit a request to the rector if they needed funds to purchase something or for travel. But the men knew the amount of their contributions.
about the “serious psychological impact that will follow when … Jesuits realize that they are second-class citizens in a ‘strange’ university in which many of them are being paid from one to three thousand dollars less than laymen of comparable qualifications.”

The identity crisis within the Jesuit community echoed campus-wide in the 1960s as Marquette struggled with what it meant to be a Catholic university in the wake of Vatican II. Marquette was not alone in the struggle, nor would the issue be settled quickly. The crisis of religious identity produced much anxiety and hand wringing at Catholic colleges and universities well into the twenty-first century. The theological creativity unleashed by Vatican II helped undermine the neoscholastic consensus, grounded in natural law, which had knit higher education together in a comprehensive Catholic worldview where all facets of creation were unified and rendered intelligible. Philip Gleason has argued that up until the 1960s, Catholic higher education had gradually modernized in terms of structure and institutional practices, but it remained ideologically aloof from modernity through its devotion to neoscholasticism. The 1960s was the pivotal decade when the neoscholastic consensus disintegrated. Ideological secularization ensued in the absence of a philosophical/theological alternative to neoscholasticism, resulting in crisis about what it meant to be a Catholic college or university.

Ever on guard against secularism, Blum worried about the potential loss of Catholic identity at Marquette. He was not pleased by the abandonment of the mandatory

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467 Alice Gallin, *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education Since 1960*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000. See also *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 34 (Fall 2008); the entire issue was devoted to Catholic identity under the auspices of “Mission Matters.”

468 Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 320-322
annual Ignatian retreat requirement for undergraduate students, something he had first experienced as a 20-year-old transfer student at Creighton in 1933. And Blum became deeply alarmed when a student Residence Assistant (RA) confided to him that hard drug use was happening in the Men’s dorms, just like at secular schools. The relinquishing of direct Jesuit control over Marquette exacerbated Blum’s anxiety for the future. If laymen were to exert greater influence over the university, Blum believed it was important that they be devout Catholics. He lobbied hard to get his former student and friend, Quentin Quade, appointed vice president for academic affairs in 1972. Quade’s appointment eased the concerns of some Jesuits about a perceived lessening of Christian identity at Marquette. Perhaps Blum’s greatest concern, however, was the individualism exhibited by the younger Jesuits, especially in their unwillingness to live in simplicity, to wear clerical attire, or to voluntarily identify themselves as Jesuits. For Blum this imperiled the future of the Society of Jesus, which depended upon the ongoing discernment of new vocations. Blum believed that men would not be drawn to the order if the young priests and scholastics lived indistinguishably from the students they taught and failed to wear clericals and identify themselves in conversation as Jesuits.

471 Blum to Pedro Arrupe, S.J., February 6, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Arrupe, S.J., Father General Pedro, 1969-1975.” In this letter, Blum was responding to a request from Fr. Arrupe to the Society’s consultants for their opinions on vocations and community life. Each Jesuit community had four consultants, who advised the rector and the provincial on the state of the community, and each had the option to issue independent reports to his superiors, including the Society’s superior general in Rome. Rev. Walter J. Stohrer, S.J., interview by William Fliss, 4 October 2013. Blum served as consultant from 1969-1973. In this letter to Arrupe, an angry Blum shared the following anecdote: “Several years ago [i.e. late 1960s] a graduate student in Theology asked a Jesuit for references to the Church Fathers, and when the Jesuit suggested that he consult Father Guzie, scholar in the field, the student who knew Father Guzie very well, exclaimed: ‘Tad Guzie. Is he a priest?’”
Marquette’s theology department became a flashpoint for Blum in the struggle over Jesuit Catholic identity. In 1966 he began to worry about the waning Jesuit influence in the department, and by 1970 Blum was warning the mother of a prospective freshman that “sometimes students who study theology become somewhat mixed up, or very much mixed up.”\(^{472}\) By 1973 Blum was weighing in on a power struggle within that department, initiated by a coalition of its component factions that he perceived to have lost much of their commitment to Catholicism. Likely, these faculty members were committed to ideas that challenged or even dissented from the traditional teachings of the Magisterium. Whether Blum liked it or not, what it meant to be a Catholic theologian had changed since Vatican II. Richard McBrien has likened the role of the theologian before the Council to “being the press secretary to the president. Your job was to present organizational policy as effectively as possible and defend it as necessary.”\(^{473}\) Now, theologians at Catholic universities had greater academic freedom to pursue ideas wherever they might lead. During this period the theology departments at Catholic universities abandoned any explicit role in the faith formation of Catholic students. Instead, campus ministry programs emerged at Jesuit universities such as Marquette to provide pastoral guidance to the young students striving to become the “Men and Women for others” that Superior General Arrupe would call for in a famous address in 1973.\(^{474}\)


Blum viewed Marquette’s new campus ministry program with suspicion, because it quickly attracted the younger Jesuits who pushed it toward becoming overtly political. Blum was angry when campus ministry hired a Jesuit novice—a former student activist at Georgetown—specifically to teach Marquette students how to evade the military draft.\footnote{Blum to John P. Raynor, S.J., January 18, 1971, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Raynor, Rev. John, S.J., 1965-1973.”} When Marquette’s student newspaper announced that campus ministry would be establishing a coffee house in the basement of Merrity Hall, open to any students day and night, to discuss the political and theological matters of the day, Blum quickly expressed his displeasure to President Raynor: “I would hate to see the campus ministry dissipate its time and efforts, and endanger its usefulness in the area of the spiritual life of the students, by involvement in political issues which would seem to be beyond its proper mission, to say nothing of its competence.”\footnote{Blum to John P. Raynor, S.J., July 3, 1970, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Raynor, Rev. John, S.J., 1965-1973.”} Had the campus ministry’s coffee house been geared toward encouraging Marquette students to become political activists on behalf of school choice, it is difficult to imagine Blum fighting the idea. Here Philpott and Anderson’s notion of “Catholic political liberalism” is handy in resolving what seems like Blum’s anti-political hypocrisy. Blum viewed the grassroots political activism of students with alarm, probably seeing it as a kind of virus caught from the secular schools. Whereas Blum believed that the Catholic parents who fought in the public square for their constitutional right to religious freedom were acting in accord with Catholic teaching. He would not have said the same of the students’ activism, especially if it involved breaking laws or even threatening to overthrow the constitutional order entirely.
The new governance model at Marquette accelerated the university’s modernization in terms of faculty recruitment and expectations. For some Jesuits, this called their job security into question. No longer was it assumed that Jesuits would automatically have spaces on department faculties. The men had to compete with lay scholars for appointments, and they were judged by the standards of mainstream academia, which increasingly emphasized research and publication over teaching. By the early 1970s, Virgil Blum belonged to a waning sub-group of faculty members on Jesuit university campuses—Jesuits who were renowned teachers but who did not publish extensively in academic journals or assume leadership positions within their professional groups. A former colleague of Blum’s who joined Marquette’s political science department in 1971 recalled, “[Blum] was not a traditional kind of scholar and nothing like you would have today in the department or even as some of us were when I came. So far as I know he didn’t present papers at conventions. He wouldn’t attend political science meetings. He really didn’t write serious academic pieces.”

Blum, like some of his brother Jesuits, did not fit the new mold of the successful university professor. Blum became aware of this during his final years of teaching. In 1974 he was angry (and undoubtedly hurt) when he learned that his annual salary increase was lower than others in the department. It appeared that his non-academic services to the university, the civic community, and the Catholic community no longer carried the weight they once had.

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478 A very notable exception at Marquette was Rev. Francis Paul Prucha, S.J., the leading scholar of the history of governmental relations with American Indians and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in history.
479 Blum to Robert G. Gassert, S.J., April 26, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 1, folder title “Correspondence, Gassert, Rev. Robert G., S.J., 1974-1978.”
Blum’s prophesy from 1970 seemed to be coming true: as a faculty member, he increasingly saw himself like a second-class citizen at a ‘strange’ university.480

Amidst all these discomfiting changes at home, Blum’s crusade abroad in the public square for educational freedom should have provided him with comfort and distraction, and to some extent it did. But the pace of progress was slow, and the fight on behalf of public aid for non-public schoolchildren was encountering lethal obstacles. The national movement that Blum had helped to launch would founder by the early 1970s.

The decline of CEF

As the 1960s progressed, Citizens for Educational Freedom appeared to be gaining momentum. Its lobbying efforts had helped produce tangible benefits for children attending non-public schools. At the federal level, President Johnson’s ESEA legislation included aid provisions that applied to non-public schoolchildren, and there was hope that President Nixon’s administration would be even more sympathetic. A string of victories at the state level seemed to bear out Blum’s endorsement of the legislative route over the judicial route. Advocates in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Minnesota enjoyed success with a new kind of public aid legislation, the “purchase of service” arrangement, in which government contracted with local non-public schools to teach the children subjects that were common to both public and non-public schools.481 Other states were making

480 During his final years in the political science department, Blum resisted efforts by the younger faculty to modernize the department. Blum’s former colleague, Jack Johannes, explained how Marquette’s department became somewhat polarized between traditionalists who focused on normative political theory (e.g., What should politics be like? What is the best system?) and those who treated political science as a science that should concentrate instead on empirical descriptive claims (i.e., How does politics work?). Not surprisingly, given the nature of his formation in the Society of Jesus, Blum emerged as a leader of the traditionalist perspective. He tried to keep the department from hiring faculty that would move it in the other direction. Blum was especially suspicious of quantifiers. See John P. Johannes, interview by William Fliss, January 7, 2021.

481 Personally, Blum was not a fan of purchase-of-service agreements; he much preferred tuition grants. Blum believed that the purchase-of-service model gave the public school bureaucracy too much power over
progress toward this kind of legislation, as well as progress on an assortment of fair bus transportation bills and even bills for tuition grants for elementary and secondary students.⁴⁸² CEF received a boost in 1967 when the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) decided to formally endorse the organization.⁴⁸³ NCEA in turn encouraged bishops and diocesan school superintendents to aid CEF. Despite these favorable trends, by the 15th anniversary meeting of CEF’s National Board in 1974, the group would effectively be moribund. Causes for this were both internal and external. Not all the parties involved in the movement would have agreed on an explanation for its decline. Blum, of course, had his own opinion.

All CEFers who had filled leadership roles would have acknowledged the fact that internal disagreements undermined the group’s effectiveness. The establishment of a Washington D.C. headquarters with a full-time paid staff was ultimately a failure. ESEA did not become a stepping-stone to greater federal aid. It proved difficult for non-public students to take advantage of ESEA, and the administration of the legislation moved toward giving block grants to state boards of education to be spent within the states, a baleful development in Blum’s mind.⁴⁸⁴ CEF was never able to hire a successful executive director for its national headquarters. An adversarial spirit arose between the national office and the state organizations. The state federations questioned the

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competence and effectiveness of the national office. Paul Brayer, leader of New York’s CEF, told the national president, “Certainly the national office has not proven itself worthy of our efforts. Personally, I refuse to work hard to raise funds to pay an exorbitant salary to a fund raiser.” Brayer’s comment reflects that fact that national CEF relied for its existence on the state groups sending a portion of their own revenue to Washington. Over time the stream of funds became a trickle. Toward the end of 1972, CEF’s president informed the organization that only $3,700 had been received from the states that year, compared to $35,000 in 1971 and $55,000 the year before. In 1966 Blum had tried to bring the state federations into line by proposing an amendment to CEF’s constitution that would have granted the Board of Trustees the power to appoint state presidents and to approve state board members, a move that, had it succeeded, would have undermined state morale even further. The bottom line, though, was that without adequate funding the national office was limited in what it could accomplish and therefore appeared increasingly impotent. CEF’s co-founder Martin Duggan—somewhat marginalized within the national organization since 1965—may have been expressing a bit of schadenfreude when he told Blum, “We presented a far more knowledgeable front and public relations approach when we were a volunteer organization operating out of St. Louis.”

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485 Paul W. Brayer to Stuart Hubbell, April 11, 1966, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 20, folder title “Correspondence, Hubbell, Stuart, 1966.”
486 Dr. Eugene Lindse to Members of the Board of Trustees, State Federation Presidents, and CEF Leaders, November 14, 1972, Box 23, Folder 22 (Citizens for Educational Freedom, 1967-1972), Records of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
488 Martin Duggan to Blum, April 5, 1966, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin & Mae, 1958-1973.”
The debate between the legislative and judicial routes to educational freedom intensified toward the end of the 1960s and engendered great bitterness that led to the emotional burnout of some long-time CEFers. Blum’s legislative strategy had held the course since the group’s founding. It concentrated on amassing legislative victories at all levels of government and gradually winning over public opinion to CEF’s cause by casting it in the rhetoric of religious freedom. Advocates of the judicial route favored selecting an existing discriminatory law and provoking the courts to overturn it, hopefully forcing a U.S. Supreme Court decision that would invalidate similar laws across the country. Blum considered this to be a very dangerous route that would likely backfire and destroy the movement entirely. He did not believe that public opinion was yet on their side, and so he doubted that the justices of the Supreme Court would rule in their favor.

The late 1960s witnessed much judicial activity, but it originated with groups opposed to CEF’s agenda, such as the ACLU and the American Jewish Congress. A consequence of CEF’s success in lobbying for legislation was that the laws it had championed now quickly came under legal challenge from supporters of the strict separation of church and state. This dynamic had a demoralizing effect on CEFers in the trenches. A member of the National Executive Committee spoke for many when he wrote in May 1968, “Rather than setting up ducks to be shot down by the opposition, doesn’t it make more sense to take a page out of the opposition’s book and make a positive assault upon existing laws which violate constitutional rights of parents? Let’s for once force the opposition to a defensive posture.”

William Consedine, NCWC’s general counsel, was alarmed at this

489 Robert P. Woodman to Board Members, Executive Members, State Federation Presidents, May 1, 1968, Box 86, Folder 26 (Organizations: Citizens for Educational Freedom), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) General Counsel/Legal Department, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
development. He and Blum agreed that rash legal challenges were a bad idea. CEF would remain on the legislative course, but the internal debate was long and acrimonious and led some CEFers to sour on the organization and drop out.

Adding to these internal factors that contributed to CEF’s decline were external forces working against the organization. One seems to have been Catholic public opinion. Catholic parents never supported CEF in near the numbers that Blum had expected. He attributed this mostly to the authoritarianism that permeated Catholicism, which inhibited the laity from thinking like democrats and realizing that they had constitutional rights that should be defended through pressure group politics. Blum also blamed hostile groups such as POAU and the ACLU for framing the educational debate in terms of the separation of church and state, a framework that American Catholics allowed themselves to be “brainwashed” into accepting. Blum believed CEF provided clarity, and he struggled to understand why the Catholic community in the United States did not rally around his cause. He eventually concluded that it was because lay Catholics acted politically only if their parish priests and the bishops led them to it. Through his writings and his speaking engagements, Blum tried to snap Catholics out of this habit and motivate them to become part of the democratic process. Blum’s rhetoric grew blunter over time. In 1972 he published a book with the unflattering title, Catholic Parents,

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490 William R. Consedine to Mr. James O. Brennan, July 19, 1968, Box 86, Folder 26 (Organizations: Citizens for Educational Freedom), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) General Counsel/Legal Department, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C
491 See for example, John Vanden Berg to Blum, March 4, 1972, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 28, folder title “Board Meeting, 1972.”
**Political Eunuchs**, a work he hoped would get parents angry and finally stir them to action.

Blum’s dream of widespread support from the Catholic population was perhaps naïve. The Jesuit himself was a rabid booster for Catholic schooling, but the diverse Catholic community in the United States had never been united behind a parochial educational system. Even during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the era of the Immigrant Church—admired nostalgically by some Catholics today for its devotional fervor and countercultural identity—Catholic support for parochial schools had never been universal, subject instead to regional and ethnic variations.\(^{493}\) The larger-than-life bishops who dominated the dozen largest urban dioceses from roughly 1920-1960 did much to expand the nation’s parochial school systems: In 1959, 59 percent of Catholic parishes in the United States had a school attached to them, up from only 35 percent forty years earlier.\(^{494}\) However, even in 1965 when Catholic schools had reached their greatest extent (and while CEF enjoyed its heyday) the nation’s parochial schools were educating only 47 percent of the U.S. Catholic population, meaning that over half of the eligible children attended public schools.\(^{495}\) Of all problems facing parochial schools in the twentieth century, finances was the most ubiquitous, making the prospect of public funding attractive for Catholic educators like Blum, especially with parents’ rising expectations for high quality facilities and instruction. The Jesuit seems to have operated under the assumption that millions of Catholic parents would naturally choose to transfer


\(^{494}\) Ibid., 397.

their children to a parochial school if public funding became available. Such an assumption would help explain Blum’s rising frustration with Catholic parents. It was as if in Blum’s mind the parents were too dense to understand that the very thing they wanted (i.e., to educate their children in a parochial school) was within their grasp if only they could get it into their thick skulls that the solution lay in becoming first-class citizens and embracing the democratic process by throwing support behind CEF, finally heeding the advice Blum had been preaching for years.

Blum may have misunderstood the Catholic population. It is possible that most Catholic parents were simply unmoved by CEF’s rhetoric or by Blum’s writings when they encountered them, being satisfied with the local public school and content to let their children attend there while remaining members of the local parish. A look at the sociological data from the period reveals ambiguity on this issue. Andrew Greeley (1928-2013) was the leading social scientist studying Catholic attitudes toward education during the 1960s and 1970s. Greeley was a priest and sociologist at the University of Chicago. During 1963-1964 Greeley and his colleagues surveyed a large random sample of Catholic adults on a range of issues, including parochial schooling, and then repeated a modified version of the survey a decade later. Both surveys revealed significant support among the population for federal aid to parochial education. In the first survey, 73 percent of Catholics believed that the federal government should give money to religious schools to pay teachers’ salaries and to construct new facilities, a number that

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rose to 76 percent a decade later. But support for public funding in principle did not necessarily indicate a parent’s desire to use a parochial school for her own child. There is a difference between asking a question along the lines of “Do you support government funding for parochial schools?” and asking “If you are a Catholic parent with a child in a public school and public funding became available that allowed you to afford a parochial school or that enabled a school to be built near you, would you transfer your child out of the public educational system?” Getting at that answer would have required a different survey, one that was never administered.

If Blum misunderstood the U.S. Catholic population, then the situation ironically lends credence to the Jesuit’s assertion that judges always looked to public opinion before ruling on cases. After all, why would U.S. Supreme Court justices like Hugo Black and William Douglas be expected to rule in favor of public aid for non-public schooling when most Catholic parents did not even embrace parochial schools? With commentators from inside the church, Blum among them, publicly debating the value of parochial school systems in the late 1960s, the U.S. Catholic population hardly presented a united front to outside observers.

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497 Greeley, McCready and McCourt, *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church*, 240.

498 Even though Greeley was a strong believer in Catholic schools, he and Blum were not close. Greeley did not support public funding for parochial education, his views made clear in William E. Brown and Andrew M. Greeley, *Can Catholic Schools Survive?* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970), 151-160. Greeley feared that public funding would bring public regulation with it, which would erode Catholic identity over time. Correspondence between the two men was minimal. Blum wrote to Greeley in 1972 to praise a column he had written about the subtle anti-Catholicism at work in the United States. The following year, Blum wrote Greeley again to inform him of the founding of the Catholic League and Greeley replied with a brief thank you letter, commenting that such a group was long overdue. It does not appear that Greeley ever initiated an exchange with Blum. See Blum to Greeley, November 3, 1972, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 3, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1970-1973” and Greeley to Blum, May 24, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 5, “Correspondence, Presidential, 5/1973-12/1973.”
Another external force working against Blum’s movement was the growing anti-tax sentiment among Americans in the 1960s. The anti-tax movement would achieve its fullest expression in the 1970s in the form of Howard Jarvis’s campaign for Proposition 13 in California, but an anti-tax consciousness had already been building in reaction to increased postwar spending at all levels of government.\(^{499}\) In 1967 Blum grumbled to the Duggans that a *Milwaukee Journal* poll revealed that 26 percent of area Catholics opposed bus rides for parochial school kids specifically because they feared their taxes would increase as a result.\(^{500}\) If even the Catholics were concerned about this, then the sentiment was sure to be higher among non-Catholics being asked to spend on parochial schoolchildren. A CEFer stepping down from the National Board in 1975 groaned, “For the parents of the 45 million children in government schools, C.E.F. not only does not satisfy a want, but represents a threat (additional taxes).”\(^{501}\) When Wisconsin CEF campaigned for state tuition grants in 1970, it argued that since educating a child in a parochial school cost so much less than in a public school, the closing of insolvent parochial schools would produce a flood of students into the public schools, increasing taxes even more.\(^{502}\) In other words, taxpayers were better off supporting children in the cheaper non-public schools than to see those schools close. It was a clever way to turn the tables on taxpayer critics, but anti-tax sentiment remained a problem, nevertheless.


\(^{500}\) Blum to Martin and Mae Duggan, February 2, 1967, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 19, folder title “Correspondence, Duggan, Martin & Mae, 1958-1973.”


Virgil Blum settled on the church’s hierarchy as even more to blame than Catholic parents for CEF’s decline. If the Catholic laity was as culturally fettered as Blum imagined, then the clergy’s duty in the wake of Vatican II was to encourage and educate them. Believing that the priests would act only if their bishops pressured them, Blum repeatedly reached out to the American episcopacy, trying to get them to make support of CEF a priority within their dioceses. As CEF’s financial situation worsened in the late 1960s, Blum became increasingly desperate to have the bishops contribute directly to the organization. By 1970 Wisconsin CEF relied upon a contribution from the Milwaukee Archdiocese of 20 cents per child, levied from the parishes with schools, to make payroll. The eventual withdrawal of this contribution practically destroyed the state chapter. Blum’s bitterness boiled over in a letter to an ally at the University of Minnesota Law School:

You see, I symbolize the laity in CEF; that’s why I’m not trusted. After heading CEF for more than ten years in Wisconsin and winning more than $10 million worth of benefits for private elementary, secondary and higher education in Wisconsin, my own archbishop refused to talk to me, and the same is true of the local Catholic superintendent. Gratitude—they don’t know the meaning of the word.

Blum’s angry outburst hints at a deeper resentment he felt toward the American bishops in the wake of Vatican II. Simply put, he viewed them as hypocrites. For all the Council’s talk about empowering the laity, when push came to shove, the American hierarchy did not want to give its flocks real power. Earlier, Blum had told a CEF leader in California,

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503 An excellent representative example is Blum’s letter to Archbishop John Dearden, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, July 21, 1967, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 18, folder title “Correspondence, Cousins, Archbishop William, 1968-1972.”
505 Blum to Mr. David W. Louisell, Esq., July 7, 1972, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 11, folder title “Correspondence, Minnesota, 1971-1974.”
“[N]either the hierarchy nor their lieutenants are at all willing to allow the laity to become involved in anything that touches things of interest to the Church, unless they can keep reins on the laity.... They are not yet willing to support the organization and expansion of an interest group which they cannot control....”

Blum came to believe that his association in the minds of the bishops with the danger of lay power sharing had rendered him *persona non grata* among the hierarchy.

When assessing the reasons for CEF’s decline, the most immediate cause was undoubtedly the impact of adverse court rulings. Blum kept a close eye on education-related litigation in all the states and he showed his pragmatism by advising leaders on how best to craft their legislation to weather the courts and how to respond in ongoing cases. For example, by 1968 Blum had stopped advocating voucher legislation because he did not believe such laws could survive judicial scrutiny anywhere, especially since the public education establishment viewed them as an existential threat and would spend whatever it took in legal fees to defeat vouchers.

When the New York law that provided textbooks at state expense to non-public schools came under legal attack, Blum coached Catholic leaders involved in the case on how best to downplay the dogmatic reputation of Catholic religious teaching and stress instead its ecumenical diversity in a post-Vatican II world. He told them, “It is well to remember that a substantial majority of this court have a revulsion against doctrinaire and absolutist postures.”

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506 Blum to Eugene E. Bleck, M.D., October 27, 1970, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 7, folder title “Correspondence, California, 1967-1970.”


508 Blum to Donohue, Tobin, Molloy, Kelly, Consedine, Davitt, McCarren, Roch, January 22, 1968, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 13, folder title “Correspondence, New York, 1968-1975.”
best efforts, the judicial tide turned against his crusade, as the U.S. Supreme Court came to embrace a strictly separationist position on church/state issues.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s rulings on aid for non-public elementary and secondary education can be divided between two periods of activity separated by a long gap of years. The Everson decision of 1947 kicked things off in the postwar era. Here the Court upheld a New Jersey law providing bus transportation for non-public schoolchildren—a victory of sorts for Catholics—however, Justice Black’s majority decision ominously invoked language supporting a high wall of separation between church and state. The following year in McCollum v. Board of Education (1948) the Court affirmed an impregnable wall between church and state by striking down a released-time arrangement in Champaign, Illinois, whereby public-school students had been released from their classes to attend religious instruction taught onsite by visiting clergy. McCollum handed separationists a resounding victory, the surety of which was muddied a few years later in Zorach v. Clausen (1952), which saw the Court uphold a different released-time arrangement in New York, the chief difference between the two being that the classes in New York were not held on the public-school campus. Taken together these cases constituted an ambiguous legacy. After Zorach followed a period of sixteen years when the Supreme Court never chose to address a case of aid to non-public elementary or secondary education. Passage of ESEA in 1965, with its provisions for aid

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510 For more on the Everson decision see the discussion in the previous chapter.
to non-public schools, motivated separationists to mount fierce challenges that the
Supreme Court could not ignore. Separationists won a key procedural victory in *Flast v.
Cohen (1968)*, which overturned an earlier ruling that had denied standing to individual
taxpayers who tried to sue in their capacity as taxpayers. To the chagrin of CEFers, *Flast*
opened the door to taxpayer lawsuits on spending bills that opponents argued violated the
Establishment clause. The laws that CEFers had helped to pass at the state level came
under attack from the opposition. Tempering the separationists’ victory in *Flast,*
however, was another decision handed down on the same day, called *Board of Education
v. Allen.* This was the case alluded to earlier in which Blum offered advice to Catholic
leaders. *Allen* involved a law in New York that provided textbooks to non-public
schoolchildren. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the textbook law on the grounds that its
primary effect was a public purpose, not a religious one. *Allen* was a victory for the
accommodationists, and it provided encouragement for CEFers who favored the judicial
route.

Unfortunately for CEF and Blum, separationists got the ruling they had been
hoping for a few years later in a landmark case called *Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971)*, which
struck down New York’s purchase-of-services law. The decision was far reaching
because the Court established three criteria that future laws would have to meet in order
to pass judicial scrutiny. Known collectively as the Lemon Test these criteria declared
that the law (1) must have a secular legislative purpose; (2) that its primary effect must
neither advance nor prohibit religion; and (3) that it must avoid excessive governmental
entanglements with religion. Together these criteria raised high the wall of separation,
making it very difficult for accommodationist laws to pass muster. *Lemon* was the case
that Blum had feared for years. In the words of one historian, “Over the next decade the Court administered blow after blow to advocates of government aid to elementary and secondary parochial schools, leaving the defenders of such assistance with nothing but a small amount of pocket change, as opposed to the substantial public funds they had imagined would be forthcoming.”

Of these rulings in the wake of *Lemon*, Blum singled out *Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty v. Nyquist* (1973) as the most devastating. The *Nyquist* decision ruled against tuition grants and tax credits, two policies for which Blum had held out great hope. Both provided significant primary aid on behalf of non-public education as opposed to auxiliary aid in the form of services like free bus transportation. By striking down tuition grants and tax credits in *Nyquist*, the U.S. Supreme Court destroyed morale among CEF’s leaders and parents. In 1975 Blum wrote of CEF to an ally, “I regret to inform you that the organization is all but dead.”

**A new direction**

Virgil Blum resigned from the board of trustees and executive committee of Citizens for Educational Freedom following their meeting in October 1974. It was the 15th anniversary of the organization that Blum had helped to create, reduced by now to a shell of its former self. CEF would limp on, with the Duggans eventually reasserting their role in the organization by filling the leadership vacuum created by the departure of Blum and his closest allies. But even before that 1974 meeting Blum had already moved on in a new direction, one that he had discerned after careful reflection on his experiences in the

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512 Blum to Eugene E. Bleck, M.D., May 16, 1975, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 16, folder title “Correspondence, Bleck, Eugene E., 1971-1975.”
public arena over the previous twenty years. Blum was not giving up the fight for God-centered education in the United States. The man from Defiance would never surrender. Instead, Blum was re-conceptualizing the struggle.

Blum still kept tabs on CEF’s activities. The U.S. Supreme Court may have struck down tax credits and tuition grants for elementary and secondary non-public school parents and children, but educational vouchers had never been tested in the high court. In 1975 Blum suggested to a CEFer that there was a possibility that the public might now become sold on vouchers given the increasing unhappiness being expressed about the quality of the nation’s public-school systems. However, Blum would not seek to lead that fight directly. He had concluded that such a battle could never be won unless a larger cultural shift took place in the United States. Blum emerged from the 1960s with the belief that the secular drift he had been battling against his entire career had reached a tipping point. Secular humanism was now poised to become the dominant cultural value system in American society; for Blum this boiled down to the belief that “man is self sufficient, that he needs not God, that he can create for himself a paradise on earth.” Blum believed that human beings, left to their own devices, would never create a paradise. Blum feared the emergence of an omnipotent secular state that would eradicate religion from American life.

In order to succeed, secular humanism needed to overcome the Catholic Church. By the early 1970s Blum believed that anti-Catholicism was on the rise. He now loved to quote the Yale Professor and conservative intellectual, Peter Vierick, who had described

513 Ibid.
514 Blum to Chester J. Blechinger, March 18, 1971, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1970-1973.”
Catholic baiting as the anti-Semitism of the liberals. Blum looked to the American Jewish community for inspiration. The B’nai B’rith and the American Jewish Congress—groups Blum had long admired despite their being his opponents in the school choice struggles—became models to the Jesuit for how an embattled minority group might very effectively oppose deeply entrenched bigotry. Blum also drew inspiration from the black civil rights movement. As early as 1962 he asked a correspondent, “Under the N.A.A.C.P. the negro has made undreamed of advances, why can't we Catholics use the same methods and make the country do justice to us…?”

Blum tended to equate the plight of Catholics in American society with that of African Americans.

Virgil Blum embraced the identity politics flowing out of the 1960s and moved to build an organization of much greater scope than CEF, one that would unite American Catholics in defense of their civil rights and ultimately serve as a bulwark against the complete domination of secular liberalism. Blum still believed that educational freedom was of paramount importance. He linked the survival of Catholic schools with the survival of American democracy: The country needed a strong Catholic Church in order to safeguard its democracy, but the church would remain only as strong as its school system. Blum now believed that one could never make progress on educational freedom without first getting to the heart of the problem, which was the underlying anti-Catholicism in American culture. Victory in future court rulings on Catholic education depended upon relentlessly exposing and rooting out anti-Catholicism in American life. Whether or not the Catholic community in the United States would rally to Blum’s new organization remained to be seen.


On a cloudy Monday in May 1973, Father Virgil C. Blum, S.J. sat at a press conference in the Sheraton-Carlton Hotel in Washington D.C. listening to attorney Stuart Hubbell announce the creation of a new organization to achieve freedom and equality for American Catholics: The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Hubbell was the League’s executive director. Jesuit Father Blum was the new organization’s president and the man most responsible for its founding. Blum had assembled the Catholic League in less than four months, and he had written the statement that Hubbell now read to the assembled reporters. At a time in life when many people look expectantly toward retirement, the 60-year-old Jesuit professor of political science at Marquette University was assuming the presidency of a fledgling, national organization with enormous aspirations. Part anti-defamation league, part civil rights group, the Catholic League was intended to aid the American Catholic community at a crucial moment in its history.

Blum’s statement to the press described a wave of anti-Catholicism that had gained momentum in American society in recent years. Catholic beliefs and practices were under increasing attack from a hostile secular media and entertainment industry. Government agencies were distributing instructional materials to schools that contained policy prescriptions directly counter to Catholic teachings. Most egregiously, the American judiciary had singled out Catholics for discrimination in a

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string of rulings. The solution was resistance, and the Catholic League was prepared to show the way. Blum called upon American Catholics to abandon their customary meekness toward the political process. By educating themselves about their rights and organizing to pursue them, the nation’s 50 million Roman Catholics could realize the religious freedom that was their birthright under the U.S. Constitution.

The Catholic League was the culmination of Blum’s public career. Although Blum never used the term culture war, he had been participating in one since the early 1940s when he decided to devote his ministry to the preservation of Catholic education in the United States. For Blum the creeping secular influence of modern liberalism posed the gravest internal threat to U.S. culture. The Catholic Church was the bulwark keeping this secularization at bay—the standard around which believers of all stripes could rally—but the Church’s survival depended upon a vibrant Catholic educational system that would produce well-formed lay citizens and serve as a seed bed for future vocations to the religious life. Catholic education always remained the issue closest to Blum’s heart. Its survival was the crux, the decisive point. For this reason, Blum had focused his ministry on convincing Catholics to exercise their right as citizens to secure public funding for parochial education. Blum encouraged non-Catholics to join in the struggle, most notably through CEF; however, the U.S. Catholic school system so dwarfed the efforts of other denominations—it was the largest private educational endeavor in human history—that it remained for Blum the most important player in the struggle. Blum carried with him a prejudice against public schools that dated back to his formative years in Defiance, Iowa; but over time Blum shifted from criticizing a
public educational system controlled by Protestants to one he believed to be controlled by secular humanists. Blum welcomed the idea of other religious groups expanding their own school systems in alliance with Catholics.

The Catholic League marked a change in the scope of Blum’s public ministry, not in its goal. Blum had come to realize that educational freedom for Catholics could never be won in isolation from the larger cultural struggle. Everything was woven together. Blum understood the United States to have been founded on religious sensibilities, and he believed the survival of democracy depended upon the preservation of moral principles rooted in a belief in God and the inalienable rights that come from God. The Judeo-Christian tradition needed to be preserved, and Catholics had a duty to lead the struggle. Catholics constituted a quarter of the U.S. population, a potentially influential power bloc. Secularists recognized the power of the Church and sought to assail its teachings and undermine its influence. Catholics could not sit idly by and let this happen. The Catholic League became Blum’s solution to the problem.

The League’s formation

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights came together in less than four months, but the idea had been taking shape in Blum’s mind for at least two years. In January 1971 Blum hosted dinner for two visiting friends at Milwaukee’s John Ernst Café, a popular restaurant with the Marquette crowd. His dinner companions were Jesuits

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Kenneth Baker and John Navone. Baker had recently served a short and controversial stint as President of Seattle University where his uncompromising stand against student activists won Blum’s praise. Baker now served as editor-in-chief of the conservative *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*. Father Navone was a theologian at the Jesuits’ Gregorian University in Rome and a frequent contributor to Baker’s journal. The three men commiserated with each other over the threat they saw in the wider cultural rebellion coming out of the 1960s. Traditional authority was being challenged at every turn. Individualism had always been a respected American trait, but now it was being taken to a new level and celebrated to an unprecedented degree. Freedom of expression crossed the boundaries of good taste, and ideas and symbols once afforded deference—including those associated with religious traditions—were now open to ugly ridicule. The Catholic Church bore the brunt: its teachings under scurrilous attack; its cultural trappings defamed. The Jesuits diners agreed that at least two Catholic pressure groups were needed in the United States, one defensive in nature to counter defamation, the other offensive in nature—along the lines of the NAACP—to battle for the rights of Catholics in an increasingly hostile society.

The matter rested there until late June 1971 when the U.S. Supreme Court delivered its decision in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, striking down New York’s purchase-of-services law and establishing a formidable test for any future funding measures that included schools run by religious denominations. *Lemon* was the decision Blum had

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long feared during his years battling for CEF, one that would raise the wall of separation between church and state to an unscalable height. Within a fortnight Blum mailed a letter to every bishop in the United States alerting them to this outrage. He likened the Lemon decision to Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) which had downgraded African Americans to second-class citizens in the name of public peace and good order. Now Catholics faced the same treatment. Blum called on the bishops to encourage formation of an offensively minded political action group like the NAACP along with an accompanying defensive anti-defamation group.

Blum’s calls for action grew over the next year. They were fed by an event in the Wisconsin Legislature in the fall of 1971 when a bill supported by CEF encountered fierce opposition. It would have offered tuition tax credits to parents sending their children to non-public schools. Blum detected anti-Catholic vitriol in the opponents’ rhetoric. In a letter to Catholic pastors across Wisconsin, Blum declared,

> A veteran representative of 20-years’ experience in the Assembly told me that he had never heard so much bigotry in Assembly debate except on the open housing bill…. After witnessing such anti-Catholic diatribes for the greater part of five weeks during sporadic debate on our bill, I am more convinced than ever that Catholics must have an Anti-Defamation League to defend their rights as citizens.  

Blum’s letter to the U.S. bishops had garnered some sympathetic replies, but the prelates took no collective action in the wake of it. Blum had no interest in forming such a group himself, but he encouraged others to start one. When a newly formed Catholic

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520 Blum to all U.S. Bishops, July 8, 1971, Blum Papers, sub-series 3, box 9, folder title “Catholic Parents—Political Eunuchs (with bishops), 1971-1973.”

521 Blum to Catholic pastors, November 8, 1971, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 29, folder title “Executive Committee Minutes and Documents, 1965-1972.”
lay group based in New York City called PRO ECCLESIA declared in summer 1972 that the time had come for a Catholic anti-defamation league, Blum wrote to its president with great enthusiasm, encouraging him to form one.\textsuperscript{522} Blum was repeating the pattern he had followed in the late 1950s that had eventually produced CEF: i.e., offering encouragement to anyone who showed interest in forming a group. If multiple Catholic anti-defamation groups sprang into being, so much the better. The important thing was that pressure be brought to bear soon on behalf of American Catholics.

The most promising move toward a Catholic anti-defamation league took shape on the west coast of the United States in late 1972, apparently on the initiative of Kenneth Baker who had been one of Blum’s companions at dinner the year before. Baker had raised the issue with a colleague from the Oregon Province, Daniel Lyons, S.J., who enthusiastically embraced the idea of forming a league. Lyons was a prominent and energetic conservative Catholic journalist whose exploits by age 53 had already inspired a glowing biography.\textsuperscript{523} More important than Lyons’s energy was his access to funding. Lyons worked for Twin Circle Publishing Company, owner of Baker’s Homiletic and Pastoral Review. Twin Circle had been established in 1967 by millionaire entrepreneur Patrick Frawley, who had made his fortune building the Paper Mate pen company and later Schick, the first manufacturer of stainless-steel shaving razors.\textsuperscript{524} Frawley was a devout Catholic who seems to have begun his media enterprise (he also owned the National Catholic Register) in the wake of Vatican II to provide a platform for his

\textsuperscript{522} Blum to Timothy Mitchell, September 12, 1972, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Personal Correspondence, 1970-1973.”
conservative views. Frawley showed enthusiasm for an anti-defamation league. Blum told Baker that Lyons should call him if there was anything he could do to help. Blum was incensed by *Roe v. Wade* but he also saw it as a valuable opportunity. The extent of the ruling had surprised even pro-choice activists, and it plunged many Catholics into despair. To Blum it was a blow that might rouse Catholics to get involved in the democratic process. He wrote excitedly to his older sibling Sister Roselle—now teaching at a Chicago high school—"NOW THE ABORTION DECISION has finally shocked them [i.e. bishops and laity] into a realization that without organization, without working through the democratic processes we have absolutely no influence on the legislatures and the courts." Blum argued that the *Roe v. Wade* decision singled out Catholics for discrimination when it declared up front that most Protestants and Jews did not believe life began at conception. By isolating Catholic beliefs for refutation, the Court proved itself anti-Catholic in Blum’s mind. The weekend after *Roe’s* announcement found Blum meeting with Patrick Frawley at his

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525 Blum to Kenneth Baker, S.J., November 26, 1972, Blum Papers, sub-series 3, box 9, folder titled “Catholic Parents—Political Eunuchs.”
palatial home in California to plan the new organization and discuss candidates for its board of directors. The initial name for the group, “The Catholic Civil Rights League for Education and Life” revealed the two issues that drove its creation—abortion and religious freedom in education. The name also reflected that fact that it would not be a straight up anti-defamation league but would combine the offensive and defensive elements Blum had elucidated in 1971. In addition to countering defamation of the Church and its beliefs, the new organization would actively battle in the courts for Catholic civil rights.

Considering how the Catholic League came to be so synonymous with Virgil Blum, it is surprising that he did not seek to take charge of the organization from the outset. Blum agreed to serve on its board of directors, but he initially refused the role of chairman of the board, arguing that it should go to a lay Catholic lawyer instead. When Lyons offered Blum the position of executive director, Blum turned it down. He seems to have initially envisioned his role at the League as more advisory in nature, like his relationship had been with CEF. This changed over the course of February to April 1973 as the embryonic Catholic League increasingly became Blum’s organization. This was driven in part by the legal nature of so much of its work. Lawyers would be crucial players in both anti-defamation suits and civil rights advocacy, and Blum had networked extensively within the legal community. By contrast, Kenneth Baker was a theologian and Daniel Lyons a journalist. Moreover, Blum had long been a crusader for some of the League’s objectives. He enjoyed name recognition across the Catholic landscape,

531 Ibid.
especially among the American bishops, some of whom had been hearing from the
defiant Jesuit since the mid-1950s. An important factor for Blum in his own
considerations was the financial backing of Patrick Frawley. One of the weaknesses of
CEF from its beginning had been a lack of money. Blum was loath to sink his time and
energy into another under-funded enterprise. A month after the League’s founding, Blum
told Frawley outright, “Without your moral and financial support, I would never have
become involved in the founding of the League, much less would I have assumed the
presidency.”

Blum took the lead in building the League’s board of directors, drawing upon
allies from CEF to fill some seats. Most importantly, Blum sought to involve Stuart
Hubbell of Michigan. Hubbell was a lawyer and longtime Catholic activist who had
served as president of CEF during its heyday in the mid-1960s. Many of CEF’s leaders
had disappointed Blum when it came to competence and zeal but Hubbell’s reputation in
Blum’s mind remained undiminished. The two men had become friends and Blum was
deeply saddened when Hubbell resigned from CEF’s board in 1970. Now, Hubbell
responded enthusiastically to Blum’s call, seconding the need for an organization like the
Catholic League. It was Hubbell who suggested that the group’s name be changed to its
final iteration: The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. The lawyer from
Michigan accepted the role of executive director that Lyons had originally offered Blum,
while Blum gravitated toward the role of League President, a position that encompassed

532 Blum to Patrick Frawley, June 16, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title
“Correspondence, Frawley, Patrick, 1973-1974.”
533 Blum to Stuart Hubbell, April 15, 1970, Blum Papers, sub-series 4, box 10, folder title
“Correspondence, Michigan, 1968-1971.”
534 Blum to Stuart Hubbell, February 16, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 5, folder title
“Correspondence, Hubbell, Stuart, 1973.”
the role of CEO and would be ratified at the first board meeting in May. Over the weekend of March 17-18 Blum visited Hubbell in Traverse City where the two men hammered out many League details. “Stuart Hubbell is a tremendous guy,” Blum reported to Daniel Lyons, “he is totally committed to the objectives of CLRCR, is a competent lawyer in religious and civil rights, is highly regarded by the bishops of Michigan.”

The stage was quickly being set for the Catholic League’s introductory press conference on May 14th. According to its by-laws at that time, the League’s primary objective would be “defense against the defamation of Catholics wherever it occurs.” Its other objectives were:

- “Defense of the rights of the family, including the right to life for the unborn and the aged, the right of effective education against the promoters of addictive drugs, and the rights of parents in the education of their children.”
- “Defense of the rights of conscience in the practice of medicine, nursing and other professions.”
- “Defense of the right of religious institutions to self-government, and to determine their religious orientation matters of policy and employment.”

Blum later described these objectives with soaring rhetoric on the cover of the first issue of the Catholic League Newsletter. He began by saying, “Like Martin Luther King, the Catholic League has a dream. It dreams of the time when Catholics in America will be treated with respect and justice—by the mass media, civic and political groups, legislatures and courts.” Blum then expounded upon the League’s objectives in a style

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that aped Dr. King’s famous address from a decade earlier. Such a move might have struck some readers as being insensitive; but it illustrated a thought that had long been lodged in Blum’s mind—American Catholics were a persecuted minority like African Americans, and therefore it was fitting that Catholics claim a place within the contemporary struggle for civil rights.

**Finding the middle of the road**

The Catholic League was an organization that claimed to represent American Catholics everywhere, but it emerged during a divisive period in U.S. Catholicism. A Catholic civil war had broken out between progressives and traditionalists in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, and the story of the Catholic League illustrates this division tearing at U.S. Catholicism. Blum’s personal sympathies lay more with the traditionalists, but he believed that the Catholic League would only be effective in battling its external foes—either those of a secular or of a Fundamentalist Protestant variety—if it showed a united front. The best way to achieve unity was for the Catholic League to remain silent on internal issues that divided Catholics such as liturgical practices, birth control,

538 Blum’s traditionalist proclivities brought him into contact with many like-minded Catholics, although he spent little time himself complaining about Church matters. His correspondents were not so reticent. Some traditional Catholics viewed progressives with disdain with disdain bordering on contempt. An illustrative example appears in a letter to Blum from Barbara Nauer, English professor at Loyola University in New Orleans. When Nauer visited the New York City office of progressive *Commonweal* in 1976 in the hope that the magazine might support her effort to form a traditionally inclined Catholic Writers’ Guild, she received a bland reception. Nauer found herself shouting at them, eventually fleeing *Commonweal’s* office in anger and frustration and finding solace at the noon Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral where “an old priest was thundering the readings…in a voice that knew they were true.” Nauer went on to tell Blum, “How I blessed that old priest. Sitting there in his thunder I figured out how it is with the “Commonweal Catholics”: They are not Catholics at all. They have lost the Faith. They are dead branches on the vine. When the times separated the culture-Catholics from the real Catholics, they were the dross. The faithful need not pine for them.”

Nauer’s comments reveal the temptation among conservative Catholics—evident still in the twenty-first century—to self-identify as the true Catholics in opposition to false Catholics. See Barbara Nauer to Blum, November 27, 1976, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Presidential, 1976-1980.”
and the ordination of women. Blum and Hubbell sought to structure the organization down the middle of the political road. At the opening press conference Hubbell proclaimed, “We are not a voice of the Catholic church nor do we speak for any particular viewpoint within the Catholic community. Rather we speak for citizens—as citizens—in a pluralistic civil society.” They purposely avoided inflammatory rhetoric that risked turning any Catholics off to the organization.

The involvement of Daniel Lyons, S.J., and to a lesser extent Kenneth Baker, S.J. and Patrick Frawley, posed a problem for the emerging Catholic League. These men were the most vocal boosters for an anti-defamation group in early 1973, but they were also firmly in the traditionalist camp in the minds of discerning Catholics. In March Baker published an editorial in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* calling for an anti-defamation league, and he followed up the call with a letter to the conservative *Wanderer* newspaper in late March as well as a piece in *Triumph*, the arch-traditionalist journal established by L. Brent Bozell, Jr., brother-in-law of William F. Buckley, Jr. Because these calls for an anti-defamation group were coming from publications understood to be right wing viz-a-viz Church politics the League emerged with that association clinging to it. Frawley seems to have recognized the damage he might do to the organization’s image and so withdrew himself from consideration for the board of directors. Notwithstanding, Frawley saw danger in Blum’s approach. “If we are middle of the road, nothing may happen,” he warned the Jesuit, apparently questioning the backbone of liberal Catholics to fight anti-Catholicism.540 Of the three men, Daniel Lyons was the most controversial,

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540 Blum’s notes on telephone conversation with Patrick Frawley, March 21, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Frawley, Patrick, 1973-1974.”
so much so that Frawley himself intervened in April to sever ties between Lyons and the nascent League. Evidently, Lyons had opined publicly that all media networks were run by Jews, a comment that had damaged one of Frawley’s business ventures, incensing the millionaire entrepreneur. As owner of Twin Circle Publishing Company and therefore Lyons’s employer, Frawley had the influence to shut Lyons out of the League. Frawley’s anxiety was not isolated. Another of Blum’s collaborators voiced concern over Lyons, declaring, “His name is mud in NY City.” Originally slated to serve on the League’s board of directors, Lyons disappeared from League activity by the time of the press conference, although he would aid the Catholic League indirectly later that year by sending it the mailing lists for Twin Circle and National Catholic Register. After that, however, Virgil Blum’s interactions with Daniel Lyons ceased completely.

In his quest for the middle of the road, Blum understood that anybody evaluating the Catholic League would begin by studying its board of directors. Boards vary in the amount of actual influence they exert; however, directors are meant to embody an organization in the public mind. Organizations carefully select board members to collectively project a desired image. Blum wanted a mix of board members from across the Catholic ideological spectrum. Conservative directors proved easy to find, liberal

541 Blum’s notes on telephone conversation with Patrick Frawley, April 4, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Frawley, Patrick, 1973-1974.”
544 That Lyons and Blum did not remain in contact may have been due to the fact Lyons met his future wife soon after the Catholic League formed. The two were married in 1975. Lyons remained active in journalism after leaving the Jesuits. See NJ.com, “Former prominent Jesuit priest celebrates 100th birthday in N.J.,” accessed July 28, 2021, https://www.nj.com/hunterdon/2020/08/former-prominent-jesuit-priest-celebrates-100th-birthday-in-nj.html.
directors less so.\textsuperscript{545} This worried Blum. He had told Daniel Lyons, “Both Stuart Hubbell and I feel that we must be extremely careful not to give the liberal press a basis for charging that the Catholic League is a right wing organization. If we were to give them a basis for making the charge they would do everything they could to destroy the credibility of our organization.”\textsuperscript{546} Prominent liberals were hesitant to join the League’s board, sensing perhaps that its organizational drift would be toward internal Church politics and in the direction opposite from their own beliefs. One such person was Donald Campion, S.J., editor-in-chief at liberal \textit{America} Magazine, the Jesuit weekly. He politely declined Blum’s invitation to serve with the somewhat oblique but crystal-clear explanation: “[T]he risk of an unprofitable awkwardness arising out of a conflict between editorial positions of \textit{America} and the policies of a group professedly concerned with controversial issues is too great.”\textsuperscript{547} Despite Blum’s best efforts, the board’s make-up at its founding leaned in the conservative direction. The names of the conservatives were certainly better known.\textsuperscript{548}

The Catholic League’s ideological image worried some bishops as they regarded the new organization. The divide between American Catholics in the pews could also be found within the ranks of the episcopacy.\textsuperscript{549} Some prelates were more open than others to

\textsuperscript{545} Blum also wanted minority representation on the board but claimed to have been unable to find any qualified candidates before the organizational meeting on May 12, 1973. Blum to Board of Directors, October 25, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, Presidential, 5/1973-12/1973.”
\textsuperscript{547} Donald R. Campion, S.J. to Blum, May 10, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Board of Directors, 1973.”
\textsuperscript{548} Blum to Anthony J. Prosen, September 20, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, Presidential, 5/1973-12/1973.”
the winds of change blowing out of Vatican II. Bishop Joseph Brunini of Mississippi, one of the more progressively minded men, asked Bishop James Rausch, General Secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference (NCCB/USCC), for a review of the Catholic League. Rausch sympathized with Brunini: “I have some concern about positions it might take, given the composition of its Board of Directors.” Yet Rausch went on to assure Brunini that “Mr. Stuart Hubbell is a very balanced Catholic.” Rausch assigned Monsignor Olin Murdick, the Education Secretary at USCC, and Robert Lynch to be League liaisons. The two men met with Blum and Hubbell in Chicago in September 1973 and reported back their impressions and recommendations. They acknowledged the “strongly conservative-Catholic” makeup of the League’s board but noted that “it is only advisory and does not really function as a Board.” They lauded the League’s philosophy and objectives and conveyed Blum’s and Hubbell’s assurances that the Catholic League would not address itself to any internal Church matters and would defend the bishops even if an episcopal decision clashed with the League’s wishes. Murdick and Lynch made a point of reporting as favorable the fact that neither Patrick Frawley nor Daniel Lyons, S.J. were directly involved with the organization. The two men also listed some causes for concern, the first


552 Ibid.

553 Lynch would be ordained a priest in 1978 and later elevated to bishop. He would eventually serve as president of NCCB/USCC.

being that “The general unwillingness of liberal Catholics to be associated with this effort almost mandates a conservative Catholic orientation”, something that they feared would not sit well with the more liberally minded USCC staff.\textsuperscript{555} Moreover, should the Catholic League succeed as Blum and Hubbell hoped, it could lead to future tensions stemming from the Church’s lack of control over the organization. Blum himself was also noted as a cause for some concern. Murdick summed up the Jesuit by saying,

\begin{quote}
Father Blum has a tendency to speak his mind – albeit a sharp and clever mind…. Many bishops do not appreciate being lectured to and this Blum has done on occasion in the past. He is not, then, universally loved and respected by the hierarchy. But he is smart; he is loyal to the Church and to the bishops when they give leadership and he can be worked with.\textsuperscript{556}
\end{quote}

Overall, the evaluation of the Catholic League by Murdick and Lynch was positive, or at least hopeful. They recommended close contact as the organization developed. The League certainly met a need for the Catholic community. Many in the hierarchy, regardless of ideological bent, were alarmed at the increasing number of defamatory attacks on Catholic culture in the media and arts. Over the next few years, the USCC came to rely on the Catholic League to occupy a vital niche. Conveniently, this cost the USCC nothing since the League operated on its own and was not tied directly to the Church hierarchy. When the Bishop of St. Petersburg, Charles McLaughlin, wrote to Rausch on behalf of Florida’s bishops requesting formation of a program to defend Catholic social philosophy in the courts, the General Secretary could assure McLaughlin that the Catholic League was filling that role.\textsuperscript{557} By December 1974, the USCC’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item[555] Ibid.
\item[556] Ibid.
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assistant general secretary was telling a diocesan vice-chancellor, “I would highly recommend any support that you could give to the League….the Church needs an independent group like the Catholic League to defend the legal rights of Catholics.”

‘Paper Tiger’ with a letterhead and guts

For the first three years of its existence, the Catholic League consisted essentially of President Virgil Blum, S.J. and Executive Director Stuart Hubbell. It was a two-man show that proved to be a very productive partnership. The indefatigable Jesuit met his match in Hubbell. They needed to be tireless because the Catholic League faced a major challenge from the outset: It began life short of money, a chronic condition that would always make fundraising a top concern. Following the Catholic League’s launch, the desks of Blum and Hubbell became snowed under by hundreds of letters of support and requests for assistance. The League faced high expectations from a vocal minority of American Catholics concerned about the rise of anti-Catholicism in society.

The League’s financial struggles can be traced back to two early developments. One was the withdrawal of Patrick Frawley’s financial support within the first year of the organization’s existence. Frawley’s backing had convinced Blum to commit to the League in the first place, but soon the Jesuit found himself in charge of a fledgling organization as impecunious as CEF had been in 1959. Why Frawley distanced himself from the League is unclear. He had financed the planning meetings in early 1973 and the May press conference in Washington D.C. where he covered travel and lodging for the

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559 How Stuart Hubbell (1927-2010) managed to run the Catholic League while maintaining his own private law practice and helping to raise a family of seven children remains a mystery to this author.
new directors that gathered there. But in the wake of that organizational meeting, Frawley’s funding dissipated. If Blum had hoped that Frawley might play the part of the rich patron behind the scenes periodically pumping cash into the League, he was sorely disappointed. In the summer of 1973, Frawley agreed to help fund League advertising in secular and Catholic newspapers, but he did so with the understanding that the money was a loan to be paid back. Blum’s correspondence with Frawley seems to have largely subsided after 1974 but it remained cordial to the end, offering no evidence of a rift between the men or hinting at why Frawley had departed the scene. Perhaps financial difficulties within his own business empire curtailed Frawley’s enthusiasm for the League; or maybe he was simply exercising the mindset of a venture capitalist—providing seed money for a new enterprise that must rise or fall on its own merits. Whatever the reason, Frawley did provide Blum with a list of wealthy Catholic donors to court; however, Frawley’s behavior dashed any hope that the entrepreneur himself might become the League’s sugar daddy.

The second development that hurt the League financially was its long delay in receiving tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The League’s ability to raise large sums would remain crippled until donors enjoyed a tax deduction on their contributions. Furthermore, the lack of tax-exempt status affected the League’s ability to engage in direct mailing, a newer method of fundraising and consciousness building perfected by conservative strategist Richard Viguerie in the late 1960s. Blum

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560 Blum to Patrick Frawley, March 26, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Frawley, Patrick, 1973-1974.”
had high hopes for direct mailing. Voluntary contributions did accompany many of the letters of support that came to Blum and Hubbell in the summer of 1973, but they amounted to little compared to the sums that might be raised through direct mailing. But without tax-exempt status, the League had to pay a much higher rate for postage. The quest for tax exemption frustrated Blum because he had little control over the process. The League had been incorporated in California by a law firm connected to Patrick Frawley, and the attorneys there were supposed to obtain the necessary exemption. Blum waited expectantly for news through the summer and fall of 1973 only to learn that the firm had not yet even submitted the application. It would not do so until November. Adding to Blum’s vexation, the IRS was very slow to rule. Months after its submission, the application was finally sent to the IRS office in St. Paul for action, only to be eventually passed along to the national office in Washington for a final ruling. Not until June 3rd, 1974—over a year after the League’s unveiling to the public—did Blum receive word that tax exemption had been granted. The impact of this long delay should not be underestimated. If organizations enjoy a window of opportunity immediately after formation—when their messages are new and fresh—then the League was unable to fully exploit any such momentum generated by its appearance in May 1973.

Blum and Hubbell forged ahead despite these setbacks. The Catholic League was the first anti-defamation and civil rights group for Roman Catholics in U.S. history. The two men may have been charting new territory, but they could look to the Anti-

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562 Blum to Patrick Frawley, March 26, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Frawley, Patrick, 1973-1974.”
563 Blum to Board of Directors, June 4, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1974.”
Defamation League of B’nai B’rith (ADL) for inspiration and example. Blum did not hide the fact that he modeled the Catholic League on the ADL. While it angered Blum that most American Jewish groups opposed the thing he desired most—public funding for non-public schoolchildren—he had long admired the solidarity and power exhibited by the Jewish community in the United States. In 1971 Blum harangued his bishops to work toward emulating the Jewish community: “American Jews have organized 80 local interest groups, and 11 national interest groups.... They have had an incalculable influence on public policy-making in the legislatures and courts.” Catholics could learn much from the Jewish community. Blum hoped that the League’s formation might be a first step toward fashioning a similar lobby to defend Catholic interests. That anti-Semitism was universally denounced in the United States was proof for Blum of the Jewish lobby’s effectiveness. He was convinced that if the mockery and derision being heaped upon Catholics were visited instead upon American Jews, the public outcry would be deafening. Blum hoped that one day anti-Catholic remarks in the media and among the liberal intelligentsia might become just as anathema as anti-Semitism. For this to be realized, however, American Catholics needed to unite and bring relentless pressure to bear on offenders.

564 It is to Blum’s credit that he—a staunch cradle Catholic from rural Iowa who had grown up listening to Father Charles Coughlin—showed no signs of anti-Semitism in his vast correspondence. He received anti-Semitic letters from others, including Jesuits, but Blum never echoed or affirmed their views in his replies.
566 Blum envied how the Jewish community seemed to possess powerful antennae that picked up any hint of anti-Semitism and communicated it throughout the body for action. In 1974 Blum shared with General Secretary Rausch at the NCCB/USCC an incident that had occurred recently when the Jesuit addressed the Cardinal Dougherty High School graduation commencement in Philadelphia. Soon after returning to Milwaukee, Blum received a call from Saul Sorrin, local director of the ADL with whom Blum had always enjoyed friendly relations. Sorrin reported that he had received several calls from Jews in Pennsylvania claiming that Blum made derogatory statements. Blum quickly sent over a copy of his talk, which assured Sorrin and put the matter to rest. Blum told Bishop Rausch: “I recount this incident to demonstrate how
The Catholic League differed markedly from the ADL in that it combined anti-defamation work with civil rights legal activity. In effect, the League tried to combine an equivalent of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith plus Leo Pfeffer’s American Jewish Congress into a single organization. During their joint planning sessions in the spring of 1973, Blum and Hubbell had considered founding a separate public interest law firm to handle the legal work; however, they abandoned the idea, fearing that the firm might eventually establish its own purposes and drift away into other activities.\footnote{Stuart Hubbell to Rev. Michael J. Sheehan, December 11, 1973, Unprocessed Material, Box 106, Folder “Organizations: Lay: Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.} Blum desperately wanted a Catholic anti-defamation group to protect his Church. According to Thomas Caldwell, S.J. who lived in Marquette’s Jesuit community at the time, Blum’s attitude was, “I want an organization that will jump in with both feet and raise hell when somebody clobbers the Church.”\footnote{Thomas Caldwell, S.J., interview by William Fliss, January 18, 2017.} But as a political scientist who specialized in legal affairs and taught constitutional law and civil liberties courses, Blum may have viewed the civil rights work as the heart of the Catholic League. The courts would ultimately determine success or failure for the League’s mission. This is not to say the anti-defamation work was unimportant. It contributed to shaping public opinion—“forming the operative ideas of society” as Blum liked to put it— which influenced how jurists ruled. An added benefit was that it supported the expensive legal activities. Blum understood that Catholics were likely to join the League more out a sense of outrage—provoked for example by the cartoon run in City College of New York’s student effectively the Anti-Defamation League works. If perchance I had made a remark derogatory of Jews, certainly the call two days later from the local director of the Anti-Defamation League would have had a very chilling effect on future statements that I might have made regarding Jewish activities in American society.” See Blum to Bishop Rausch, June 23, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 7, folder title “Correspondence, Rausch, James, Most Rev., 1973-1975.”
newspaper in February 1974 depicting a habited nun masturbating with a cross—than out of a calculated desire to overturn an adverse court ruling. Egregious expressions of anti-Catholicism would draw supporters to the League, who in turn would pay the annual dues that subsidized “progressive litigation to protect individual rights and the interest of the Church under the law.”

Under the leadership of Blum and Hubbell, the Catholic League engaged in four categories of activity. The first was Education and Information in which it sought to inform members of the Catholic community about their rights under the law, the extent to which their rights were being violated, the remedies available, and the proper action to be taken. The League’s monthly newsletter was the primary vehicle for this activity, as were articles published in the Catholic and secular presses as well as public talks delivered by League staff and volunteers. The second category of activity was Negotiation. Here the League identified parties responsible for anti-Catholic statements or actions and persuaded them directly to amend their ways. For example, in 1974 the League discovered that the Xerox Corporation had been distributing a booklet on population control to high schools that was offensive to Catholic beliefs. The League approached Xerox, explained the problem, and persuaded the corporation to stop publishing and distributing the booklet. The third category of activity was Confrontation. Here the League took an issue into the public square and tried to rally public opinion to put the offender into a difficult position. An example of this played out in New Orleans soon

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570 These levels are laid out clearly in one of Blum’s talks, “Is the Catholic League Necessary?” Remarks at the Western Catholic Press Association Convention, September 10, 1976, Blum Papers, sub-series 3, Box 5, folder title “Paper presentations.”
after the League’s founding when the new suburb of Pontchartrain-New Town was being developed with strong financial support from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The commissioners planning the suburb had decided to prohibit the establishment of any non-public schools within the community. Blum and Hubbell led a successful public relations campaign that compelled HUD’s secretary to threaten withdrawal of federal funds unless the commissioners removed the restriction. The League’s final category of activity was Litigation where the League came to the defense of the statutory and/or constitutional rights of Catholics and those of other faiths. This inclusion of other faith traditions was important for Blum. From its introductory press conference, the League recognized that “discrimination against any citizen because of his religion ultimately becomes an attack upon all and upon religion itself.”

Despite the presence of ‘Catholic’ in its name, the League was prepared to defend all believers in court. In so doing, Blum understood himself to be engaging in the new spirit of ecumenism that emanated from the Second Vatican Council. This openness also reflected Blum’s abiding concern that secularism was the gravest threat facing U.S. society. A sense of optimism and hope pervaded the Catholic League’s establishment in 1973 and guided its first years under Blum and Hubbell. The future seemed full of possibilities, and the two men hoped to exploit a perceived potential for growth. The delay in obtaining tax-exempt status was a serious blow to fundraising. For its first year

especially, the League operated on a shoe-string budget. Nevertheless, it had an impact in the public square. The League helped to curtail the re-airing of the controversial episodes of the CBS television sitcom *Maude* which advocated a pro-choice position on abortion. The League entered the lists often to protest vulgar treatments of Catholic symbols and practices, leading to retractions and apologies. Hubbell commented, “A ‘Paper Tiger’ has been able to accomplish much by a letterhead and guts.”572 More substantially, the League played a prominent role in defending a Colorado physician named Frank Bolles from a harassment charge in early 1974 for having mailed anti-abortion materials to 2400 residents, a case that Bolles would ultimately win in October 1975. The League also issued an *amicus curiae* in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Wheeler v. Barrera* which would successfully defend the right of disadvantaged children attending church-related schools to receive equal benefits provided through the 1965 ESEA legislation. Blum’s and Hubbell’s hard work earned them a standing ovation from the Board of Directors when it met on the first anniversary of the League’s founding. The Board was filled mostly with Blum loyalists from his CEF days and prominent figures lending their names to the letterhead. It was a weak body that played a loose advisory role at best, a fact that would haunt the organization in the years to come.

**Growing pains**

In Blum’s presidential reports to the Board of Directors in the 1970s, the Jesuit liked to compare the Catholic League to a human person moving through the life cycle. Blum’s goal was to grow the League as quickly as possible, advancing it rapidly from childhood through adolescence into maturity. By the end of its first year, the League had

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572 Minutes of Annual Meeting, May 25, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting, 1974.”
attracted only 6,000 members out of a U.S. Catholic population of nearly 50 million and raised $105,000.00, a paltry sum compared to the annual budget of $6 million enjoyed by the Jewish ADL. Blum did not want his organization to remain, in his words, a “nickel and dime” operation. Unfortunately, the Catholic League struggled to connect with key constituencies. Blum’s own Jesuit fratres showed little interest in the League despite Blum’s firm belief that his apostolate fit perfectly with the evolving ethos of the Society of Jesus. The Catholic League’s efforts to attract the support of U.S. bishops also proved disappointing. Relatedly, support from diocesan priests never met Blum’s expectations. Most significantly, the Catholic League failed to resonate widely with lay Catholics in the pews, a reality that annoyed Blum and left him searching for explanations. Disappointed but undaunted, the Jesuit labored ceaselessly to grow his organization. Frugal management of funds allowed the Catholic League to expand its organization by the end of the decade, although the group would never pass into maturity—at least not in the sense of realizing Blum’s full vision for the League at its formation.

Virgil Blum took very seriously his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the Society of Jesus. For a man as stubborn and single-minded as Blum, the last of these vows, obedience, must have been tested often. Yet Blum never openly defied his superiors. He certainly made his feelings known to them and argued his positions doggedly; but if Blum’s superiors gave him a direct order, he did it and never publicly aired his unhappiness afterward. Blum had no respect for Jesuits who openly defied the authority of their superiors. When William Callahan, S.J. of the New England Province, founder of the radical Quixote Center, published open letters explaining why he could not

573 President’s Report, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1974.”
obey an order from his provincial—one of a chain of events that led to Callahan’s eventual expulsion from the Jesuits—a disgusted Blum sent copies of the letters to a friend, commenting, “the round file is a good depository.” That a man as pugnacious as Blum could submit himself so completely to his religious order shows how profoundly important the Society of Jesus was to Blum’s identity. Not surprisingly, Blum was deeply hurt when his fellow Jesuits exhibited indifference toward the Catholic League.

Disappointment with the Society of Jesus was not new for Blum. Throughout the 1960s he had expressed anger over the lack of Jesuit support for CEF and his work on behalf of non-public schoolchildren. Despite Superior General Arrupe’s request to the American provincials in 1969 that Jesuits back interdenominational groups like CEF, the Society in the United States had shown little support for Blum’s educational efforts, leading Blum to chastise his fellows in a March 1972 letter to the *National Jesuit News*, a newspaper intended as a forum for Jesuits. When his confrontational letter failed to appear in the next issue, Blum pressured the paper to publish it, which it did in May 1972.575 In that letter, Blum accused his fellow Jesuits of being what community organizer Saul Alinsky called “idea people.” They shed copious tears for the disadvantaged in bull sessions but refused to cooperate with groups of concerned citizens in democratic ways to tackle society’s problems. If Blum thought Jesuit support would be different when it came to the Catholic League, he was disappointed. Blum’s entreaties to Jesuit communities throughout the United States, begging for funds for his Catholic

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574 Blum to Joseph Babj, S.J., October 2, 1979, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, Biever, S.J., Rev. Bruce, 1974-1989.”
League, met with meager responses even though his unique apostolate battled on behalf of all Catholics.\textsuperscript{576}

The indifference that most Jesuits displayed toward the Catholic League mystified Blum because he believed he was fulfilling the Society’s mission as well as anybody else. Under Pedro Arrupe’s leadership (1965-1981), which began at the end of the Second Vatican Council, the Society of Jesus transformed itself ideologically from a pre-conciliar bulwark against secular modernity into a post-conciliar agent for social justice. Arrupe’s vision achieved its fullest expression at the Jesuits’ 32\textsuperscript{nd} General Congregation (GC), called for by the Superior General in 1973 and completed in 1975. Blum followed the GC with great interest, and his copy of the English translation of the Congregation’s Documents shows much underlining and marginalia.\textsuperscript{577} Blum found little in the Documents to disagree with. In fact, he clearly emerged from his reading feeling validated in his decision to go out on a limb two years earlier and form the Catholic League.

For Blum the League fit seamlessly into the GC’s marching orders for the world’s 20,000+ Jesuits. The Congregation began its report on Jesuit identity in a spirit of repentance, acknowledging the Society’s own failure at keeping the faith and upholding justice. These two ways—keeping faith and upholding justice—formed an undivided road: One could not truly keep faith without upholding justice. The GC decided that the inseparability of faith and justice should define what Jesuits are and do.\textsuperscript{578} Blum agreed

\textsuperscript{576} Blum to Bruce Biever, S.J., May 30, 1976, Blum Papers, sub-series 1, box 1, folder title “Personal Correspondence, Biever, S.J., Rev. Bruce, 1974-1989.”

\textsuperscript{577} Documents of the 32\textsuperscript{nd} General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, An English Translation in Virgil C. Blum, S.J. File, Jesuit Archives Central United States. (Hereafter Documents)

\textsuperscript{578} Documents, page 7, paragraph 3.
wholeheartedly. Ever practical, he noted that the struggle for justice in each nation is dictated by its political institutions. In the United States, interest groups were, for Blum, the key institutions and therefore he saw his Catholic League as being at the heart of the struggle. As Blum studied each paragraph in the documents, he seemed to be asking himself is the Catholic League in here? The answer for him was a continuous yes. The Jesuit leaders from around the globe that gathered for the GC in Washington D.C. demanded, “a life in which the justice of the Gospel shines out in a willingness not only to recognize and respect the rights of all, especially the poor and powerless, but also to work actively to secure those rights.” Blum must have been nodding in agreement at these words because he emphasized the lines in the margin. For years Blum had recognized the poor and powerless parents throughout the United States striving to educate their children in religious schools, and Blum’s life was nothing if not active. According to the GC, Jesuits must “contribute to the defense and propagation of the faith and promotion of justice in charity.” Blum could check that box—the Catholic League was defending the Church in the public square against ugly attacks. The Jesuit Fathers noted that the Pope “demands of us that we offer resistance to the many forms of contemporary atheism.” In this regard, the Catholic League had been serving as a watchdog against the secularism that was driving religion out of American public life. The 32nd GC committed the Society of Jesus “to work on behalf of the voiceless and powerless.” Who were more voiceless and powerless than human fetuses, a group

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579 Ibid. page 21, paragraph 18.
580 Ibid. page 9, paragraph 12.
581 Ibid. pages 21-22, paragraph 19.
582 Ibid. page 30, paragraph 42.
whose rights the Catholic League strove to protect? The GC noted that for justice to be upheld, the structures of society needed to be transformed. For Blum, the Catholic League was all about societal transformation. By influencing public opinion, the League might eliminate anti-Catholicism, thereby transforming a prejudiced American judiciary that looked to society for cues on how to rule. The 32nd GC is commonly understood as operating very much in the liberal spirit of Vatican II, ultimately serving to affirm progressive viewpoints within the Catholic Church. Blum’s reading of its pronouncements offers a fascinating example of how someone coming from a more conservative perspective could digest the same rhetoric and yet draw conclusions affirming his own point of view, one that many of his fellow Jesuits did not share. When it came to the poor and powerless, Blum’s confreres were probably thinking more along the lines of the economically impoverished, the immigrant, the refugee, and the victims of racism.

Virgil Blum’s hope that the American bishops would support the League in large numbers faced disappointment as well. He established a friendly relationship with Bishop James Rausch at the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC) and at least two bishops could be found on the League’s Board of Directors at any given time, but Blum never won widespread support. The more conservative prelates proved most responsive; John Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia drew upon Catholic League materials when preparing his own presentations. The bishops certainly did not back the Catholic League in large numbers with financial donations. Although the number of Catholic cardinals,

583 Ibid. page 29, paragraph 40.
584 Mrs. Anthony Nowak to Blum, February 24, 1975, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1975.”
archbishops, and bishops in the United States during the 1970s averaged just over 300, only a tiny fraction of these men contributed to the League. In 1973, thirty-seven bishops contributed a total of $6,795.00. The following year episcopal donations reached their apex: 64 bishops added a total of $16,400.00 to the League’s coffers. In 1975 the number dropped to 41 contributing a scant $5,140.00. All in all, a meager response. The League experienced no perceptible increase in episcopal support during the later years of Blum’s presidency. Monsignor Murdick’s comment to Rausch that many bishops were annoyed by Blum’s unsolicited lectures may help explain the tepid response. Another factor could have been the common perception of the Catholic League as a conservative group. Overall, the American episcopacy leaned to the left during the 1970s and 1980s.\footnote{See Michael Warner, \textit{Changing Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917-1994} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).}

Hundreds of priests joined the Catholic League, but this represented a trickle compared to the flood of new members that Blum had expected when he began recruiting from the priesthood. For example, a direct mailing to 33,000 diocesan priests in September 1975 yielded only 408 new members—a response rate of just .0123 percent.\footnote{Blum to Bishop Rausch, November 7, 1975, Unprocessed Material, Box 106, Folder “Organizations: Lay: Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.} Blum enlisted a retired Marquette Jesuit from the history department, Henry Casper, to serve as the League’s Director of Development with a special emphasis on outreach to priests. The elderly Casper toured the country as best he could, meeting as many pastors as possible and seeking to preach about the Catholic League from their parish pulpits.\footnote{A sample travel log of Father Casper’s efforts in March 1979 have survived. See Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 2, folder title “Casper, S.J., Rev. Henry, 1976-1979.”} Many priests refused the request. Blum connected this lukewarm response back to the
bishops. He seized upon a study by Gerald Dewey in *Sociological Analysis* where Dewey concluded that reference group theory best explained the decision making of Catholic priests, which boiled down to the fact that most priests were guided by their bishop’s apparent preferences when determining their own actions.588 This explained for Blum why a priest would not embrace the Catholic League—he was not receiving a positive signal from his bishop. Because the bishops were not endorsing the League *en masse*, recruitment among priests remained stunted. Blum seemed to be running into the same wall he had encountered while drumming up support for CEF in the 1960s. In what must have seemed to the Jesuit like *deja vu*, the episcopacy was imperiling the Catholic League’s success. Blum griped about this to the Board of Directors and to Bishop Rausch, but he did not complain publicly, fulfilling his promise to the USCC never to openly criticize the leaders of the Church.

Limited access to parish pulpits for preaching may help explain the relatively small proportion of the laity that joined the Catholic League. Blum was convinced that parishioners were unlikely to embrace an appeal for which their pastor showed no enthusiasm. A formal option to join the League as a dues-paying member did not emerge until late 1973; had a structure existed for the processing of memberships at the time of its May launching, perhaps the Catholic League could have capitalized more on its initial momentum and built a larger support base from the beginning. Over the years, direct mailing became the chief method of recruitment. It succeeded in growing the League, but the results were not astonishing. By February 1976, over 600,000 letters had been mailed,

yet the League’s membership stood at only 14,000.\textsuperscript{589} The League also published advertisements in the Catholic press, but their effect proved minimal. For example, a full-page color ad in \textit{Homiletic & Pastoral Review} garnered only 12 new members out of 17,000 subscribers.\textsuperscript{590} During Blum’s presidency, membership in the League never seems to have risen far above 30,000.\textsuperscript{591} The perception that the Catholic League was a conservative organization concerned only with abortion and education injured its appeal among some laity. A supporter from Colorado lamented to Blum that the president of Denver’s Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women (ACCW) would not permit a program about the Catholic League to take place at its May 1976 convention. Only “social action materials” could appear on the schedule for the Denver ACCW.\textsuperscript{592} Another problem lay in the League’s messaging. Blum once summarized the group’s mission as helping the Catholic community to

create the operative ideas of society, to utilize effectively the mass media, to affect the thinking of the opinion-makers in business and the professions, and … to hold elected politicians accountable for their political decisions.\textsuperscript{593}

The League’s Development Director, Father Casper, commented that such a message is “one that strikes far more at man’s intelligence than it does his heart.”\textsuperscript{594} Casper noted that blue-collar parishioners responded more favorably to appeals to aid the foreign

\textsuperscript{589} Blum to Mr. John F. Boroughs, February 3, 1976, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Presidential, 1976-1980.”
\textsuperscript{590} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{591} Precise membership numbers for year-to-year are impossible to find in the Catholic League records that survive in the Blum Papers.
\textsuperscript{592} Mrs. Verne J. Baumberger to Blum, February 3, 1976, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Presidential, 1976-1980.”
\textsuperscript{593} Blum to Archbishop Quinn, April 20, 1978, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Quinn, Archbishop John C., 1978.”
\textsuperscript{594} Report of the Director of Development, February 24, 1979, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1979.”
missions or to support the disabled than they did to appeals to transform American culture in a sweeping sense. An anonymous pastor expressed the problem this way to Casper: “You have a product that is difficult to sell. It is not easily marketable.”

Despite these obstacles, the Catholic League slowly grew through the 1970s into the early 1980s. Frugal management of funds by Blum and Hubbell put the League in a position to expand its operations. The expansion came mostly in the form of new staff positions created to finally take the strain off the two men. Except for a sabbatical year during 1974-1975—which Blum used to raise funds for the Catholic League—the Jesuit kept teaching full-time at Marquette University in addition to running the Catholic League. Blum finally retired from Marquette in May 1978. The expansion of personnel began with an associate executive director and grew to include such positions as a director of public relations, director of development, director of publications, and an office manager. Perhaps the most notable hire among the expanding staff was Michael Schwartz, who settled into the role of Director of Public Affairs. Young, highly intelligent, and photogenic, Schwartz served the League until 1985 and became its public face in the media. As the staff expanded in Milwaukee, Stuart Hubbell decided in 1978 that he should resign as executive director, a role he felt he could no longer perform all the way from Traverse City, Michigan. This effectively made Blum manager of the overall operation, a role that would create controversy in future years. Blum did not want to lose Hubbell’s legal acumen, and so he kept his friend in the League, making Hubbell Director of Legal Affairs, a position that put him in charge of the Legal Advisory

595 Ibid.
Committee, a group of lawyers established by the Board to provide support for the general counsel.

Hiring a general counsel was one of the two most important developments at the Catholic League in the late 1970s, the other being the creation of League chapters across the United States. Blum and Hubbell had originally intended to set up regional offices centered on a cooperating civil rights attorney who would be paid a monthly fee to oversee litigation within a region of the country; however, they struggled to find qualified attorneys interested in assuming that position, and they abandoned the idea of regional offices by the beginning of 1975. Instead, the two men moved toward hiring a full-time lawyer at the Milwaukee office to serve as general counsel for the organization who could then coordinate legal efforts with cooperating attorneys in the field. Hubbell would supervise the general counsel through the Legal Advisory Committee. The League scored a coup in 1977 when it hired a rising star among civil rights attorneys named Robert Destro to serve as general counsel. Robert Destro and Michael Schwartz stand out as the two most significant hires made at the Catholic League during Blum’s presidency.

The other important development was the establishment of League chapters. Blum had originally been opposed to the formation of local chapters, but he warmed to the idea by 1977. His greatest fear had been that chapters might endanger the League’s tax-exempt status and third-class mailing privilege. Blum’s experience in CEF taught him that local chapters were difficult to control and could be a source of embarrassment or even danger to a national organization. Direct political activity would strip the Catholic League of tax-exemption. To avoid this calamity, League affiliates could never support or oppose specific candidates or legislation, and they certainly could not contribute to
political campaigns in any form. The political impact of the League needed to be indirect, centered on educating the public and raising awareness about issues affecting the Catholic community in the United States. Blum eventually decided that chapters were worth the risk, provided they could be kept on a tight leash. Chapters might vivify membership recruitment. They could serve as the national office’s eyes and ears in a locality and work to raise the League’s profile there. Moreover, chapters could prove useful in fundraising, a tantalizing prospect for an organization always concerned about its financial stability. The first Catholic League chapter appeared in Minnesota on May 23, 1977. In January 1978, a chapter was established in Washington D.C. Eight more chapters would be created over the next year.\(^{596}\)

That period 1978-1979 appears now to have been the high-water mark for the Catholic League under Blum’s leadership. In his presidential report for the 1978 annual meeting of the Board of Directors, the Jesuit stated, “[A]fter five years of trial and error, I think we are now putting together a team that can begin to do the gigantic tasks we have undertaken.” Exuding optimism, Blum declared, “I think the Catholic League has now passed through the age of adolescence and is beginning to be regarded as a mature anti-defamation and civil rights union.”\(^{597}\) Unfortunately, the Catholic League had some troubled teenage years ahead of it, and it would never really evolve into a mature civil rights organization and anti-defamation league by the time of Blum’s death in 1990.

\(^{596}\) Report of the Associate Executive Director, 1979, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1979.”

\(^{597}\) President’s Report, 1978, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1978.”
Vouchers and the inner city

Virgil Blum had begun his public career in the 1950s as an educational crusader seeking public funds to benefit non-public schoolchildren, and this cause always remained closest to Blum’s heart. His commitment to the Catholic League should not be seen as digressing from that work but as complementing it. Indeed, Blum saw his labors at the Catholic League as a necessary precursor to achieving educational freedom for non-public schoolchildren. Only by exposing and breaking down anti-Catholicism in U.S. society could progress be made in supporting non-public education. In the wake of the adverse court rulings of the early 1970s, Blum recognized as quickly as anyone that vouchers remained the major funding scheme that might pass judicial scrutiny—assuming effective pressure could be brought to bear on the political process. Blum hoped that an interdenominational, grassroots parents’ group might be formed to champion vouchers. CEF had tried to fill this role but failed. Blum wanted the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) to take the lead in forming such a group and, most importantly, in funding it. Blum quickly identified poor African Americans and Hispanics as promising allies, and he sought to enlist them to the cause and bring public attention to the poor quality of their urban public schools.

By the end of the 1960s the judicial tide was turning ever more against public aid to parochial schools. The *Lemon v. Kurtzman* decision of 1971 seemed like a nail in the coffin. Here, the U.S. Supreme Court established the Lemon Test with its key third provision that prohibited public funding measures from having “excessive entanglements” with religious institutions. Blum believed firmly that anti-Catholicism was the motivating factor behind these adverse judicial rulings. Jurists equated non-
public schools with Catholicism and their aversion to Blum’s religion motivated their rulings. He singled out the U.S. Supreme Court as the most egregious offender. For Blum, the Court bore out historian Arthur Schlesinger Sr.’s assertion that anti-Catholicism was the deepest bias in the history of American people, entrenched even before racism. Blum told a friend, “I have become firmly convinced … that before we can resolve the problem of public funds for the education of children in church-related schools we must resolve a more fundamental problem. That is the problem of anti-Catholicism in America.” The Catholic League represented a solution to this problem.

Blum hoped that the Catholic League, supported by the full weight of 50 million U.S. Catholics, might rally other denominations under its banner and reshape public opinion into showing sympathy for the rights of non-public schoolchildren, thereby improving the chances that a grassroots lobbying group might achieve lasting success in the political arena. In effect, Blum sought to wage the war on two complementary fronts.

Even after the Lemon decision, Blum hoped that tuition tax credits might develop into the primary vehicle for public funding of parochial schools, but his hope proved short-lived. Soon after Blum launched the Catholic League, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its ruling in Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty v. Nyquist, striking down tuition tax credits as unconstitutional. Blum read the Nyquist decision immediately and less than a week after its publication wrote to Secretary General Rausch at the USCC advocating strong action. Blum thought Nyquist was poorly reasoned and he was confident that it could be overturned within five years if the bishops

598 Blum’s most direct attack on the Supreme Court in print was “Is the Supreme Court anti-Catholic?” Homiletic & Pastoral Review 74, no. 8 (May 1974), 10-19.
599 Blum to Ed J. Riley, December 6, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder titled “Personal Correspondence, 1970-1973.”
mobilized against it. He suggested that all church-related schools add $1.00 to their book or tuition bills to finance a nationwide program encompassing research, legal conferences, and extensive programs for educating the public.\textsuperscript{600} Rausch met soon afterwards with a committee of lawyers, administrators, and diocesan authorities to discuss Nyquist, but they did not act on Blum’s recommendation.

The elimination of tuition tax credits as a funding measure available to advocates like Blum left vouchers as the only remaining method that might endure judicial scrutiny. Vouchers had been gaining momentum since the late 1960s, endorsed by intellectuals and policymakers from both Left and Right. Liberals like Christopher Jencks and Jonathan Kozol hoped that vouchers would equalize educational opportunities for urban minorities. Conservatives, on the other hand, found their free-market flavor appealing. The Nixon administration used Lyndon Johnson’s Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)—a feature of LBJ’s War on Poverty—to push for vouchers.\textsuperscript{601} The first state to attempt a voucher program was New Hampshire in 1973. Its State School Board chose to exclude religious institutions from the program, a move that provoked Blum’s Catholic League to threaten to sue.\textsuperscript{602} Blum told Joseph Duffy, S.J. the Superintendent of Catholic Schools in New Hampshire, that “it would be unpardonable not to throw everything we have into litigation to challenge its constitutionality.”\textsuperscript{603} It may be a sign of Blum’s outrage at Nyquist that here he abandoned his customary reluctance to pursue direct legal challenges. In this instance, Blum was willing to take the risk. The USCC legal staff was

\textsuperscript{600} Blum to Bishop Rausch, June 30, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Rausch, James, Most Rev., 1973-1975.”
not confident that the case could be won. It advised Bishop Rausch to let the Catholic League assume the full costs of the litigation—“It is an issue tailor-made to their purposes.” The Catholic League never sued. Had the New Hampshire program emerged five years later, the League may very well have sued; but the group was still a paper tiger in Fall 1973 and lacked the resources to lead a major suit.

The Nyquist decision had a devastating impact on the already struggling CEF, demoralizing many of its members who had labored for years advocating tuition tax credits. In October 1973 Blum told Mae Duggan, “[W]hat we are trying to do now is simply maintain the organization in existence, hoping for the day when the powers that be realize the importance of such a political action group.” The “powers that be” in Blum’s mind were the U.S. Catholic bishops, and he hoped that they might finally throw their full support behind a nationwide grassroots parents’ group to pressure politicians into action. The timing seemed opportune. The once robust Catholic educational system had been struggling since Vatican II with higher costs and declining enrollments. Between 1965 and 1968 the number of students in Catholic schools in the United States dropped from 4.5 million to 3.9 million and continued to decline each year after. The growing popularity of the voucher idea could serve to breathe new life into CEF. By 1974 the group was able to maintain a national office in Washington D.C. only because its

607 Walch, Parish School, 128.
executive director, Dr. Edward Spiers, and his secretary both worked virtually unpaid. Dr. Spiers described CEF as “6 little islands which have a very difficult time to even finance their own existence, let alone have funds to promote the cause of these rights.”

In late 1973 Blum hoped to resuscitate CEF in a push for vouchers, and he tried unsuccessfully to get its dysfunctional board of directors to pursue a reorganization plan. But CEF had been in the public eye for too long and it carried such internal political baggage that the idea of CEF suddenly springing to new life was unrealistic.

In October 1974 Blum resigned from CEF’s board of trustees and executive committee, but the Jesuit did not abandon the idea of a robust pressure group. That same month he wrote to Monsignor Murdick, the USCC Education Secretary, and proposed that the Conference take the lead in creating a new political action interest group that Blum called Americans for Choice in Education (ACE) to lobby for vouchers. Unlike CEF, which had begun as a Catholic group but then broadened to include other denominations, ACE would be strongly interdenominational from the outset with a Board that required representation from Lutheran, Christian Reformed, Jewish, Episcopal, and secular private schools. Blum looked to Catholic schools to bankroll the group, restating his funding idea from the previous year than an annual contribution of $1.00 per child could be added to tuition or book bills for use by the new group. Blum noted that at the core of the anti-voucher coalition were powerful lobbying groups such as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. Their influence needed

608 Edward F. Spiers to Mae Duggan, November 8, 1975, Blum Papers, ss5, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, Murdick, Olin J., Rev., 1975.”
to be countered by an organization like ACE. The USCC did not act on Blum’s recommendation, but Murdick did convene a meeting in June 1975 to discuss the education question. Blum was not invited to the meeting; but in its wake he renewed his ACE proposal to Murdick and recommended that the Monsignor approach Melvin Laird, former Wisconsin congressman and a Defense Secretary under President Nixon and ask Laird to lead the group. As a legislator, Laird had been a firm advocate of tuition tax credits and he was the sort of high-profile figure that Blum always craved for involvement in his schemes.

Monsignor Murdick formed a Task Force to study different options for Catholic activism on education, including a group along the lines Blum was proposing. The Task Force numbered fifteen: Five members from the USCC, five from the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), and five state Catholic Conference directors. Among this last group was Emile Comar, executive director of the Louisiana Catholic Conference and a staunch Blum ally. Comar had been active in CEF and was a director at the Catholic League. Murdick established a subcommittee, which included Comar, to investigate formation of a political action group. The subcommittee recommended unanimously that the Task Force help create a group called Parents for Alternative Education (PAE), organized very much along the lines of Blum’s ACE idea, to be funded by contributions from Catholic schools. Originally sympathetic to the proposal, Murdick grew skeptical of PAE, voicing objections raised by others on the USCC staff. The Task Force ultimately rejected the subcommittee’s proposal at its meeting on December

612 Blum to Terence Cardinal Cooke, December 9, 1975, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Murdick, Olin J., Rev., 1976.”
4, 1975. It moved away from backing the formation of this interdenominational parents’
group and toward developing a Catholic program of public relations to influence
legislators. Blum thought this a waste of time that showed the USCC’s ignorance at how
American democracy worked. “Lobbying in the corridors and engaging in public
relations, no matter how well executed, cannot possibly bring about a political solution,”
the Jesuit told Murdick.613 Any effort had to be built on grassroots lobbying. Blum
lectured the Monsignor: “Our failure to engage in these [democratic] processes—the
most basic of which is grassroots politics, as Blacks and Jews have so clearly
demonstrated—makes it virtually impossible for politically accountable politicians and
judges to work for freedom of choice in education.”614 The effort needed to be grassroots,
and it needed to include other denominational schools and non-denominational private
schools lest anti-Catholic prejudice destroy it. Blum was arriving at the conclusion that
USCC would always be too risk averse to take effective action.

The defiant Jesuit attempted an end-run around the USCC bureaucracy by going
directly to the episcopacy. When Murdick commented to Blum that Cardinal Cooke of
New York wanted to get a national movement underway that would include the laity,
Blum wrote directly to the Cardinal, expressing unhappiness at the Task Force’s rejection
of PAE.615 Blum told Cooke that he suspected the root of the problem lay in the USCC’s
reluctance to share power with an organization that it could not control. Blum assured the

613 Blum to Rev. Msgr. Olin J. Murdick, November 26, 1975, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title
“Correspondence, Murdick, Olin J., Rev., 1976. As an example, Blum cited the NCCB/USCC’s
unsuccessful campaign in favor of a right to life amendment to protect the unborn, proposed in the wake of
the Roe v. Wade decision.
614 Ibid.
615 Blum to Terence Cardinal Cooke, December 9, 1975, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title
“Correspondence, Murdick, Olin J., Rev., 1974-1975.”
Cardinal that the USCC would in fact control the new interest group because the USCC had the power to cut off its funding simply by directing Catholic schools to cease collecting contributions. Cooke referred Blum to his Archdiocesan Secretary of Education, and the discussions dragged inconclusively into 1976. The following year Blum approached the new Archbishop of San Francisco, John Quinn—soon to be elected president of the NCCB—and lobbied on behalf of the PAE idea. Quinn showed interest, prompting Blum to send the prelate additional information; however, Quinn turned this material over to the USCC staff for its opinion. The staff member charged with answering Archbishop Quinn acknowledged that the USCC was probably afraid to share power with an independent organization, but he cited the primary reason for rejection as being the absence of any federal legislation that was politically and constitutionally feasible. He concluded, “Until that Task Force decides that some forms of federal legislation might be politically and constitutionally feasible, it would seem the USCC does not wish to encourage the formation of parents’ groups that would push for legislation.”

The staff member’s conclusion points to the fundamental disagreement between Blum and the USCC over strategy. The Conference itself could not engage in any grassroots lobbying because of its tax-exempt status, but it could offer support and funding to an independent group like the proposed PAE. However, it was unwilling to do so because no promising federal legislation appeared on the horizon. From Blum’s perspective the USCC was being obtuse. Desirable Federal legislative proposals did not

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appear miraculously. Where did the 1964 Civil Rights Bill come from? It came from years of struggle at the grassroots—relentless lobbying and activism by African American citizens and their allies. Blum believed that freedom of choice in education would only emerge through the same process, conducted by parents acting like first-class citizens of the United States. In essence, the USCC was Waiting for Godot. It was remaining inactive until the right situation developed, failing to comprehend that the emergence of the desired situation depended upon it taking prior action. Blum gently chided Archbishop Quinn for having gone only to the USCC for advice. “It need hardly be pointed out,” Blum noted with a touch of bitterness, “that the USCC staff has a vested interest in the status quo, in keeping exclusively in their own hands the power to represent potential interests of almost four million private school children and their parents.”

Blum recommended that the Archbishop seek an outside, disinterested lobbying expert to reassess the proposal. But Archbishop Quinn, by now also President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), heeded the advice of the USCCB and Blum’s hope for a nationwide, grassroots interdenominational pressure group faded away.

Throughout Blum’s communications with the USCC and the Bishops, the Jesuit stressed the need for a group such as PAE in order to save the Church’s educational apostolate in the inner cities. He told the New York Archdiocesan Education Secretary that the decision on PAE was “virtually a decision on the question of the Church’s continued deep involvement in the education of Blacks and Hispanics.”

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617 Blum to Archbishop Quinn, April 20, 1978, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Quinn, Archbishop John C., 1978.”
schools in the inner cities were struggling, and Blum believed the organized pursuit of
vouchers would demonstrate the Church’s preferential option for the poor. Moreover,
Blum saw non-Catholic African Americans as natural allies in the struggle for school
choice. A voracious reader of newspapers and periodicals, Blum kept abreast of reports
on the sorry state of public education in U.S. inner cities. Since public schools were
failing the urban poor, non-public schools might be their salvation. The idea that
vouchers could benefit impoverished African Americans was not new. In 1968 Milton
Friedman was already touting vouchers as a means for the African American community
to run its own schools instead of sending their children to inept government schools.

Blum enlisted the Catholic League to aid in the struggle over urban schools in
two ways. First, he tried to network among African American communities and
encourage them to join the voucher crusade. In 1975 Blum contacted a Dominican friend
who had a connection to Reverend Jesse Jackson, then PUSH leader in Chicago, in the
hope of discussing vouchers with the civil rights activist. In 1978 the Board created a
new position at the Catholic League, ambiguously titled Director of Special Projects,
intended to perform outreach to the black community. Moreover, Blum created

619 Tom Caldwell, S.J. recalled that when he was minister of Marquette’s Jesuit Community, he decided to
purchase a second subscription to the New York Times because Blum always read the community’s copy so
thoroughly that it was never available to anybody else until he was finished. Thomas Caldwell, S.J.,
621 Blum to Rev. Thomas C. Donlan, O.P., March 30, 1975, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title
“Correspondence, Donlan, Thomas, 1975.”
622 To fill the position, Blum hired a fascinating African American woman named Cheryl McDaniels. A
martial arts instructor and a former Marquette graduate student, McDaniels was also a vowed member of
the Catholic Third Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Her service at the League was brief. McDaniels
eventually changed her name to Trimelda Concepcion, earned a reputation in Chicago as the “Ninja Nun”
and moved to the west coast where she ended up becoming a bishop in the Recovery Churches of America.
https://recoverychurchesofam.wixsite.com/mercy-apostles/untitled She did not respond to the author’s
request for an interview.
informational materials about vouchers to be distributed to low-income families. The second way the Catholic League sought to contribute to a resolution of the urban school crisis was by engaging in research that might show the superiority of parochial schools over public schools in educating the urban poor. In 1977 Blum received a $20,000 grant from the Catholic DeRance Foundation to begin conducting interviews with parents and teachers at Catholic schools that served the poor in urban areas. Blum hired social scientists Donald Zewe, S.J., Timothy O’Brien, and James Cibulka to conduct and analyze the survey which grew to encompass 64 randomly selected private schools in eight major cities. The study revealed heavy sacrifices being made by minority parents to send their children to private schools so that they might receive a better education. It undermined the myth that private schools were selective in accepting students; that is, taking only the best and leaving the problem children to the public schools. The Catholic League’s study highlighted how important was the sense of community that pervaded these schools, with parents and teachers both heavily involved in achieving student success. The League’s report was one of the first in a long line of dueling social scientific studies published over the next forty years arguing for the superiority of private over public schools, or vice versa, in an urban environment. The study provided grist for popular articles by the League that emphasized the value of private schools and suggested how their success could be expanded through vouchers. The effort also led to production of a film titled *Miracle in the Inner City* which the League distributed to networks and stations for broadcasting.

In this way, Blum used the Catholic League to remain involved in the battle for public funding for non-public schoolchildren, the cause he had adopted as his own over thirty-five years earlier. The Jesuit was willing to unite with the urban poor in a coalition to pursue vouchers, but he believed that such a group effort should be pursued at the national level where it could transform what he liked to call “the operative ideas of society.” This helps explain why Blum in the late 1980s was not directly involved in the local advocacy leading up to the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, a voucher program that would be established the year Blum died. The Jesuit sought the widest scope for the school choice movement. Consequently, Blum looked to the USCC and the Catholic Bishops to take the lead in creating a nationwide parents’ group to lobby at the grassroots, one that would include minority groups and other denominations. He pinned his hopes here because he believed that the future of Catholic education—and by extension American culture—was at stake; but Blum also focused on the USCC and the Bishops because he saw Catholic school parents as being the only potential funding source for a group that must compete effectively with the powerful lobbies opposed to vouchers, such as the teachers’ unions and the National Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty (National PEARL).

Trouble at the Catholic League

While Virgil Blum continued working toward his vision of a viable parents’ lobby, he labored to build up the Catholic League. The year 1978 marked an important

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625 Jim Carl suggests that Blum was too involved in Judeo-Christian identity politics at this time to form a coalition with northern civil rights leaders. Furthermore, Carl overstates the extent to which Blum absented himself from the school choice struggle when he formed the Catholic League. Jim Carl, Freedom of Choice: Vouchers in Education, 97-99. It seems clear Blum would have welcomed such northern civil rights leaders into an organization like ACE or PAE. Moreover, Blum remained active in the school choice struggle after founding the League; for Blum the two efforts were complementary.
moment for the organization. Filled with new staff positions, the League stood poised to expand its reach and realize Blum’s dream of a strong anti-defamation group and civil rights union. Having retired from teaching at Marquette in 1978, Blum was now able to devote much more attention to the apostolate he had founded. The period from 1979-1983 witnessed a rise in the League’s membership and its public profile, thanks to more vigorous public relations efforts and the presence of local chapters. But its achievements seem modest compared to Blum’s lofty dreams listed in the League’s first newsletter back in 1973. This next period in the League’s development was turbulent, and it would witness an internal crisis in 1982. Part of the trouble at the Catholic League derived from Blum’s ongoing struggle to keep it aloof from internal Catholic Church politics. The League’s association in the public mind with conservative Catholicism increased during these years. Making matters worse, the League experienced internal dissension, for which Blum’s management style bears some responsibility. When Stu Hubbell stepped down as executive director in 1978, the Catholic League became—for better or worse—Blum’s organization and the Jesuit’s grip on it would only increase over the next decade.

Since its founding, the Catholic League had enjoyed more support from the conservative end of the Church spectrum. Blum struggled to find liberal directors willing to serve on his board. League members leaned to the right according to a 1976 survey, evidently the only time during Blum’s presidency that the League sought to profile its membership. Middle-aged, well-educated, and rightward leaning were its chief characteristics. The median age of respondents was 52. Two thirds of League members reported holding at least a bachelor’s degree. When queried about their ideological leanings, only 2 percent of the respondents self-identified as “Very liberal” with another
13 percent claiming to be “Somewhat liberal.” Moderates accounted for twenty-eight percent of the membership, leaving over half of the members in the conservative camp. The proportion of conservatives probably grew in the late Seventies and early Eighties. The League tended to use subscription lists from conservative Catholic periodicals for its membership drives, in part because these publishers were more sympathetic to the League’s cause and chose not to charge the organization for access to its lists. Defense of the unborn increasingly dominated the League’s newsletter, and it was an issue that resonated more with conservative Catholics.

Abortion and educational freedom received the most attention at the Catholic League. Other concerns included euthanasia, discrimination in hiring, and conscience rights, although this last one was an offshoot of the abortion issue, usually focusing on the right of doctors and nurses not to be compelled to participate in abortions. Defamatory statements about Catholicism or abusive treatments of Catholic iconography provoked responses from League spokespersons. Not surprisingly, the League attracted staff members who were most interested in these specific issues that the organization concentrated upon, and so this served to reinforce the narrowness of the League’s concerns. Conservative staff members and conservative volunteers at the chapter offices could drift easily into making comments that crossed the line into internal Church disputes, risking offense to other members. One member wrote directly to Blum to report she had reduced her financial contribution to the League because of disparaging words published about the controversial priest figures, Andrew Greeley and Hans Küng. She chastised Blum,

626 President’s Report, 1977, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1977.”
It appears that these two priests are criticized merely because they have opinions more liberal than those usually considered mainline Catholic. It is not the province of the Catholic League to excommunicate these two priests. I have never read any criticism of Bishop Marcel LeFebre [sic] or any of his illegally ordained priests in the newsletter even though they maliciously attack the Church. 

Blum did his best to monitor the ideological line being taken by the League. He even risked offending Quentin Quade—his closest friend and Marquette’s executive vice-president—by refusing to publish an article Quade had submitted to the newsletter because it included criticism of the pastoral letter on nuclear weapons recently issued by the U.S. Bishops. Quade was vexed but their friendship survived.

The drift to the right at the Catholic League received a push from James Hitchcock when he became Chairman of the Board of Directors and chair of its Executive Committee in 1978. Hitchcock was a history professor at Saint Louis University who in 1977 helped found the conservative Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. He had appeared on Blum’s radar in 1971 with his *The Decline and Fall of Radical Catholicism*, a critical look at the Catholic reformers who emerged during the first five years after Vatican II and a book Blum personally enjoyed. In 1974 Blum reached out to Hitchcock in response to some articles the history professor had published, especially a piece in *America* Magazine titled, “Catholics and Liberals: The Decline of Détente.” Blum loved the piece so much that he sought permission to have it reprinted and mailed to every Catholic League member. He believed that it brilliantly described the trends the League was fighting against such as the rising expressions of anti-Catholicism in society and the

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627 Ms. Jean Flasch to Blum, February 2, 1982, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 7, folder title “Correspondence, Schwartz, Michael, 1979-1985.”

secular humanist philosophy at the heart of the “new liberalism” that was finding expression politically through the Democratic Party. That same year, Blum invited Hitchcock to join the League’s Board of Directors. When Hitchcock became Board Chairman in 1978, he took a more active role in the League, monitoring the orthodoxy of the League’s Board and staff. Hitchcock wrote to Blum criticizing one of the bishops on the board, Joseph Francis of the Newark Diocese, for his public support of the Equal Rights Amendment. Hitchcock questioned Bishop Francis’s devotion to the League’s goals, commenting, “He has not, as you know, been particularly helpful to us so far.”

Hitchcock also turned his crosshairs on one of the more liberal members of the League’s staff, Brother Thomas Draney, the development director for the east coast. Hitchcock accused Draney of harboring prejudice against the Mineola New York Community of Marianist Fathers. Like many Catholic religious orders in the wake of Vatican II, the Marianists experienced an ideological divide within their ranks. Of the Mineola community, Hitchcock noted, “The official Marianist position has been to define these people as right-wing kooks. Apparently Brother Draney swallows this completely.”

Hitchcock saw the Mineola Marianists as enthusiastic supporters of the League’s ideals whom Draney was neglecting to cultivate out of ideological disdain.

Piloting the Catholic League through such precarious ideological waters would have been challenging under the best of circumstances, but Blum’s job was made more difficult by the disarray that attended the League’s administrative operations. Every organization has internal politics and turf wars, but the Catholic League experienced

629 James Hitchcock to Blum, November 14, 1978, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Hitchcock, James, 1974-1985.”
630 James Hitchcock to Blum, February 26, 1978, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Hitchcock, James, 1974-1985.”
more than its share. All the internecine squabbling and personality conflicts that characterized the Catholic League’s operations and that show up in the historical record need not be rehearsed here. Suffice to say, the Catholic League was not the happiest of workplaces and the high turnover rate among personnel indicates some deep-seated problems at the League. Disarray at the national office created unhappiness among the volunteer leaders of the local chapters who looked to Milwaukee in vain for direction and for the opportunity to provide input on the League’s operations. When the chapter presidents united to demand a study of the relationship between the chapters and the national office, nothing came of it. Some chapter presidents and staff thought that the national office’s location in Milwaukee was part of the problem. In a bit of regional snobbery directed toward what a later generation would call “fly-over country” they argued that the League would never win the respect of American Catholics, particularly in the Catholic strongholds of the northeast, if its headquarters remained in a backwater city like Milwaukee.

A challenge for the historian is determining how much blame for the League’s troubles should be heaped on Virgil Blum. It seems clear that some staff members at the Catholic League were more effective than others. Some were simply not competent enough for the positions they occupied while others were likely guilty of misconduct. But when blame is being passed around at an organization, the buck stops with the leadership, and Blum was head of the Catholic League. The trust Blum placed in individuals was

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631 The president of the League’s Washington DC chapter, Anthony Czajkowski, used his position on the board of directors to try and force the issue in 1984, but Blum deflected the effort. See Blum to Chapter Presidents, June 12, 1984, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Presidential, 1982-1990.”

632 Notes on telephone conversation with Fr. Peter Stravinskas, June 9, 1983, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 7, folder title “Correspondence, Stravinskas, Peter, 1976-1985.”
probably abused by some of those people, yet it is difficult to accept Blum as the misunderstood victim he always portrayed himself to be when responding to criticism. Blum does not emerge from the historical record as an effective manager. That the Society of Jesus would allow Blum to take the helm of a potentially complex enterprise like the Catholic League while lacking almost any managerial experience shows the confidence it had in its men. The last time Blum had directly managed a workplace was in 1944 at the theologate in St. Mary’s Kansas when he supervised the lay mimeograph operators supplying notes to the 180 theologians studying there. Blum’s years as chairman of Marquette’s political science department represented a kind of management, but the dynamic there was more in the spirit of *primus inter pares*. At CEF Blum’s role as trustee and executive committee member had been along the lines of a strategist who advised the paid staff and volunteer leadership. But now Blum was responsible for directly managing salaried professionals and enthusiastic volunteers who brought to their work credentials that Blum lacked. For managerial guidance, he seems to have turned to the one institution he knew well, the Society of Jesus, but here the Jesuits failed him.\textsuperscript{633}

Blum vacillated between the two extremes of Jesuit management style he had witnessed during a career that straddled the pre-conciliar and post-conciliar Societies. At times he was prone to micromanage and surveil League staff members in the spirit of the novitiate, junioriate, philosophate, and theologate experiences that had formed him as a young man. At other times Blum resembled a post-conciliar provincial giving a Jesuit the freedom to work independently as the Holy Spirit directed him. Applied to the Catholic League, these conflicting approaches could result in confusion that bred resentment. An

\textsuperscript{633} The other potential model in Blum’s experience was the family farm, but he could hardly have taken a page from his father’s book and whipped his employees when they misbehaved.
example of Blum’s tendency to micromanage can be found in his relationship with the legal department at the Catholic League, a situation that will be discussed shortly and that led to an internal crisis in 1982. An example of free rein extended to an employee is illustrated in Michael Schwartz, the League’s charismatic Director of Public Affairs. Schwartz’s tenure of 8.7 years at the League was the longest of any employee during Blum’s presidency, the long duration probably due in part to the freedom Schwarz enjoyed. He took advantage of every opportunity to travel and speak on the League’s behalf, building a name for himself in the process. Blum allowed Schwartz to pursue writing a book on anti-Catholicism which Schwartz published in 1984 through Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. called *The Persistent Prejudice: Anti-Catholicism in America*. Over time Blum became concerned about Schwartz’s “freelancing” and moved toward the opposite extreme by seeking to rein him in. Schwartz resisted and disagreements flared between the men over book royalties and honoraria for public appearances.634

Blum’s performance as the undisputed boss at the Catholic League was undermined by a deeper problem. On the surface Blum’s defiant personality exuded an air of self-assurance and righteousness; however, it seems to have masked deep-seated personal insecurity.635 Blum’s insecurity most likely traces back to his treatment by the

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634 Blum to Bruce Biever, June 21, 1984, and Michael Schwartz to Blum, June 21, 1984, both in Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 7, folder title “Correspondence, Schwartz, Michael, 1979-1985.”

635 When asked about Blum’s weaknesses, James Hitchcock replied, “Well, my curbstone diagnosis was that he was a very insecure person.” James Hitchcock, interview by William Fliss, September 17, 2015. The objectivity of Hitchcock’s assertion may seem open to question given the two men’s very public falling out, but its corroboration by Blum’s former rector at the Marquette Jesuit community lends credibility to the idea. When asked to comment on Hitchcock’s diagnosis, Greg Carlson, S.J. replied, “I want to be careful here. A Jesuit superior has access to a man, at least ideally, at a very deep level. So, I think what I want to say is—and I’ve been a superior three times—we superiors get to do a lot of guessing about where the connections are deep in a man. And that’s the kind of thing you’re asking about, and I think the best I can say is that [Hitchcock’s] perception makes sense to me.” Greg Carlson, S.J., Interview by William Fliss, April 1, 2017.
Society of Jesus, which had shunted him down to the inferior Short Course during formation and which never afforded Blum’s discipline, political science, the respect it deserved; nor did the Society adequately support Blum’s ministries that were based on his undeniable talent for political science. This may help explain Blum’s preoccupation with U.S. Catholics as second-class citizens: He had been made to feel second-class within his own religious order. Common among insecure people is a desire to control, and Blum increasingly exhibited this trait at the Catholic League during the 1980s.

Blum’s need for control found expression with very negative consequences in his dealings with the League’s legal department. The department began its existence with the hiring of a general counsel in 1976 and then expanded by the 1980s to include other lawyers acting as associate general counsels. The League’s first general counsel lasted only a year. His successor, Robert Destro, came to the League in November 1977, drawn by the opportunity to run a legal department that seemed to have great potential and with the added enticement of teaching courses at Marquette’s law school. Tension developed between Destro and Blum. Both men were committed to the League’s mission, but Blum was convinced that a general counsel must focus on publishing articles for academic law reviews, believing that these journals served as vehicles for disseminating new legal ideas that attorneys would then develop and argue in cases. Destro thought Blum overestimated the value of these journals. He focused his attention on litigation and the internal work

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636 James Hitchcock suggested that another factor contributing to Blum’s insecurity was that lived in the shadow of his older brother, Victor Blum, S.J. Hitchcock had been told this by an unnamed Jesuit. James Hitchcock, email message to William Fliss, September 18, 2015. But two Jesuits who lived in Blum’s community at Marquette, Thomas Caldwell and William Kelly, dismissed this idea immediately. Kelly said, “Virg Blum was not the inferior younger brother in the shadow of the great Victor. The two were far enough apart in distance and areas of interest to have separate lives.” Interviews with Thomas Caldwell, S.J. and William Kelly, S.J., January 18, 2017.
commonly associated with a general counsel position. Destro annoyed Blum by spending
considerable time updating the League’s By-Laws that had been filed in California in
1973. Conflict also emerged over objections Destro’s legal department held to principles
Blum had written for governing the League’s chapters. The attorneys feared that these
guidelines opened the organization to lawsuits and therefore they needed to be revised.
The most significant disagreement between Blum and Destro, however, centered on the
legal department’s position within the Catholic League. Destro believed the department
must remain semi-independent in its work and judgments, with an obligation to report
only to the League’s legal advisory committee, which was the group of lawyers appointed
by the Board to support the general counsel. Blum, on the other hand, wanted the general
counsel and the rest of the legal department to report directly to him so he could make
sure they were doing what he thought they should be doing. Although Blum taught
classes on constitutional law and civil liberties to undergraduates at Marquette, he was
not an attorney, and his tendency to tell the lawyers what they should be doing bred
resentment.637

The situation deteriorated to such an extent that by late 1981 Blum actively
sought to replace Destro as general counsel. Although Stuart Hubbell had resigned as the
League’s executive director in 1978, he remained involved in the organization by
chairing its Legal Advisory Committee. In effect, Hubbell acted as Destro’s supervisor,
which put the attorney from Michigan right in the middle of the dispute. Hubbell
ultimately sided with Destro, sparking paranoia in Blum who became convinced that the
two men were conspiring to remove him from office and make Destro the League’s

637 Final Report of General Counsel Robert A. Destro to Board of Directors for Period November 1, 1977
to February 28, 1982, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1982.”
president. Blum replaced Robert Destro with another attorney in early 1982 and wrote a curt letter to Hubbell dismissing his erstwhile friend from the legal advisory committee, thereby severing Hubbell’s involvement with the Catholic League once and for all and ending their long friendship.

**The road not taken**

The Catholic League’s membership remained oblivious to the internal drama leading to Robert Destro’s departure, but the controversy did have consequences for the organization. The chairman of its executive committee, James Hitchcock, grew uneasy over what he perceived to be Blum’s manipulation of information being made available to the Board of Directors as well as the Jesuit’s interpretation of meetings which did not match Hitchcock’s own memory of the events. During the “Destro Affair” as Blum called it, Hitchcock began to document the Jesuit’s communications, slowly building up a file of information that would surface in a much severer crisis three years later.

Blum’s war with his general counsel had little impact on the rank-and-file League members, but it did reverberate in other circles. Robert Destro enjoyed an excellent reputation within the Catholic legal community and beyond. On the heels of Destro’s departure from the League, President Reagan appointed him to serve on the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and soon Destro embarked on a long and distinguished career as a professor at Catholic University’s Law School. The controversy at the Catholic League was an embarrassment for the Society of Jesus; and Blum’s provincial, Joseph Labaj, S.J. responded by arranging to have another Jesuit, Bruce Biever, assigned to the League, a post that he would eventually assume on January 1, 1984.
The 49-year-old Biever was universally admired by his fellow Jesuits. A native of the Milwaukee area, Biever was born the year before Blum entered the Society of Jesus. Unlike Blum, Biever had been assigned to the Long Course of Jesuit formation, culminating in the fourth vow that enabled him to exercise high leadership roles in the Society. Biever spent only one year of his regency teaching at Campion High School before heading to the University of Pennsylvania to complete a doctorate in American Studies, specializing in sociology. Biever was clearly being groomed for administrative leadership. In 1967 he was assigned to be socius (secretary) to the provincial for the Wisconsin Province. Here Biever gained valuable experience for his subsequent assignment as the next provincial, a position he held from 1972-1978.

Biever was a good example of the new breed of provincials that emerged under Superior General Arrupe’s leadership beginning in the mid-1960s. A former rector of Marquette’s Jesuit community summed it up this way:

Up until that point [provincials] had been the academic stars in philosophy and theology, sometimes great men, sometimes safe men, and the move under Arrupe’s leadership was to get people who were inspirational leaders with a broad sense of what Jesuit life could be. I think in almost every one of the provinces you can mark a difference from one provincial to the next somewhere in the 1960s that is a real turn. Bruce Biever is certainly on the other side of that. A real mensch. Very smart. Good with people. Listeners with great judgement. Before then it was more people that somebody in Rome thought was safe.⁶³⁸

Biever’s assignment to the Catholic League in 1983 meant that Blum’s former “boss” would now be reporting to Blum. Biever had won the older Jesuit’s respect after becoming provincial in 1972 when he moved to terminate some of the more extreme experiments in Jesuit life that had vexed Blum and to restore a communal prayer life.

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within the province’s communities. Blum’s respect deepened through the 1970s as Biever expressed regard for the Catholic League’s work and supported the older Jesuit’s ministry with letters of encouragement and consolation. Blum was so impressed that in March 1978 he invited Biever to consider joining the League’s staff once his service as provincial ended. Biever delighted Blum by showing interest in the idea, leading the older man—by now bitter toward the Society—to remark, “The fact that you would consider working for our anti-defamation and civil rights league runs so contrary to typical Jesuit action in matters of Justice that I, as president of the Catholic League, am somewhat reassured with respect to Jesuit commitment to working for the poor and disadvantaged.” Unfortunately for Blum, a few days later the younger man broke the news that he was being assigned to a ministry of greater need at Marquette University. That was 1978. By late 1982 in the wake of the Destro Affair the next provincial, Joseph Labaj, was arranging for Biever to go to the Catholic League.

The full story behind why the province wanted Biever at the League and what the Jesuits hoped to achieve there remains murky, mostly because evidence is inaccessible.

639 Blum to Pedro Arrupe, S.J., February 6, 1973, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Arrupe, S.J., Father General Pedro, 1969-1975.” Here Blum described an example of experimentation he thought egregious. In 1970 five Jesuit scholastics serving at Marquette University had been assigned to Campus Ministry. According to Blum, “These scholastics dressed like lay students; they had no community life; they had virtually no spiritual direction; they had access to money at will; and they were free to come and go within the city...The result of this experimentation was disastrous—all five scholastics, very fine young men who could have done much work for Christ, have left the Society!”

640 For examples, see Biever to Blum, June 26, 1974, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Rainaldo, Rev. Jack”; Biever to Blum, April 18, 1977, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Personal Correspondence, Biever, S.J., Rev. Bruce, 1975-1987.”


642 Blum to Biever, June 2, 1978, Blum Papers, sub-series 2, box 5, folder title “Personal Correspondence, Biever, S.J., Rev. Bruce, 1975-1987.”

643 Records at the Jesuit Archives and Research Center in St. Louis that document meetings in which personnel assignments were discussed and decided between the provincial and his consultors are restricted for 50 years. Any records discussing Biever’s appointment to the League will become available in 2032-
Yet a document in the papers of Marquette’s president at the time, John Raynor, S.J.,
sheds some light on the situation. Since 1978 Biever had been serving as Vice President
for University Relations, which put him in charge of alumni relations, development, and
public relations. In September 1983, President Raynor invited the departing Biever to
dine with him. Conveniently for posterity, Raynor penned a private memo recording their
dinner conversation and inserted it into his own file on Biever. Raynor’s memo clearly
indicates that Labaj was the driving force behind Biever’s assignment. Biever opined to
Raynor that the provincial had two motivations for sending him to the League. First, to
protect the League’s existence. Labaj likened Blum to a Jesuit from an earlier generation,
Daniel Lord (1888-1955), who had led the interwar Sodality movement through his
publishing house, *The Queen’s Work*. Upon Lord’s death, however, the ministry he began
(or more accurately, reinvigorated) grew moribund. Labaj feared the same would happen
to Blum’s League. Raynor noted, “a one man show, man goes, show goes.” Labaj’s
second motivation was to address Blum’s deficiencies as an administrator. Biever
volunteered to Raynor that “VCB is very poor, almost non-administrator.” Here is
evidence suggesting the Destro Affair had shocked the Jesuits into applying damage
control to an embarrassing Catholic League apostolate. When Blum announced Biever’s
appointment at a League staff meeting on July 21, 1983, he portrayed the younger Jesuit
as his likely successor, arguing that the organization still needed a priest at its head owing

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2033. Another key source of information is Patrick Burns, S.J. who was Father Labaj’s socius.
Unfortunately, Father Burns refused the author’s request for an interview.
644 Biever’s position as Vice-President for University Relations can be seen as a stepping-stone on a
twentieth-century Jesuit version of the classical Roman *cursus honorum*, with this one leading to a
university presidency instead of the consulship.
645 “Dinner with BFB S.J. 9/7/83” UNIV A-1.1, series 20, box 236, folder title “University Relations, Vice
President, Biever, Rev. Bruce F., 1977-1984”.

to the Catholic laity’s inability to take initiative without clergy leadership.\textsuperscript{646}

Interestingly, Biever would make clear to Raynor at their dinner in September that he hoped his absence from Marquette might be temporary and short, suggesting that Biever did not see himself as Blum’s eventual successor as president of the Catholic League. Biever told Raynor that he had invested a large part of his life at Marquette University and that he desired to return there in the future.

Provincial Labaj’s assignment of Biever to the Catholic League and his reasons for doing so may seem unimportant on the surface, but they are quite significant when viewed within the context of the Society of Jesus in the early 1980s. The matter deserves deeper probing even if a paucity of accessible evidence leads to more speculation than the historian would like. Despite Blum’s hope to steer a middle road ideologically, the Catholic League leaned toward the conservative end of the Church spectrum. The USCCB staff had noted this immediately in 1973, and the League membership survey of 1976 bore it out. So why would the Wisconsin Province pull one of its best men, Bruce Biever, from a top administrative post at a major university and send him to a lone wolf operation such as Virgil Blum’s Catholic League, an apostolate in tension with the liberal turn of the Society of Jesus after Vatican II?

Two possible answers rise to the surface, and they reveal how a study of Virgil Blum’s life can serve to illumine the stresses that gripped his religious order in the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{647} The first explanation centers on the tumultuous period that the Society of Jesus

\textsuperscript{646} “Rationale for Another Priest on Staff,” Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Biever, S.J., Rev. Bruce, 1983-1989”

\textsuperscript{647} A fact that must not be overlooked, however, is that Biever’s mother died in April 1982, leaving the Jesuit as sole guardian for his mentally disabled younger sister, Beverly. William Kelly, S.J. believed that Biever was assigned to the Catholic League because they needed a place to put him so that he could take care of his sister, the implication being that Biever could no longer perform all the travel involved in his
was passing through at the time of Biever’s assignment. During the 1970s, Superior General Arrupe’s leadership came under papal criticism, first from Paul VI, and then (very briefly) from John Paul I, before the arrival of Arrupe’s strongest critic, John Paul II, in 1978. The popes expressed concern about the reforms that Arrupe sought to implement in the Society and the doctrinal waywardness that seemed to be imperiling the order’s cohesion and sense of mission. The conflict came to a head in August 1981 when Arrupe suffered a debilitating cerebral thrombosis and could no longer carry out the duties of superior general. In accordance with the Constitutions established for the Society of Jesus over 400 years earlier by St. Ignatius of Loyola, Arrupe chose a vicar general—Vincent O’Keefe, S.J., head of the American Assistancy and Arrupe’s close friend—to lead the Society until the Jesuits could convene a General Congregation to elect a new superior general. At this point Pope John Paul II intervened directly in the internal affairs of the Society. He replaced O’Keefe with his own personal representative, an 80-year-old Jesuit confidant named Paolo Dezza, through whom the pope supervised the Society’s affairs closely as it prepared for its 33rd General Congregation, which would eventually gather in September 1983, the same week in fact that Biever met for dinner with Marquette’s President Raynor.

The Destro Affair and Biever’s subsequent assignment to the Catholic League coincided therefore with a precarious moment for the Society of Jesus as it endured

Marquette position. See interview with William Kelly, S.J., January 18, 2017. While Beverly’s situation was undoubtedly a consideration in the discernment process, the matter does not seem as simple as Kelly suggested. Labaj was clearly the driver behind Biever’s assignment, not Biever himself; and if Beverly was such an important factor, why did President Raynor not mention that in his personal memo? Moreover, Biever’s background as a fundraiser made it certain that Blum would expect him to do some traveling for the League, courting donors.

intense papal scrutiny and weathered criticism from conservative elements in the Church. The Jesuits in the United States found themselves walking on eggshells." Viewed in this context, Biever’s assignment to the Catholic League may have been an effort to save an apostolate that represented the old Jesuit order. An organization like Blum’s, with its vocal opposition to secular humanism and its ardent defense of religious liberty for Catholics, was the type of ministry to be viewed favorably by a conservative Roman Curia. According to this explanation, the League’s continued existence offered assurance that American Jesuits were in step with Church leadership. Although the League’s membership was small relative to the total Catholic population in the United States, it was national in scope and had the support of conservative Catholics such as William F. Buckley and Michael Novak. According to this explanation, the League was useful in the ongoing drama of Church politics and needed to be preserved.

A second explanation for why somebody of Biever’s stature would be assigned to the Catholic League is that the province leadership, recognizing the League’s national scope and potential, believed that Blum’s apostolate had grown too conservative, and saw an opportunity to broaden the organization’s focus and bring it in line with the full range of Catholic social concerns. The Catholic League was a civil rights organization, but Blum’s concept of civil rights and the Board’s concept were narrow, limited essentially to protecting the right of Christians to oppose abortion and the right of parents to receive

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649 Nowhere is this more evident than in the pages of National Jesuit News, the newspaper established within the American Assistancy in the early 1970s to provide a national forum for open discussion among U.S. Jesuits. Its early issues contained raw exchanges of very frank opinions on matters touching the Society; but by the early 1980s the paper showed signs of self-censorship. Increasingly absent were articles and opinions that showcased disagreements among Jesuits or gave an impression of a lack of cohesion among the Sons of Loyola. By 1986 the triviality of its content was being noted. See National Jesuit News issues for May and June 1986.
public funds to educate their children in non-public schools. Other concerns that might have been interpreted in the language of civil rights, such as the plight of newly arrived immigrants, many of whom were Catholic, and the concerns (wages, housing, healthcare) of the poor and disadvantaged—for whom Catholic social teaching gave preference—received little attention from the League. According to this explanation, Blum’s organization needed support because it had the potential to broaden its scope to embrace the full range of concerns in Catholic social teaching. This latter explanation seems more convincing. Even if no formal plan existed to expand the League’s definition of civil rights, the province leadership would have hoped that Biever’s placement there might broaden the organization’s focus. At the least, Biever’s presence might arrest the League’s drift into internal Church politics and tone down its rhetoric. In the context of divisive U.S. Catholic Church politics in the early 1980s and from the view of a concerned province leadership, any broadsides fired into the public square from a Jesuit

650 The Board of Directors and President Blum did touch upon the issue of a broader definition of civil rights at the 1978 and 1979 annual meetings. In 1978 the Board passed a resolution to defend Hispanic Americans from job discrimination and discriminatory immigration policies. Accordingly, later that year the League publicly expressed opposition to the “Tortilla Curtain,” an effort by the INS to build a 12-foot fence topped with razor wire along stretches of the U.S./Mexico border. But this position created an internal public relations problem when the League began receiving angry letters from its conservative membership denouncing the League’s stance and expressing support for the wall. Blum himself did not show much interest in widening the scope of the League’s concerns. In 1980 when General Counsel Robert Destro wrote an article for the League’s newsletter on the plight of Cuban refugees, most of whom were Catholic, Blum killed the piece, arguing that no civil rights issues were involved. “The League is not involved in finding solutions to social and economic problems,” he told his general counsel. During the 1980s, the League issued relatively few public pronouncements that reflected a broader interpretation of civil rights, limiting itself instead to the notion of the civil rights of Catholics qua Catholics, or to the idea of religious freedom more generally. So, for example, even though there were a million Black Catholics in the United States by the mid-1970s the League did not involve itself in the larger Black civil rights movement on behalf of its Catholic brothers and sisters. About these League deliberations in 1978-1979, see Minutes of the Annual Meeting, February 25, 1978, in Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1978,” and see the Agenda and the Associate Executive Director’s Report for February 24, 1979, both in Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder title “Board Meeting Records, 1979.” For more on the Tortilla Curtain see Oscar J. Martinez, “Border Conflict, Border Fences, and the ‘Tortilla Curtain’ Incident of 1978-1979,” Journal of the Southwest 50, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), 263-278. For Blum’s exchange with Destro see Destro to Blum, November 7, 1980, and Blum to Destro, December 1, 1980, both in Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Destro, Robert, 1979-1982.”
apostolate, aimed either from an extreme left or right perspective, would have been unwelcome.

Biever’s assignment produced dissension at the Catholic League. James Hitchcock interpreted the province’s appointment of Biever as a move to quietly terminate the League. Since joining the League’s Board of Directors in 1974, Hitchcock had been on guard against anyone he perceived to be heterodox entering its leadership ranks. He was suspicious of Bruce Biever and wrote to Blum expressing his concerns. Hitchcock doubted the younger Jesuit’s commitment to the League’s work. He cited pages from a book Biever had written on Irish American Catholicism to argue that Blum’s potential successor did not believe that a Catholic pressure group could even work in the United States. After talking to a half-dozen Jesuits in the St. Louis area, Hitchcock informed Blum that Biever could never be sympathetic to an organization like the Catholic League. According to Hitchcock, “One [Jesuit] went so far to say, ‘It must be the Wisconsin Province’s way of killing off the organization.’” Hitchcock’s dander had already been raised earlier that year by the heavy-handed way in which the Jesuits effected Biever’s assignment. The move was essentially a fait accompli. The Executive Committee had not been able to interview Biever. Although the League was a collaboration between the Society of Jesus and the Catholic laity, its directors, staff, and chapter presidents—most of whom were lay Catholics—had been shut out from this

651 Hitchcock to Blum, September 3, 1983, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Hitchcock, James, 1974-1985”
652 Bruce Francis Biever, Religion, Culture, and Values: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Motivational Factors in Native Irish and American Irish Catholicism (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 790-810. Biever’s analysis led him to conclude that the American Irish believed no overarching Catholic mentality existed; therefore, American Catholics could never be effectively mobilized as a pressure group. While Biever did not state his own personal agreement with this conclusion, Hitchcock argued that a sympathy for it shone through the work.
significant process affecting the future of the organization. Annoyance rippled through the League’s staff and across its chapters.

Hitchcock’s notion that Bruce Biever’s purpose at the Catholic League was to oversee its demise is not borne out by Biever’s subsequent actions. The younger Jesuit certainly wanted to change the League, but he was not out to kill it. Biever’s official title was Executive Vice President. An experienced administrator, Biever set about studying the internal workings of the national office. What he found was chaos owing to imprecise job descriptions and overlapping duties that undermined accountability. Biever proposed an office reorganization plan that would have adjusted job titles and job descriptions to give each staff member discrete responsibilities and that would have altered the lines of reporting. As it stood, eight people reported directly to Blum. Biever sought to change this unreasonable dynamic by having three of the revised positions report to himself instead, including the staff responsible for press releases, the newsletter, and other publications. Biever clearly wanted to shape the League’s messaging. Blum rejected this reorganization plan. He wanted Biever to focus on fundraising and on bringing the east coast chapters under control. In characteristic Blum fashion whenever confronted with a proposal he did not like, he simply failed to act upon it.

Biever sought to influence the League’s communications as best he could. He was helped by a tradition in the Society of Jesus whereby one Jesuit was assigned to read another Jesuit’s publications before they went to press. Biever assumed this role for Blum. The elder Jesuit’s articles had to pass through Biever before seeing print, and Biever was not shy about providing candid feedback. Blum’s vow of obedience compelled him to heed the feedback. Biever also kept an eye on the newsletter that went
out to the membership each month and acted preemptively upon problematic content. For example, when Destro’s successor as general counsel, Pat Monaghan, wrote a piece attacking the Catholic press corps for, among other things, failing in what Monaghan saw as its perceived obligation to be an effective “witness for life,” Biever intervened to kill the article, fearing it would alienate the press and make the League look absurd.

Biever’s concern about messaging extended to the chairman of the League’s Board of Directors. In early February 1984, only six weeks after starting at the League, Biever wrote a private letter to Blum, expressing anger at James Hitchcock’s vocal involvement in Church politics. Biever wondered why Hitchcock was “attacking precisely those areas which are off limits to the organization of which he is the Chairman!” Among the attacks that motivated Biever’s letter was undoubtedly an article in William F. Buckley’s *National Review* where Hitchcock criticized the liberal sympathies of many bishops and expressed hope that Pope John Paul II would reshape the U.S. episcopacy. When it came to internal Church politics, Hitchcock’s article was about as involved as any could be. Biever told Blum that Hitchcock was endangering the League’s credibility with the NCCB, the Catholic press, and mainstream Catholics. Moreover, Biever pointed out that if he was going to make any headway in fundraising among Bishops, the Catholic League must not be associated with such criticism. Blum does not appear to have admonished Hitchcock. Although the Jesuit was willing to confront paid staff members on issues, he seemed unwilling to rein in the Chairman of the Board.

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653 Bruce Biever, S.J. to Blum, April 8, 1984, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 5, folder title “Correspondence, Monaghan, Patrick 1982-1983.”

654 Bruce Biever, S.J. to Blum, February 10, 1984, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Biever S.J., Rev. Bruce, 1983-1989.”

The relationship between Biever and Blum grew tense, although they never had an irreconcilable falling out such as Blum experienced with Stu Hubbell. Their relationship remained cordial even after Biever left employment at the League in 1986. Disagreement between the two Jesuits emerged most strongly in the Fall of 1984 as the United States faced a presidential election and the issue of Catholic politicians and their views on abortion rose to prominence. The two major political parties differed on abortion, with the Republicans supporting policies to limit or ban abortions in order to protect the right to life of unborn fetuses, while the Democrats sought to protect the right of women to control their own bodies by choosing to have an abortion. Neither Republican candidate was Catholic. The Democratic Vice-President candidate, Geraldine Ferraro, found herself at odds with her Church when she endorsed her party’s position on abortion. Ferraro was joined in her beliefs by another prominent Catholic Democrat, Governor Mario Cuomo of New York. Cuomo was a keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention and would go on to give a controversial speech on abortion at the University of Notre Dame in September of that year. These two Catholic politicians justified their positions by arguing that while they may be personally opposed to abortion, they had no right in a pluralistic society like the United States to impose their personal belief on others by advocating restrictive abortion policies.

Blum attacked the reasoning of Ferraro and Cuomo in a hard-hitting piece for the Catholic League newsletter, entitled “Shinto Catholics and the Right to Life.” Blum borrowed the term “Shinto Catholic” from a New York City pastor that had coined the term to describe American Catholics who privatized their religious beliefs by refusing to

take any public position based on those beliefs. For Blum, politicians like Ferraro and Cuomo misunderstood American democracy if they believed that a pluralistic society demanded Catholic citizens keep their personal religious beliefs separate from their political actions. On the contrary, democratic pluralism required citizens to act politically out of their deepest conscience via interest groups that vied in the public square with other interest groups. Out of this clash of interest groups came public policy. For democracy to work properly, Blum was convinced that Catholics and all other believers must enjoy the freedom to act publicly on their religious beliefs. Religious freedom was the issue at stake in the debate and any talk about separation of church and state served merely as a smoke screen masking the crucial issue.

Bruce Biever was alarmed at the stridency of Blum’s attack on Ferraro and Cuomo. He thought Blum was treating the two politicians as straw men when the real issue was the Church’s failure to properly form and guide American Catholics to be politically active. In his comments on Blum’s piece, Biever revealed himself to be more liberal than the older Jesuit on internal Church matters by criticizing Pope John Paul II for sending a mixed signal to his American flock—on the one hand the Pope urged Catholics to become politically active and yet he prevented Church leaders from acting. Here, Biever was almost certainly referring to two events: the Pope’s demand that liberal Jesuit Robert Drinan resign his elected office as a Democratic congressman and the Supreme Pontiff’s muzzling of Raymond Hunthausen, the anti-nuclear peace activist Archbishop of Seattle. Blum defended John Paul II, arguing that no one had done more to

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657 The back-and-forth between Blum and Biever is captured in two memoranda: Biever to Blum, August 8, 1984, and Blum to Biever, August 8, 1984, both in Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 2, folder title “Correspondence, Biever, S.J., Rev. Bruce, 1983-1989.”
encourage the laity to get involved in politics; and as for clerical leaders, Blum believed they undermined their own credibility by becoming, like Drinan, too closely associated with a particular party. Biever urged Blum to tone down his attack on Ferraro and Cuomo and he tried to argue in terms the older man would understand. “Your theme through the years,” Biever reminded Blum, “has been that the fault lies, dear Brutus, with ourselves. That is the God’s truth, and railing against the Ferraros and Cuomos of the world will do nothing to change that truth. We created them.” Blum disagreed, believing that an organization like the Catholic League must nevertheless, in good conscience, speak out forcefully against such politicians. To simply say “we created them” was a cop out. To remain silent would be to surrender the country to the secular humanists, the real menace at the heart of American society. Blum concluded, “I for one am not about to surrender, and if the League does I think it should fold its tent and quietly steal away into the night.”

Ultimately, Blum’s piece was published; however, he compromised with Biever by toning down the rhetoric against Ferraro and Cuomo and by making the article’s main, concluding point be that the gravest fault lay with the Catholic Church for not doing a better job of educating lay Catholics. The exchange between the two men over this article reveals their political differences, and it reflects in microcosm the divide that kept American Catholics from uniting politically. Biever was willing to defend the right of liberal Catholics like Hunthausen and Drinan to speak publicly on issues of peace and social justice, but he was reluctant to publicly criticize liberal candidates when they clashed with Church teaching in suggesting that a woman’s right to choose an abortion somehow outweighed a fetus’s right to live. Blum, on the other hand, was more than willing to attack Catholic politicians on the conservative issue of abortion, but he
remained silent in all his writings on Catholic support for liberal issues that were unimportant to him.

In early 1986, Bruce Biever sought and obtained reassignment to Marquette University, not to continue his rise in administration but to serve as a full-time professor in the Department of Social and Cultural Sciences. Blum was not sorry to see him go; that spring he complained in a private meeting with their Jesuit superior that Biever was a waste of talent. Blum was disappointed that Biever, despite his fundraising credentials, had failed to raise significant sums for the League; and he bemoaned how the younger Jesuit, an excellent writer, had published very little for the organization. Biever did not cut his ties to the League completely. At the request of their Jesuit superiors, Biever continued to review Blum’s writings. Biever became one of the League’s directors and his name appeared on the letterhead; however, given the Board’s weakness, the role meant very little. In hindsight, Biever’s assignment to the League looks like a failed experiment, an attempt to right the ship administratively, to steer it toward the center of the ideological spectrum, and to broaden its appeal beyond just Catholics who were outraged over abortion and who supported educational vouchers. After two years it was clear that neither Blum nor the Catholic League would change. It would remain an anti-defamation group and civil rights union with narrow concerns. The Catholic League was Blum’s kingdom, and the Society of Jesus seems to have simply decided to let it run its course while hoping to keep its worst excesses in check. A former assistant general counsel may have summed up the situation best with a general comment he made about

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Blum’s personality: “Nobody was going to steer Father Blum in a direction he did not want to go.”

**The Wanderer incident**

The Catholic League claimed to speak for all Catholic citizens in the United States, but its support came from a conservative base. The danger for any organization tied to a core constituency is that it will act in a heterodox manner—or be perceived as doing so—and offend its firmest supporters, in effect biting the hand that feeds it. Such was the case with the Catholic League. In 1985 it had a public row with *The Wanderer*, the nation’s oldest conservative Catholic newspaper. The catalyst was League Chairman James Hitchcock who at the Board’s annual meeting in spring 1985 tried to oust Blum from the presidency. In the wake of the coup’s failure, Hitchcock went public with the League’s internal problems through *The Wanderer*. The incident created bad press that damaged the League’s reputation and helped to stifle any further growth it might have enjoyed under Blum.

Since the Destro Affair in 1982, Hitchcock had been gathering information on the internal workings of the League, documenting especially Blum’s management style and the high rate of turnover in personnel. Hitchcock had grown frustrated by the lack of Board involvement in the League’s decision-making and the quality of information it was receiving about the organization that the directors were bound by law to direct. The hiring of Bruce Biever as executive vice president and Blum’s potential successor without any input from the Board was one example. By early 1985 Hitchcock had decided that Blum needed to go. He worked with another director, Pearl Zelle, to

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introduce a resolution requesting Blum’s retirement. Ahead of the meeting, Hitchcock sent the board members an explanatory memorandum accompanied by 21 pages of documents that portrayed Blum as an incompetent authoritarian who was driving the Catholic League into the ground.\footnote{James Hitchcock to Catholic League Board Members, April 2, 1985, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 3, folder title “Correspondence, Hitchcock, James, 1974-1985.”} Hitchcock focused on the League’s financial troubles and internal disorder, particularly the high rate of staff turnover, a phenomenon he attributed to Blum’s difficult personality. Blum countered with a memorandum that attempted to refute Hitchcock’s claims point by point. When the Board gathered on April 20th, just over half of the directors were present. Blum weathered the storm. After the resolution failed, Hitchcock immediately resigned and walked out of the meeting.\footnote{Hitchcock later said of the board, “There were some people, a minority, who agreed with me. Again, I think [Blum] had put on the board primarily people whom he had known and whom he trusted. There were people who agreed with me but said, you know ‘Father Blum is Father Blum and I’m not going to oppose him. He’s a great guy.’ And then there were some who were outright his supporters.” James Hitchcock, Interview by William Fliss, September 17, 2015.}

The conflict did not subside. Hitchcock contacted a reporter at *The Wanderer,* who spent three weeks researching the situation at the League. He conducted telephone interviews with Hitchcock as well as League employees past and present. The result was a 9,600-word article under the headline “Amid Predictions of Its Collapse … Catholic League Is In Turmoil.”\footnote{Gary Potter, “Amid Predictions of Its Collapse … Catholic League is in Turmoil,” *The Wanderer,* May 23, 1985. The reporter did contact Blum as well, but the Jesuit was laconic in comments.} Although the reporter acknowledged Father Blum’s many contributions to the Church, he was highly critical of the President, presenting the image of a manipulative and secretive old man who maintained tight control over the League and dismissed employees that fell out of favor. Blum did not receive all the criticism: Bruce Biever came under attack as did James McLaughlin, Hitchcock’s successor as
Board Chairman. Criticism of Biever focused on those same excerpts from Biever’s book that Hitchcock had brought to Blum’s attention two years earlier and on leaked memoranda written by Biever that cast doubt on the Jesuit’s commitment to the anti-abortion fight, which was probably the single biggest issue of concern to readers of *The Wanderer*. McLaughlin, in turn, received scrutiny for his ties to the Mexican American Cultural Center of San Antonio, Texas, a group purported to be sympathetic to liberation theology. Besides tarnishing the Catholic League with the brush of liberation theology, *The Wanderer* also linked the organization to the idea of the “seamless garment.” Specifically, *The Wanderer* connected Virgil Blum to the idea through a chapter the Jesuit had written for a League publication in which he expressed support for the idea.

Both topics—liberation theology and the seamless garment—were guaranteed to enrage conservative Catholics. Liberation theology first emerged in the 1960s and is most associated with Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez. In its broadest sense, liberation theology stressed a Christian faith lived in solidarity with the poor, a life that demanded a praxis (practice) of working to undermine unjust political and economic structures. Conservatives branded it a Marxist theology and viewed its proponents with suspicion; in

664 Virgil C. Blum, “The ‘Seamless Garment,’” in Richard McMunn, ed. *Religion in Politics* (Milwaukee: The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, 1985), 73-75. Blum quoted Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago to clarify that the seamless garment did not “equate all issues or subsume the moral problem of protecting and promoting life into one proposition” but instead served to “sharpen our moral sensitivity and to expand the intellectual framework of debate of the life issues.” Such subtlety was lost on most conservatives who interpreted it to mean that abortion was no different from warfare as a moral problem. For a discussion of this, see Steven P. Millies, *Good Intentions: A History of Catholic Voters’ Road from Roe to Trump* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2018), 65-75. Blum wanted to emphasize that Bernardin spoke in terms of moral principles and not legislative politics. He wished to alleviate the fears of any conservatives who thought Bernardin meant that life issues needed to be brought before Congress in an omnibus bill where all would have to stand or fall together.
the heightened Cold War context of the 1980s, liberation theology seemed to them like insidious Communism cloaked in theological garb. Liberation theology emanated from Latin America, but the idea of the “seamless garment” originated in the United States and is most associated with Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago. In 1983 Cardinal Bernardin tried to close the moral rift between liberal and conservative Catholics, especially concerning disagreement over abortion rights, by proposing that all life issues be considered together in a consistent ethic of life. Here the thinking went that just like Christ’s garment at Calvary was seamless and could not be divided, so too the life issues—abortion, euthanasia, warfare, capital punishment—must be considered in common. Practically speaking, Bernardin’s message was a warning against single-issue preoccupation by the Left or Right. Conservatives must not champion anti-abortion efforts in isolation from the other life issues, while at the same time liberals must include abortion among issues worthy of protest. Most conservatives rejected Bernardin’s proposal and refused to extend to the other life issues the same importance as the fight against abortion. The Wanderer—by introducing these two topics, inadvertently or not—was pressing the emotional buttons of its readership, for if anyone wished to rouse the vitriol of right-wing Catholics in the 1980s, mention of liberation theology and the seamless garment was sure to do it.

The Wanderer’s attacks on Biever and McLaughlin developed a central theme in the reporting—that the Catholic League was now changing course under new leadership and becoming more liberal. The article provoked an immediate response from Blum and Biever. Letters went out to chapter presidents, Bishops, and “Life Members” of the League. Blum wrote a detailed rebuttal to the Wanderer article that was published as a
pamphlet and distributed widely, seeking to reassure that the Catholic League had not lost its orthodoxy and that Hitchcock’s machinations were much ado about nothing. Biever composed an anti-abortion article for the newsletter to re-establish his pro-life bona fides. The aggressiveness of their response emphasizes the existential threat this posed to the Catholic League: many of its members undoubtedly read *The Wanderer.* Nevertheless, damage had been done. Within a month of the article’s appearance, twenty-five members had written to cancel their support for the League. Applying a rule of thumb among newspaper editors which held that for each letter received there were 100 subscribers who felt the same way, Blum opined that the League might expect 2,500 cancellations, a significant blow for an organization with less than 30,000 dues paying members.

*The Wanderer* incident had internal fallout as well. Hitchcock had condemned the League’s Board of Directors for abdicating its responsibilities. It is true that only 16 of the 29 directors showed up for the April 20th meeting, even though they knew a crisis point had been reached. The Board did not have a culture of strong participation and as a collective body exerted little influence on the League’s operations. Yet those directors who attended the April meeting did seek to reaffirm the Board’s role. Even Blum’s firmest supporters were undoubtedly alarmed by the documentation that the departed chairman shared ahead of the meeting. The remaining directors passed a resolution

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668 Blum to all chapter presidents/executive directors, June 18, 1985, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 12, folder title “Wanderer Articles and Responses, 1985.”
charging the executive committee with forming a group to study the League’s operations and to make recommendations for improvement.

Chaired by one of the League’s founding directors, Emile Comar of Louisiana, this committee arrived in Milwaukee in August 1985 and conducted what Blum later described as a “kangaroo court.” After interviewing staff members for 2-5 hours each, the committee, in Blum’s words, “spent three hours telling me what was wrong with me and how terrible was the way I executed my duties as the chief executive officer.”

Areas of concern included the League’s precarious finances and lack of fundraising, the low morale of the chapters, Blum’s unwillingness to grant others authority to make decisions, and the need for Blum to release control of administration—some of the very same things Bruce Biever had tried to rectify the summer before with his office reorganization plan. The aftermath of the Comar Committee’s investigation confirmed the Board’s ineffectiveness. The Committee failed to agree on a single set of recommendations. Instead, they peppered Blum with individual recommendations that the Jesuit seems to have ignored. The Wanderer incident did not inflict a fatal blow to the League, but membership dipped in the wake of it, and the incident tarnished Blum’s image. The Catholic League was entering its final years under the defiant Jesuit’s leadership. A former Board Secretary, describing the organization during the late 1980s, commented, “It was neither declining nor growing. The Catholic League ran on the shoulders of Virgil Blum. When he was successful, when he was prominent, the Catholic League was. He was the Catholic League.”

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669 Blum to David Young, April 14, 1986, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 12, folder title “Staff meetings, 1981-1986.”
670 Ibid.
The final years

Virgil Blum would die in April 1990, on the cusp of a new decade for his Catholic League. The years immediately preceding Blum’s death witnessed a continuation of existing trends. The Catholic League became even more centered on the abortion issue, and its work reflected the growing alliance in the United States between Catholics and evangelical Protestants in opposing abortion. During these years Blum’s organization did its part to affirm Catholic participation in the Religious Right. The Jesuit remained adamant that the Catholic League must be non-partisan, but his sympathies toward the Republican Party were undeniable and this would not have been lost any League members looking to the organization for political guidance. Staff turnover at the Catholic League remained high, creating a revolving door that stymied growth and development. By 1990 the Catholic League seemed almost a moribund organization bound to the will of a dying man.

Abortion was the primary topic of concern for the League in its last years, followed by Blum’s hobby horse of school choice. The League was still vigilant in exposing defamatory statements about Catholicism and perceived desecrations of its cherished symbols, but most of the group’s attention focused on abortion. By 1989 someone reading its monthly Newsletter might have concluded that the Catholic League was just another Pro-Life group in the United States, so much of its content centered on the abortion issue. A trend in the General Counsel’s office contributed to this development. By the mid-1980s the League became increasingly involved in defending abortion protestors. A former attorney at the League identified anti-abortion picketer cases as a growing legal area at the time, and he claimed that the League was at the
leading edge of it. Consequently, the group became drawn into cases defending non-Catholic protestors. This was emblematic of a larger trend at the League in its last years toward making common cause with Protestant evangelicals in defense of religious freedom. The thought that a young Virgil Blum—product of the highly polarized religious environment of Shelby County, Iowa during the 1930s—would one day expend Catholic resources to defend the right of Protestant students to establish a Bible-Study Group at their public school shows how dramatically times had changed.

Blum’s common cause with Protestants in opposing secular humanism is best illustrated in his friendship with Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran minister and public intellectual who became a conservative voice in the 1970s as part of the neoconservative movement. The neoconservatives had migrated rightward from various points on the political left; Neuhaus himself had been a radical opponent of the Vietnam War in the 1960s, but his strong opposition to *Roe v. Wade* helped move him to the right. Neuhaus wrote two books in the 1980s that Blum embraced wholeheartedly. The first was *The Naked Public Square* (1984) which argued against the secularization of the United States, especially using the First Amendment’s non-establishment clause for the purpose of preventing religiously informed viewpoints from shaping public policies or even from

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673 It must be noted that the relationship between the Catholic League and the Protestant Religious Right was not always amicable. The early 1980s, especially, witnessed a rise in anti-Catholic statements by vocal Fundamentalist Protestant influencers such as Jimmy Swaggart, Jack Chick, and Tony Alamo. The League was not shy about crossing swords with them publicly. But they represented only one segment of the conservative Protestant community in the United States.
674 “League enters Bible-Study Case,” *Catholic League Newsletter*, vol. 14, no. 6 (June 1987).
being given a fair hearing in public debates. Neuhaus accused secularists of striving to strip the public square of any religious presence whatsoever, a radical departure from earlier U.S. history. Blum could not have agreed more. He had been saying the same thing about the First Amendment since his doctoral dissertation in 1954. Neuhaus’s second book, *The Catholic Moment* (1987), was guaranteed to win Blum’s approval because it argued that only the Roman Catholic Church, with its rich moral tradition and social teachings, possessed the intellectual weight to stand up to the juggernaut of secular humanism and lead the people of other faith traditions to victory. Neuhaus’s thinking here elided neatly with Blum’s long-standing belief that the Catholic Church was the essential bulwark against secularism, a notion that had long animated his relentless pursuit of public funding for Catholic parents who sent their children to Catholic schools.

Neuhaus had a more nuanced and sophisticated mind than Blum and so was able to frame and articulate his argument in a manner that resonated with a wider audience. The relationship between Blum and Neuhaus in the 1980s resembled Blum’s relationship with John Courtney Murray in the 1940s and 1950s: in each period Blum looked to the more erudite scholar to elucidate ideas he had been striving to express. Neuhaus acknowledged the fact that Blum had long battled for these same ideas prior to the Lutheran minister’s appearance in public life. Following Blum’s death, Neuhaus wrote of his friend, “His was a courageous and often lonely battle against the respectable biases and bigotries that deny the role of religion in our public life. Jews and Christians alike owe him an immeasurable debt of gratitude.”

Neuhaus was a favorite speaker at Catholic League events in the

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676 Statement on Father Virgil Blum, April 1990, Box 8, Folder 22 (Blum, Virgil, 1984-1989), The Richard John Neuhaus Papers, ACUA, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
late 1980s, and Blum had already bestowed the League’s John Paul II Religious Freedom Award upon Neuhaus back in 1983.

The Catholic League used awards ceremonies at the national and chapter levels to give its imprimatur to heroes in the struggle for religious freedom. The list of people receiving awards in the 1980s shows how firmly the League was ensconced in the conservative camp. Among recipients were Robert Bork, Judge Brevard Hand, Cardinal O’Connor, William Bennett, Patrick Frawley, Cardinal Krol, Dr. Bernard Nathansan, and Randall Terry. Through its monthly Newsletter, the League also helped to disseminate the writings of notable conservatives, including Michael Novak, George Weigel, Pat Buchanan, and Charlie Sykes. Part of the League’s historical significance lies in its conveying these writings to a Catholic audience that otherwise might not have sought them out or read them. Through its awards and publications, the Catholic League helped build the national network of conservative figures that emerged during the Reagan years in the United States.

Republican President Ronald Reagan received the League’s first John Paul II Religious Freedom Award in May 1983. Blum had been invited to the White House to receive congratulations on the Catholic League’s tenth anniversary, and the Jesuit seized the chance to hand the award directly to Reagan. It was a photo opportunity that the League exploited in its publications. Bestowal of the award upon Reagan and other Republicans such as Henry Hyde and William Bennett reflects Blum’s and the Catholic League’s drift toward the GOP in the 1980s. The League never told its members who to vote for; but by praising the positions and proposals of certain politicians (e.g., Reagan’s support for tuition tax credits) and criticizing others (e.g., Ferraro’s support for abortion
rights) the League was implicitly endorsing or rejecting these politicians and, by extension, their party. Steven P. Millies has argued that “it is not possible to advocate forcefully for an issue position and not to prefer a partisan outcome when there is partisan disagreement.”677 If true, the Catholic League was indeed partisan despite Blum’s protestations to the contrary. The League’s strong support for anti-abortion forces—a movement closely associated with the Republican Party—made the League’s partisan preference clear. If the League was non-partisan, it was “non-partisan” in the same way that the United States had been “neutral” in mid-1941 while it simultaneously waged an undeclared naval war against Germany on the North Atlantic. No Democrat ever received a major Catholic League award.

At best, the Catholic League was stagnating by the late 1980s. Its legal activities seemed to have diminished, confined mostly to the filing of *amicus curiae* briefs. The *Catholic League Newsletter* had become noticeably leaner. Each issue still contained a supplement intended to provide a new in-depth article for the membership to read on a topic of League interest; however, by 1988 the supplements were sometimes reprintings of pieces from earlier years. The publications being produced by the League and its staff were of inferior quality. Michael Schwartz’s *Persistent Prejudice: Anti-Catholicism in America* (1984) had been a lengthy, substantive treatment of the topic; by contrast, *Anti-Catholicism in the 1980s* (1988) written by Schwartz’s successor, Kevin Long, was only a thin, year-by-year listing of purported outrages against the Catholic Church and its beliefs. The League’s attempt to publish a major book defending Pope Pius XII’s conduct

during the Holocaust proved a fiasco.\textsuperscript{678} Relations with the chapters remained strained. A bitter behind-the-scenes struggle between the League’s national office and the Minnesota Chapter coincided with Blum’s final months on earth.\textsuperscript{679}

Virgil Blum was diagnosed with liver cancer in the fall of 1989. He attended his last annual Board Meeting in December where he told the directors that the Church needed a major league organization, but that the Catholic League was only a minor league player whose voice was not being heard in Washington or New York.\textsuperscript{680} This same sentiment might have been expressed at a board meeting fifteen years earlier. Blum was determined that the Catholic League continue. He drew strength from the unraveling of Communism in Eastern Europe, hoping that, like \textit{Roe v. Wade}, the event might inspire Catholics to join the fight for their own civil rights. Days after the meeting, Blum underwent surgery. By January it was clear the League quickly needed a presidential succession plan. Blum had done a disservice to the Catholic League by not lining up a successor. He turned now to his closest friend and former student, Quentin Quade, and begged him to assume the presidency.\textsuperscript{681} Quade was planning to retire soon from Marquette University’s administration, but he had no interest in running the Catholic League. Blum did elicit a deathbed promise from Quade that he would continue the fight for school choice, the Jesuit’s most cherished cause.\textsuperscript{682}

\textsuperscript{678} Addendum to 1989 Board of Directors Meeting, December 2, 1989, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder titled “Board Meeting Records, 1989.”
\textsuperscript{679} Memo from Joe Cannizzo to Blum, January 22, 1990, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 6, folder title “Correspondence, Presidential, 1982-1990.”
\textsuperscript{680} Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, December 2, 1989, Blum Papers, sub-series 5, box 1, folder titled “Board Meeting Records, 1989.”
\textsuperscript{681} Phyllis Quade, Interview by Bill Fliss, May 17, 2017.
\textsuperscript{682} In 1992 Quade founded the Virgil C. Blum, S.J. Center for Parental Freedom in Education at Marquette University which served as a clearinghouse of information and advice for educational reform advocates.
Virgil Blum died in his room at Marquette’s Jesuit Residence on April 4, 1990. His last message to the Catholic League’s members appeared in the March Newsletter. The Jesuit remained defiant to the end, his final hope a refrain that he had uttered countless times in letters, speeches, and publications over the previous 35 years: “I hope that Catholics in America will finally shed the guilt complex that has stifled full Catholic participation in the civic life of our pluralistic nation.”

**Circumscribed success**

Throughout his public career Virgil Blum criticized American Catholics who appeared to feel guilty that they were Catholic. In Blum’s estimation, and to his consternation, a large segment of the Catholic population seemed to resign themselves to being second-class citizens in the United States. From the Jesuit’s very first effort at writing for a popular audience—1955’s *Your Child’s Religious Liberty*—to his 1972 book *Catholic Parents, Political Eunuchs* and on through the hundreds of articles he wrote at the Catholic League, Blum constantly tried to rouse American Catholics to act like first-class citizens who demanded equal rights under the Constitution. Blum attributed this collective guilt complex to the discriminatory treatment Catholics had received historically by a Protestant majority, which had the effect of instilling a ghetto mindset in the Catholic immigrant population. American Catholics had made great material strides since the nineteenth century, but a residue of this earlier period of overt Protestant prejudice against Catholics took the form of a deep desire among American Catholics to be accepted into the mainstream. By the late twentieth century, however,

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683 Virgil C. Blum, “My Hope for the Future … and a Fond Farewell,” *Catholic League Newsletter*, vol. 17, no. 3 (March 1990), 8.
Protestants no longer dominated the mainstream, having surrendered their dominance to secular liberals. These secular opinion-molders strove to drive all religion from public life. For Blum, too many Catholics were willing to ignore the hegemonic anti-Catholicism at work in the United States in order to avoid the embarrassment of seeming countercultural in the eyes of their non-Catholic friends.684

Blum created the Catholic League in 1973 in the hope that the time had finally arrived when Catholics might rally together and transform American culture. In the wake of *Roe v. Wade* and amidst increasing attacks on Catholic symbols and teachings in the mass media, Blum believed the country had reached a watershed moment. The goals he articulated for the League in 1973 were lofty, going beyond simply being a defamation watchdog on guard against profane depictions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Blum dreamed of the nation’s 50 million Catholics uniting to transform public opinion. Instead of walking on eggshells around their non-Catholic friends and co-workers, Catholics should try to change these peoples’ minds and make clear that abusing the rights of Catholics was unacceptable. Blum believed this would have profound legal consequences because judges adhered to sociological jurisprudence, meaning that they looked to public opinion before ruling. Therefore, a shift in the “operative ideas of society” would produce Catholic civil rights victories in the courts, most importantly in the area of public aid for non-public schoolchildren. These victories would help preserve the struggling Catholic educational system that Blum believed was the keystone for resisting the influence of the secular humanists.

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684 Blum to Bernard Casserly, November 30, 1972, Blum Papers, sub-series 3, box 9, folder title “Correspondence about Catholic Parents, Political Eunuchs, 1972-1973.”
When compared to Blum’s lofty aspiration, the Catholic League’s performance was a circumscribed success, if not a plain failure. It seems never to have attracted more than roughly 30,000 members at one time, a figure that represented only .0006 percent of the U.S. Catholic population.\(^{685}\) No major piece of civil rights legislation emerged from the League’s efforts. Catholic League attorneys argued only one case before the U.S. Supreme Court, and they lost.\(^{686}\) It would be unfair to label Blum’s Catholic League as insignificant, but its greatest importance for historical study may lie in the very fact that its success was so limited. Explaining why the Catholic League never achieved Blum’s vision offers insights into the changing political and religious landscape in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. The Catholic League faced many obstacles to success. In order to understand why the League failed to live up to Blum’s dream, the relative seriousness of these obstacles needs to be assessed.

The Catholic League began life in May 1973 with some strikes against it; namely it suffered from a slow start, was badly underfunded, and faced a geographic liability. The organization had been assembled so hurriedly that it was not adequately prepared to take advantage of its initial appeal to Catholics. Over a year would pass before the IRS afforded the League tax exempt status, during which time no serious fundraising could be expected. No provision for a dues-paying membership was established until several months after its launch. If the League had been set up to immediately begin enrolling members, it might have better exploited early enthusiasm. The loss of Patrick Frawley’s financial support meant the League was woefully underfunded. Condemned to a

\(^{685}\) This calculation is based off a total population of 50 million Catholics. It may be more accurate to limit this to the number of adult Catholics; but even so, the percentage would be tiny.

shoestring budget, there was little the League could do to have a nationwide impact. Basing the League’s headquarters in the Midwest instead of on the east coast was probably a detriment as well. Following Blum’s death, the League relocated to New York City where its membership seems to have tripled.687 Although these three obstacles may have curtailed the League’s growth, it is unlikely that they account for the failure of Blum’s vision. The strongest of these three obstacles to success was the national office’s presence in Milwaukee instead of in a major city on the eastern seaboard where most American Catholics resided, some of them quite wealthy. But to claim that this explains why the Catholic League never achieved Blum’s vision would be an exaggeration. Even James Hitchcock, who fell out publicly with Blum, was unwilling to blame the organization’s poor growth on the Jesuit’s insistence that the League remain in Milwaukee. Having the League’s headquarters in the Midwest may have hindered its public visibility in the nation’s leading newspapers; but as Hitchcock put it, “I don’t think people are going to say, ‘Oh, I’m not going to join an organization in Milwaukee.’”688

These obstacles—a slow start, underfunding, and geographic location—might have been overcome by better management in the longer-term. Mismanagement clearly plagued the Catholic League and much of the blame lies with Virgil Blum. The League was Blum’s organization, especially after the expansion of the national office in the late 1970s and Stuart Hubbell’s departure from the scene. Blum was a poor choice to be the League’s chief executive officer. He had no experience running an organization like the

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Catholic League, and he lacked the proper personality for it. Blum’s history of delivering unsolicited lectures to the U.S. Bishops did not endear him to that key constituency, and his controlling nature alienated chapter volunteers and paid employees. Blum always found a way to shift blame for performance problems on to the employees; however, the incredibly high and consistent level of turnover at the League suggests Blum himself was the heart of the problem. He was the one constant variable in a string of personnel disputes. In some cases, Blum may have been right about an employee’s incompetence; but there is an old dictum which holds that Grade A leaders hire Grade A people while Grade B leaders hire Grade C people. The dictum appears to have rung true at the Catholic League’s national office in Milwaukee. On some level, Blum felt threatened by extremely capable people and so over time the quality of the staff at the Catholic League seems to have diminished.

It would be convenient to simply attribute the League’s circumscribed success to Virgil Blum’s personal shortcomings, but this would be unfair to the Jesuit’s memory. Instead, two questionable premises upon which Blum built his grand vision for the Catholic League proved to be greater obstacles to success than the others mentioned so far. The first premise was Blum’s belief that Catholics were indistinguishable from other minority groups in the United States fighting for their civil rights. He especially liked to compare Catholics with African Americans and Jews. For Blum, all three groups shared a history of discrimination in the United States, and he believed each group was entitled, if not obligated, to battle for equal rights. Most Americans, however, were unwilling to follow Blum to this comparison. A newspaper columnist probably captured the opinion

of most Americans, Catholics included, when he responded to the Catholic League’s claim by saying, “[T]he situation of Catholics in this country is not the same as that of Blacks. The recent history of Catholics is not the same as that of Jews.” American Catholics had been enjoying material gains since World War II, entering the professional ranks in large numbers because of the G.I. Bill and moving out to the suburbs. To associate this upwardly mobile group with an African American population languishing in urban poverty could be cringeworthy. Similarly, comparing Catholics with a Jewish people that had endured centuries of anti-Semitism and most recently survived a genocide in World War II could seem out of line. Any differences, however, were completely lost on Blum, revealing just how tightly Virgil Blum’s identity was tied to his Catholicism. Blum took his Catholicism very seriously. He believed himself to be a creature claimed by Christ in the sacrament of Baptism and this identity was as real and indissoluble to him as a racial identity. Blum saw no qualitative distinction between American Catholics and racial groups when it came to civil rights. But for Blum to expect the rest of American society, including Catholics, to accept such an equation was perhaps naïve. Blum’s frequent use of this association may have undermined the Catholic League’s credibility with a large segment of the American people.

The second questionable premise turned out to be the lethal obstacle to Blum realizing his grand vision for the Catholic League. The Jesuit operated under the faulty assumption that the Catholic population in the United States could ever be united around something like the Catholic League. Earlier Blum had struggled to rally Catholic parents around CEF, but that group’s failure could be explained in part by the fact most Catholic

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parents were already sending their children to the local public school instead of to a parochial school, rendering sweeping Catholic support for CEF unlikely. But the Catholic League was not limited to a single issue; it had broader concerns, and so there was hope in Blum’s mind that most of the nation’s Catholics could rally around the League. This proved impossible to achieve in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, an event that polarized the American Church. In the Council’s wake, liberals and conservatives disagreed over many issues. The fact that even the U.S. Bishops were divided among themselves did not bode well for an organization such as the Catholic League hoping to rally all Catholics under its banner. A housewife from San Bernardino, California, summed up the situation succinctly in a letter to Blum: “Why is it that we [Catholics] don’t form these interest groups? Isn’t it because we find it hard to clearly define our value on any given issue?”

A lack of consensus among American Catholics undermined Blum’s hope for the League. The Jesuit tried to downplay differences by prohibiting the League from getting involved in internal Church disputes, but the effort was futile. There proved to be no neat distinction between internal and external issues. Some of the issues that came to divide American Catholics, such as abortion rights, proved unavoidable. From the get-go, the League sought to defend the Church from public attacks not only on its sacred symbols but on its teachings as well. But when the American Catholic population itself could not agree upon Church teachings, any hope that they might rise together as an interest group seemed unrealistic. Many of the public criticisms of Catholicism during the 1970s and 1980s came from progressive Catholics and from disgruntled Catholics who had left the

Church, leading one historian to later claim, “The principal force driving modern anti-Catholicism is divisions within the Church itself.” Blum tried to keep his staff members at the League from publicly lambasting liberal Catholic dissenters, but he was not always successful. Bill Donahue, the man who would resurrect the Catholic League in New York City a few years after Blum’s death, had no such qualms. Donahue lifted any ban against bashing Catholic dissenters. This probably helps explain why the League’s membership rose during the 1990s—now it was unambiguously committed to one end of the ideological spectrum.

Instead of uniting Catholics into a grand coalition to save American society from secularism, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights became just one of a multitude of Catholic groups that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s aligned ideologically with either the left or the right. The Catholic League did enjoy some success as an anti-defamation group responding to overt attacks on the Church, but Blum’s full vision was never realized or even realizable. In 1984 the League published a compilation of the Jesuit’s writings under the title *Quest for Religious Freedom*. The book’s cover depicted a mounted knight (Blum presumably) battling a dragon. From the distance now of nearly forty years, it seems more accurate to have replaced the dragon with a windmill.

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CONCLUSION

Though I thought I had toiled in vain,
for nothing and for naught spent my strength,
Yet my right is with the Lord,
my recompense is with my God.
For now the Lord has spoken
who formed me as his servant from the womb,
That Jacob may be brought back to him
and Israel gathered to him;
I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
and my God is now my strength!

Isaiah 49: 4-5

From the time Virgil Blum entered the Society of Jesus in 1934, he went regularly on retreat, guided by The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. As a Jesuit, Blum was required to set aside eight consecutive days each year to make a retreat. It was a time to remove himself from the pell-mell of daily life and the encroaching demands of the world and, in solitude and silence, reattune himself to a God who, while never absent from the Jesuit’s consciousness, faced competitors for the man’s attention. Early in The Spiritual Exercises Ignatius directs retreatants to place themselves before the cross and pray over three challenging questions: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ? Virgil Blum faced these questions every year for 56 years. Evidence of Blum’s inner spiritual life is nonexistent: if he kept notes on his retreats or maintained a prayer journal, they have not survived. Yet these questions before the cross must have provoked soul-searching in Blum about his life and his public career. A hallmark of Ignatian spirituality is discernment, the practice of paying close attention to the movements of the spirit within the believer. Discernment shows its practical value.

in the weighing of options during decision-making. It is common for people to make an Ignatian retreat when they face an important decision in life. Blum would have been no different, and it is reasonable to conclude that his retreat experiences affected the courses of action he chose. Blum most likely emerged from retreat around 1944 convinced that Christ wanted him to fight for the rights of Catholics in the U.S. political system to stave off secularism. Similarly, Blum finished his retreats in the mid-1950s believing intensely that his place was at Marquette University and not Creighton University. Blum left retreat a few years later determined to devote himself to Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF); and he came out of his retreat in 1973 believing that the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights was the Holy Spirit’s answer for Blum to Ignatius’s question what ought I do for Christ?

Blum’s retreat experiences reinforced his commitment to labor as a teacher, political lobbyist, and—though he never used the term himself—a culture warrior. Blum’s own sense of mission fortified him as he faced numerous setbacks and disappointments in his quest to get U.S. Catholics to act like first-class citizens exercising their religious freedom in the public square. At times the seeming futility of these efforts haunted the Jesuit. The eulogist at Blum’s funeral said, “[H]e lived with a lingering fear that these last twenty years were for naught.” Blum’s annual retreats provided him opportunities to renew hope that his efforts were not in vain. His eulogist claimed that in their final telephone conversation, Blum’s attitude toward his life’s work was positive. “He finally let go, knowing all was now in the hands of God.”

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For the historian, Virgil Blum’s own perspective on his life’s work matters less than the perspective to be gained from careful assessment of the man’s significance. Blum has received very little attention in the historical literature, and a skeptic might wonder if there is good reason for this: He was not a towering figure within his own religious order, and he could appear to some today as just another product of a benighted Jesuit formation process thankfully consigned to the dustbin of history. Blum’s public crusades never achieved the ends he sought. CEF did not win national acceptance of public funding for non-public schoolchildren. The Catholic League failed to unify the U.S. Catholic population and transform the “operative ideas of society”. A robust populist movement of Catholic democrats never rallied around the Catholic League to act like white blood cells attacking the secular germ, keeping the body politic safe from what Blum regarded as the pathology of secularism.

Nevertheless, Blum was historically significant, not only in his actions and legacy but also in the way his life can serve to illumine developments within his religious order, his Church, and U.S. culture. Jim Carl has already pointed out some aspects of Blum’s significance, especially the way in which he broke the close association that educational vouchers had with segregationists in the 1950s and how Blum kept vouchers in the public eye until his death, laying the groundwork for the trailblazing Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) in the 1990s. One of the participants in that movement was conservative talk radio personality Charlie Sykes, who had served briefly as a Catholic League director in the mid-1970s and whom afterwards Blum hired occasionally to write articles for the League. Sykes recalled,

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“[C]learly when the movement began there was an intellectual infrastructure in place around school choice, and [Blum] contributed to that. They didn’t have to invent it in the 1990s…There was a luncheon at John Ernst Café downtown, back in the middle of the Nineties, when everything was in flux with the State Supreme Court decision. I remember looking around the table going, wow, this movement is really small. I mean the entire school choice movement is around this table. For someone like [Blum] to have been an intellectual leader in Milwaukee, that can’t be a coincidence.”696

Blum inspired his friend and former student Quentin Quade to establish the Virgil C. Blum, S.J. Center for Parental Freedom in Education within two years of the Jesuit’s death. The Blum Center participated in the struggle for MPCP, but the Center also corresponded with school choice groups across the United States and served as a clearinghouse of information about strategy and tactics.

In his own lifetime, Blum enjoyed widespread name recognition in the Catholic community. He was a vocal booster for Catholic education, and he was recognized as a major spokesman on behalf of public funding for Catholic parents who wanted their children to attend a Catholic school. He became a household name among people interested in religious freedom and defiance of a strict separation of church and state.

While not the first Catholic commentator to warn against secular humanism, Blum was an early and relentless critic of secular efforts to minimize the influence of religion in public life. He prefigured similar commentators who emerged during the culture wars of the 1980s, a network of people that his Catholic League helped to connect. Blum’s political activism that began in the 1950s was a forerunner of similar lobbying efforts by lay Catholic groups that would take organized shape after the Second Vatican Council, championing either progressive or conservative causes. Blum himself was an early leader

of what Steven Millies has described as “a kind of conservatism of resistance against secularism, atheism, and liberalism” that resonates still with a segment of the U.S. Catholic population.  

Forged in the religious crucible of Shelby County’s Colony, Virgil Blum was intensely devoted to the Catholic Church. Asked about Blum’s personal hobbies, one of his former colleagues at Marquette quipped, “I remember nothing about hobbies, unless you consider being a full time Catholic a hobby.” Yet despite Blum’s complete fidelity to Catholicism, he was remarkably open-minded if he sensed common political cause with other faith traditions. The Jesuit sought to build bridges with Protestants and Jews against secularism long before the 1970s. Today’s political alliance between like-minded Catholics and Protestants has been traced to 1979 and Catholic Paul Weyrich’s role as the founder of Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, the Reagan-era Religious Right’s flagship group which boasted 7 million members, a third of whom were Catholic according to Falwell. Almost 20 years earlier, Blum had set a precedent for interdenominational organizing by working to unite Catholic and Protestant institutions of higher learning to lobby for federal tuition tax credits for parents who sent their children to religiously affiliated colleges and universities. Also in the early 1960s, Blum welcomed Protestants and Jews into CEF and encouraged them to assume leadership roles. Blum’s founding of an explicitly Catholic League in 1973 did not signify denominational retrenchment. The League proclaimed its solidarity with those elements of other faith traditions that battled

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for religious freedom. Blum saw these efforts as consonant with the spirit of ecumenism flowing from the Second Vatican Council.

Virgil Blum’s actions were historically significant, but his life also serves as an insightful lens for viewing the U.S. Catholic Church, the Society of Jesus, and U.S. society in the twentieth century. Post-conciliar divisions among U.S. Catholics are evident in Blum’s failure to unite his 50 million coreligionists behind the League. Blum’s championing of parental freedom in education as a major goal of the League undermined the group’s appeal. Even before the Council, less than half of U.S. Catholic parents sent their children to Catholic schools. Most were content to keep their kids in the public school system and so the issue did not resonate with them; if anything, public funding for non-public schoolchildren meant to them a potential increase in taxes. Blum’s life also reveals the tension in twentieth-century U.S. Catholicism between an increasingly educated and assertive laity and the culture of clericalism that clung to Church leadership. Historians have noted that the “vision of an adult empowered laity conflicted with the preconceptions of a clergy and episcopacy that were less than enthused about relinquishing power.”700 Despite Vatican II’s assertions that the Church was the People of God and that a married vocation was just as good as a religious vocation, the bishops and bureaucrats in power seemed unwilling to loosen their reins on the laity. Staff at the NCWC and later the USCCB emerge from Blum’s story notable for their conservatism and reluctance to share power, a fact that annoyed the Jesuit throughout his career.

Blum’s life captures the fear and confusion that gripped many American Catholics in the

1960s as the Thomistic synthesis disintegrated and erstwhile religious verities faced challenge. Catholics at that time wrestled with a question that Mark Massa would later articulate: “If the tradition was not changeless, static, and always perspicacious, that is, meaning what it says and saying what it means everywhere and at all times, where could believers find solid ground to stand on in the evil day?” Blum seems to have responded by remaining committed to the theological understandings he had internalized during his adolescence and pre-conciliar Jesuit formation process.

Blum’s life provides a useful lens to observe the Society of Jesus from the 1930s through the 1980s. He is an excellent subject for studying pre-conciliar Jesuit formation because he followed the standard course for its full fifteen-year duration. Blum’s experience reveals the process’s strengths and weaknesses. Having tracked Blum through his rigorous training, some readers may be tempted to dismiss pre-conciliar formation as ridiculously authoritarian and suffocating. It certainly received mixed reviews from those memoirists who chose to comment on it. But this process did produce the kind of men necessary for constructing a powerful educational apostolate in the United States in the nineteenth century and for expanding that achievement to impressive heights in the twentieth century. There is no denying that the Jesuits molded Virgil Blum of Defiance, Iowa into an incredibly disciplined and hard-working man who gave everything he had to his ministry. Hopefully, the administrators at today’s Jesuit schools, who love to trumpet the value of Jesuit education and who skillfully market the brand to advance enrollment, appreciate that their institutions were built on the shoulders of the long black line and that these schools would never have flourished without men like Blum.

Blum’s story also reveals the shortcomings of pre-conciliar Jesuit formation. The Society of Jesus valued theology and philosophy above all disciplines, putting men like Blum at a disadvantage. Blum excelled at political science but proved only average in the thesis-driven pedagogy, conducted in Latin, that ruled philosophical and theological instruction. Only slowly did the Society seem to embrace and encourage the social sciences. In later years, Blum bemoaned the lack of instruction in political democracy, which he felt hindered most Jesuits from grasping the role of interest groups in effecting change within the U.S. political system. Making matters worse, the Jesuits pegged status in the Society to the men’s prowess in philosophy. By the time Blum had finished philosophy studies in 1941, his superiors had already decided to assign him to the Short Course in theology after he returned from regency. Only men who completed the more rigorous Long Course were invited to take the fourth vow at the end of formation, permitting them to hold high leadership positions in the Society. This consignment likely wounded Blum and fostered a personal insecurity that would later sabotage his efforts to lead others at the Catholic League.

During Blum’s lifetime, the Society of Jesus transformed from a conservative bulwark against liberal modernity into a champion of social justice for the poor and marginalized. It relinquished direct control of its U.S. colleges and universities and turned them over to lay boards of trustees. Many older Jesuits were not keen on these changes but remained obedient. Blum had his own reservations, especially concerning a lack of discipline and a spirit of experimentation among the young Jesuit scholastics in the late 1960s and 1970s which Blum believed threatened the long-term viability of the Society of Jesus. Blum’s intense devotion to Catholic schools made him bristle at efforts
to shift Jesuit emphasis from its educational apostolate to direct work with the poor in the inner cities. But Blum was more than just a reactionary pining after an old order that seemed to be passing away. He used his Ignatian spiritual training to discern the Holy Spirit at work during these transformative times, and he concluded that the thrust of his own ministry in political theology elided neatly with the Society’s new direction. With a notable twist on conventional understanding, Blum interpreted Catholic parents, and eventually Catholics in general, as belonging to the ranks of the poor and marginalized who deserved justice. He could read with equanimity the strategic documents produced by the Jesuit General Congregations in the 1960s and 1970s, convinced that they validated the work to which he had devoted his life. At the Catholic League, Blum construed social justice narrowly, pertaining to Catholic parents deserving public funds to educate their children as they saw fit, to the unborn deserving life instead of abortion, and to U.S. Catholics deserving protection from defamatory attacks on their religious beliefs. Blum’s superiors tried to broaden his understanding of social justice when they assigned Bruce Biever to the Catholic League; but the defiant Blum maintained his narrow course, and the experiment failed.

Blum’s life is also valuable for viewing phenomena in U.S. society during these tumultuous decades, especially the civil rights movement and the evolving nature of anti-Catholicism in American life. Historian James T. Patterson has emphasized the Rights Revolution as a crucial development in understanding the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century. Following the Second World War, in Patterson’s words, “a fortuitous combination of forces—of economic progress and moral fervor—worked together to promote significant, often beneficial changes for many previously
marginalized people.”702 A perceptive Virgil Blum noted this trend by the early 1950s and grasped the role that interest groups would play in its development. The United States was on a trajectory toward becoming a society of rights-conscious groups lobbying for beneficial public policies. Blum interpreted Catholics as being one of these groups. As a political scientist, he chose to focus on constitutional law and civil liberties so that he might assume the role of public intellectual lobbying for Catholics in this new rights-conscious environment. As a student of history and a former inhabitant of Shelby County, Blum knew the historical prejudice Catholics had endured at the hands of a Protestant majority; however, he would later detect a secular Puritanism replacing the religious Puritanism of an earlier century. Blum positioned himself to become a vocal defender of Catholic interests.

Just like Blum saw his own ministry fitting within the evolving ethos of the Society of Jesus in the 1960s, so too did he see a place for Catholics qua Catholics within the larger civil rights movement of the era. Blum genuinely believed that American Catholics deserved to be grouped with other marginalized peoples defined by race, ethnicity, or gender. He seized upon the rhetoric of the black civil rights movement without any misgivings about its possible misappropriation. The limited success of Blum’s crusades, especially the Catholic League, serves as evidence that most Americans, including Catholics, would not join him in making this equation. They refused to put Catholics into the same category as oppressed groups such as African Americans, women, or Native Americans. One reason may have been the material

success enjoyed by Catholics since the Second World War. From an economic perspective, Catholics as a demographic were not languishing. Another reason may have been the choice involved (or lack thereof) in belonging to such a group. In other words, Catholics chose to be Catholic; but blacks and women, for instance, had no say about whether they belonged to their groups. Blum’s apparent imperviousness to this distinction shows the depth of his Catholic identity. A cradle Catholic, Blum believed himself to be a creature claimed by Christ in the sacrament of Baptism and a member of his Holy Church. This identity was as concrete and indivisible to him as any genetic reality.

Finally, Blum’s life provides a look at the evolving face of anti-Catholicism in twentieth century America. Blum spent his childhood and adolescence in an environment characterized by the sort of overt anti-Catholicism that had existed since the nation’s founding. In Shelby County, Iowa, Protestants and Masons called Catholics “Cat-Lickers” and harbored deep suspicions about their motives, viewing them as pawns of an anti-democratic church. In reaction, the Catholics of the county’s curious Colony closed ranks and celebrated their communal identity. During the 1920s, religious antagonism in Defiance, Iowa lay submerged beneath a thin crust of comity; but when the education issue punctured that crust in the early 1930s, the lava of hatred spurted out. It is small wonder that Blum proved to be such a champion of Catholic education during his lifetime and so sensitive to perceived attacks on his church. By the 1950s anti-Catholic criticisms—especially regarding the education issue that was so dear to Blum’s heart—came to an increasing extent from secular liberals who viewed Catholicism as an alien culture. The “Others” in Protestants and Others United for the Separation of Church and State grew in numbers during the 1960s and Blum recognized the threat they posed to
what he interpreted as the religious freedom of U.S. Catholics. He tried to rally his coreligionists to stand up for their rights. Unfortunately for Blum, during the late 1960s many Americans, especially younger ones, grew to question traditional sources of authority. Unquestioning obedience to institutions like the Catholic Church waned; and in a new milieu that enthusiastically embraced freedom of expression, these institutions came under increasing attack, some of it crude and tasteless. Blum represents those Catholics who by the early 1970s boiled in anger as they watched cherished symbols and beliefs receive callous and sometimes profane treatment in popular media.

Blum’s failure to rally the entire Catholic population behind his League reveals the limits of Catholic community in the United States, especially after Vatican II. The faithful became polarized; Blum’s narrow focus for the League on abortion and school choice meant it gravitated toward a more conservative camp. The Jesuit imagined a middle road that might unite the contending tribes, but it proved illusory. Blum’s goal in forming the Catholic League had been to unify Catholics to expose and root out anti-Catholicism in society, enabling the realization of Catholic civil rights within the U.S. political system. But that became unachievable when some Catholics came to view their own coreligionists as engaging in anti-Catholic behavior. Philip Jenkins has defined anti-Catholicism as the belief “that some essential features of [Catholicism] give rise to evil or abuse and that the evil cannot be prevented without fundamentally changing the beliefs or practices of [Catholicism].”\footnote{Philip Jenkins, \textit{The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.} Novelist Walker Percy, a Catholic from the twentieth century American South, used to encounter this belief in the mouths of Protestants and secular liberals in offhand remarks such as “Of course the Roman Catholic Church is not
only a foreign power but a fascist power.” After Vatican II, some dissenters within the Catholic Church voiced a similar assertion couched instead in terms of sexism, a point of view that other Catholics interpreted being as anti-Catholic. Blum tried to avoid these internecine quarrels. His successor as Catholic League President, Bill Donohue, would exhibit no such reticence.

Virgil Blum called out his fellow Catholics who did not publicly support the controversial teachings of their church when it came to political opposition to abortion and the demand for public funding for non-public education. He accused his coreligionists of feeling guilty about being Catholic, but guilt may not have been the operative feeling; instead, many U.S. Catholics had probably accepted the notion of religion as a strictly private matter. Sociologist Peter Berger had already limned this development in his 1967 book *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Early secularization theorists had predicted that the historically high religiosity of the American people would melt away as the nation modernized, but that had not come to pass. Americans of the mid-late twentieth century still attended churches and synagogues and held religious beliefs in large numbers, but Berger saw religion playing less of a role in people’s public identity, submerged out of a need to maintain concord in a more and more pluralistic society. Religion was becoming a private affair defined by the individual conscience. It was losing its world-building potency. Blum utterly rejected this trend, which he saw operative in pro-choice Catholic politicians like Geraldine Ferraro and Mario Cuomo. He understood a healthy pluralism to mean educated and dedicated citizens filling interest groups—including religiously based groups—that

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voiced their beliefs fearlessly and lobbied fiercely for their constitutional rights. For Blum, being a U.S. Catholic meant more than attending liturgies and having a personal prayer life; with it came a duty to carry church teachings into the halls of democracy and transform public opinion, thereby affecting the judiciary that looked to society for cues on how to rule.

A study of the life and significance of Virgil Blum should end with a word about the man himself. Pugnacious, opinionated, aggressive, dogged, fiery, persistent: these are some of the adjectives employed decades later by those who remembered the Jesuit. Mixed with insecurity, these qualities proved at times more of a hindrance than an asset. It seems unlikely, however, that a leader with comparable commitment but greater sensitivity and diplomacy could have realized Blum’s grand vision for the Catholic League. A unifying adjective for Blum’s public life is defiant. He directed his defiance toward a Protestant majority that shaped his early years; toward secular liberals whom he saw threatening an American democracy founded on religious principles; and, toward his church’s leadership and his religious order, both of whom he believed failed to adequately support his ministry. Here obedience tempered his defiance. For behind Blum’s defiant public life lay intense personal devotion to his church and its teachings, inculcated first by the ecclesia domestica he experienced on the family farm in Shelby County, deepened in the schoolroom by the Benedictine sisters, and then refined and focused by pre-conciliar Jesuit formation. Reflecting on Blum many years after his passing, one of his old companions in the Jesuit community at Marquette University compared Blum to Christ in the Gospel of John when Jesus drove out the merchants and
moneymongers from the temple. He quoted Christ’s words, “My devotion to your house,
Oh God, burns in me like a fire” and then exclaimed, “That was pure Virg Blum!”

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