Chapter XVI

XAVIER -- THE ACCREDITATION (1967)

A team representing the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary schools visited Xavier on October 23-24, 1967. The group was headed by William N. Randall, Headmaster of the Huntington School in Boston. Other members of the five-men team were Herrick Macomber, Director of Studies at Phillips Exeter; Rev. Charles W. Sheerin, Head of the English Department at Groton School; Dom Hilary Martin, O. S. B., of Portsmouth Priory; and the Jesuit John B. Handrahan of Cheverus High School. The choices appeared to show an effort to have representatives from the type of schools analogous to Xavier.

The report signed by the the chairman is very comprehensive as to the origin, location, purposes, facilities, faculty and curriculum. Since most of these eruditional points have been included -- even at greater length -- in the previous chapter on Xavier, space is reserved here for remarks on the curriculum and the extracurricular activities in the locale where Xavier is situated.

The committee comments on the curriculum are interesting and even curious. So full a program for each student left few if any study periods during the day. Why they were really necessary might have been asked or answered. The assumption on their need could be challenged.
To soften its animadversion for the benefit of the administration, the report indicated that so full a program imposed serious burdens on the administration to work it out and keep it working. But, Jesuit administrators and such generous and competent woman as Miss Sheehan welcome and embrace the burdensome "magis" in good causes.

A recurring fault was found in the honors courses since their syllabi were homegrown, as it were, and not the staple of advanced placement proposals. If student outcome in college board subject matter tests were acknowledged as excellent and a sign of good preparation for college experience, one, like the writer who has viewed Xavier's honor programs in practice, knows their excellence and often superiority over programs following meticulously the advanced placement syllabus. To cite one possible example, it may be asserted that the junior-senior elective history courses, taught by Fr. Frank Sullivan, was in fact superior to very good honors courses following the advanced placement syllabus.

Honors courses in mathematics, physics and the classics were admittedly taught excellently. They represented the imaginative, flexible and substantial work praised in theory by the visitors but less in practice when these qualities were carried out in Xavier's own mode or fashion. The Xavier honors courses might be said to have represented the "cura personalis" of Jesuit education, if one may be pardoned here for using the nominative rather than the accusative case for this technical Jesuit quality.
The "thoroughness and flexibility" which did not serve as a middle term in discussing special honors courses was applied explicitly (as it should have been) to the English curriculum. The report was silent on the standard and progressive courses offered to all students in grammar, literature, and composition. It singled out for praise the writing workshop for juniors and seniors.

It also commended the department's good use of the library and a recent participation in a theater workshop in England. The visit may have missed Mr. Joseph O'Brien Monahan's fourth-year English course which coordinated literary offerings with contemporary music.

The norm of the advanced placement syllabus was again used in an overall assessment of the mathematics department. Its four-year course of prescribed mathematics was ultra-modern (in a praiseworthy, not in a pejorative, sense) open-ended, oriented toward abstract mathematics, variable in content at the upper levels, and constantly open to revision. Presumably, this final quality did not imply mercurial changes. Nevertheless, the content of honors courses should be the generally followed or the easily measurable Advanced Placement Syllabus, not just a Xavier arrangement even though it had proved so far its worth.

The science curriculum at Xavier was distinctive in comparison to the other Jesuit schools in New England, and to many (undoubtedly most) schools. It was commended with a left hand. In first year there was a general science course covering a wide variety of sciences. In addition to introducing all
students to some scientific knowledge and approach, it made it possible to discern who had a general aptitude for science, whether he wished at once to begin three-year cycle or to defer to junior or even to senior year one or two science courses with a non-scientific major.

For those who chose a scientific sequence for three years, there were but two subjects (chemistry and physics), each taught for one and one-half years. There was, first, three semesters in a rigorous course in chemistry. Then the same followed in physics. Biology, which was a one-year choice for others, was squeezed out of the science sequence to give greater depth to the other two. This depth thus offered an opportunity for students to bypass the initial college course in one or both of these sciences. Advance placement was at that time the climate of opinion and action in college circles, and these more extended science courses kept this aim and mentality in view.

Without passing comment on Xavier's science sequence the committee felt badly that it gave no opportunity for a year's study of biology in the science sequence. This could be affected by having all three courses for one year or, if the extended time were continued for chemistry and physics, by dropping some one of the non-science courses to fit in biology. The report does not throw light on this matter and never praises or dispraises Xavier's special arrangement which did have the backing of the university departments interested in the improvement of secondary school science courses.
The three-year sequence of French or German was commended for the oral-aural approach, the use of the language laboratory, the exclusive use by the teachers of the foreign language in class and the lively pace of instruction. The beginners' classes were judged too large for the full benefit of the excellent material and instruction. The committee thought it would be fine to allow a four-year sequence of these languages thus contracting in fact, if not in theory, Latin as the foreign language for all in first year.

As to Latin, there had been a shock and a pleasant one about the two-year prescribed Latin course and its extension by electives for one or two more years. Instruction was actually in Latin and not just erudition about Latin -- formation over Wissenschaft -- another distinctive Jesuit Ratio feature capable of being found in numerous other subjects besides Latin. Yet, although the library was good in quality on the classics, it was judged a bit sparse for a school which emphasized Latin. Much of this added desideratum might well have been on the archeology, history and social life of Rome and the Romans, and thus about Latin which the school had been praised for de-emphasizing. No comment was passed on the merits or demerits of Xavier's Latin honors course vis-a-vis the Advanced Placement Syllabus. Perhaps too few students were involved or the subject was not judged that important.

The history and social science departments suffered due to the absence in 1967-68 of the two teachers on leave who apparently were not replaced or, if replaced, by less
satisfactory instructors. Fr. Frank Sullivan's elective class in modern world history from 1660 to the present was praised, rightfully, for giving rise to brisk discussion and real thought. The report might have added his requirement of regular and serious book critiques and his coordination of arts and letters with the more political and economic textbook matter.

Some added elective courses in history were suggested, but it might be stated that some of these proposed electives might represent a social science other than history. American History, prescribed in second year and taught by a substitute, was poor in comparison with the material on hand. World history in first year, not in its mode of instruction but in its very content, was stated as too general to establish perspective. The course should be replaced by a study of medieval or ancient history. One wonders if this remedy would supply greater perspective. Without plumping for this fairly standard first year general history instruction, one might argue that a good teacher or even an ordinary one can give perspective in this general survey and overcome partially, if not wholly, the view of young students that history only began with World War II or Vietman or even Watergate. This limited perspective could be paralleled to the view that the Society began with its Thirty-First (1965-66) or Thirty-Second (1974-75) General Congregation.

Theology, although prescribed for fewer hours over four years, received five lines in the report compared to the fifteen lines given to history prescribed for two years and elective
thereafter. The theology classes were found interesting, well taught and effective for the daily lives of the students as, said the report, "Xavier philosophy would have it." The permeation of the curriculum with theology was evident in discussions in English and history classes, as it should be. This would have pleased Fathers Grassi, Farly and Maguire and their followers who limited, in comparison to other subjects, time given to formal instruction in religion. They relied on its suffusing other value subjects as well as on the continued presence of religion as manifested in a variety of daily or frequent religious practices. Only in the late 1960's did the colleges begin to equate theology in hours and credits with philosophy requirements. Both may have suffered by this equality.

Granted what were Xavier's curricular excellencies, there was one notable curriculum omission (rather two) as shall be seen. Despite the extracurricular activities in painting, singing, visiting museums, nothing exposed all the students to music and art appreciation. Such a course should be added, and the students were said to want it.

It has been observed that there was no notice of what within the prescribed and elective courses was done on art and music curricular very strikingly by Mr. Monahan and Fr. Sullivan. Fr. Vigneau, too, in the academic, as opposed to business assemblies which he introduced, did lay emphasis on such matters.

Perhaps more knowledge should have been available on the assemblies or some simple questions asked by the committee. These assemblies, which could include a wide variety of cultural
subjects, could broaden interests and perspective, and yet not overcrowd a curriculum already thought to be overloaded by the committee. Perhaps as Xavier grew in numbers, Fr. Vigneau found less time to plan these academic assemblies. The temper of the times and the thrust of the new criteria used by the New England Province of the Society of Jesus to determine its apostolates could have given preference to social science over artistic contributions.

Extracurricular activities, which admittedly opened up fine arts to some students, were as a whole commended for their variety and quality. If there was a fault -- and it appears there had to be --, it was because the faculty, then numbering twenty-four Jesuits and nine lay associates, was too small to perform this task adequately. Hence, recruitment of more staff was urged. It is ironic that this was the very year when the Province had freed Fr. Thomas Lyons from his job as prefect of discipline (1964-67) so that he could more fully supervise his three remaining activities in athletics, the cafeteria and the bookstore.

Athletics were pointed out for some shortcomings despite the admitted hard practice, grit and good coaching. Only two of the seven coaches were full-time, and the time of departure of the school buses in seventy minutes after the last class cramped participation. As to the eighty percent participation of the students in optional, though encouraged, intramural sports, this should be replaced or supplemented by a prescribed physical education program during the regular school
day. Since the curriculum was in fact as well as in the view of the committee very crowded, what effect would have this proposed prescription had? On this the committee did not comment. Perhaps on such minimal matters the praetor passes.

The committee report praised the quality of the Xavier students. The Standard Scholastic Aptitude Test had screened students beginning with its second class. The freshman class then in the school in November 1967 actually had 374 applicants of whom 178 were rejected. The percentiles were found above average. Recent graduates had scored 550 on verbal aptitude, 570 on mathematical. Ten percent were already either on deans' list or in honors programs. Especially singled out were the scores on the physical and mathematic achievement tests of the College Board.

As to current student reaction to their curriculum, facilities and staff, the visitors had found these from causal remarks and explicit questions to be most satisfying. If students had any regrets, it was because they could not enjoy all that was available. Whatever handicaps might arise from disassociation from hometown peers was abundantly replaced in the estimation of the students by the Xavier community and its ethos.

Guidance and its director, Fr. Joseph E. Mullen with collegiate experience at Holy Cross, and his corps of assistants -- chiefly Weston theologians engaged there as part of their apostolic training -- were rated highly as were the physical and academic facilities for guidance work. The work was lauded as remarkably thorough. With these assessments the students, when
queried, agreed. At this time the Province was making available graduate courses in counselling. In addition to student courses and degrees, each summer one of those interested in this work was sponsored by the province at the elite guidance program at some academy during late June and early July.

The physical plant was generously lauded although it was noticed that the gymnasium lacked seating arrangements as well as room at the ends of the basketball courts. If some added facility were needed, it would be a "teaching theater" for combining several sections of one subject occasionally into one large grouping. Thus, groups in the same subject matter, meeting four times a week separately, might meet in common on a fifth time for lectures by expert teachers. This method was suggested as a way of not excessively increasing the teaching staff -- a staff which the report indicated as too small for its extracurricular supervision. The method proposed has been commonly used in colleges and has its advantages and drawbacks. Many teachers might prefer that, if their sections were to be combined every one or two weeks, they be the extraordinary teachers. Tastes will differ.

The care of school finances was enviable and professional. This situation might stem from the instructions of Fr. General in 1937 and enfleshed by Fr. James H. Dolan to have modern accounting systems set up in Jesuit educational establishments. The first treasurer, Fr. Edward J. Whalen, had been a treasurer at Weston and at Boston College as well as a minister in other places. Fr. John J. L. Collins had been
trained in finance at the Wharton School and taught finance in the Boston College School of Business Administration. The intervening treasurer between those two was Fr. Francis Donovan, a minister with a keen eye for finance at 761 Harrison Avenue and at Cheverus as well as at Xavier from its inception. The gift of $170,250 from the Xavier community representing surplus of its salaries plus perquisites and gifts was declared by the committee to be impressive. The tuition of $580.00 was considered a solid ground for the economic future of the school. The increase up to $900.00, effective September 1969, was to prove a different story.

The final summation on this school was most laudatory even though shortcomings, often of dubious value, were pointed out. The school was to be alerted to the danger of spreading its faculty too thinly -- apparently to supervise its extracurricular activities and to keep its beginners' foreign language course of proper size. While there was little possibility of athletics or extracurricular activities gaining an upper hand, yet an academically-minded committee felt that a little ground might be yielded to some unspecified extracurriculars. How this might be done compatibly with Xavier's academic aims was unfortunately not spelled out.

The only hints along the way seem to be the prescribed curricular physical training in place of heavy reliance on intramural sports, perhaps a later departure time for the school buses, more full-time coaches and a faculty more free or more enlarged to supervise outside activities. So the report ends.
Physical training was not added. In its last full year 1969-70, the faculty of thirty-one listed nineteen Jesuits and thirteen lay associates -- a decrease in one from the thirty-two in 1967-68. Poor extra-curriculars!

The report went to the Executive Committee of the Independent School Commission of the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Xavier received its first ten-year accreditation at the December 1967 meeting of the association. It was at this meeting that, in filling an expired term, no representative of a Catholic school or association was placed on the executive committee of the independent school group. When Fr. Joseph P. Duffy protested this prior to the formal afternoon announcements, he received no satisfaction from the secretary of the independant school group. Some others did not seem to mind. They were content with crumbs. All this was in marked contrast to the membership of the executive committee of the college division.

Hence, the New England Province Prefect represented the case of the Catholic schools in the independent school unit to Mr. Dana Cotton, the secretary-treasurer of the whole association and its chief stockholder, as it were. From his attendance at a Denver meeting Mr. Cotton wrote that he would look into the matter prior to the next meeting of the board. In late January, a telephone call informed the prefect that Mr. Cotton had presented the matter showing the very high percentage in this group of the Catholic schools yet unrepresented. There was the agreement that at the next election, December 1968, this would be
corrected. The prefect was asked to submit nominations. As a result, a long-term superintendent of a Catholic diocesan system -- a third name on the prefect's terna -- was appointed to the crucial executive committee.

What was surprising, even scandalous, was the apathy or timidity of Catholic sisters, brothers and non-Jesuit clerics about taking legitimate issue with the association when the matter had been explained as Fr. Duffy had done in a timely way. If one runs fine schools, one should have the courage and conviction to speak out.

Xavier also had other educational affiliations though it was through the New England Association that formal accreditation came. Xavier joined the Association for Independent Secondary Schools with which Fr. Lorenzo K. Reid, Fr. Arthur J. Sheehan and Fr. Edward B. Rooney were long prominent. And it was affiliated with other associations including the National Catholic Education Association whose annual Easter-time meeting drew large crowds in Atlantic City, usually every second year, and elsewhere when local Bishops or Archbishops extended invitations.

Stemming from Fr. General Ledochowski's Instructio of 1933 had come the National Jesuit Education Association with which Xavier had an active connection. Its first executive secretary was Fr. Daniel O'Connell, briefly a commissarius of education. After 1937 and for over twenty-five years, Fr. Edward B. Rooney held this post. During Fr. Rooney's tenure he had two New England Jesuits as assistants to him not as assistant
directors: Fr. Leo ("Luke") A. O'Connor and Fr. Richard T. Costello. At a later time Fr. Paul A. FitzGerald, then dean of the Boston College Graduate School, was appointed assistant director of the association.

Three contributions of the Jesuit Educational Association were of great help to any school, including Xavier. These were the occasional Special Bulletins with information on current trends and government plans. There was the Quarterly, published from June 1938 to March 1970, with learned, inspirational and statistical articles. There were secondary school institutes with their follow-up reports -- a mine of information, especially for new secondary school people.

In a few months after accreditation was granted, arrangements began for replacing Fr. John P. Foley whose term as rector was expiring. A new arrangement of rector-headmaster was agreed upon on July 31, 1968. Fr. John R. Vigneau was appointed to this post. In a short time the controversial stage at Xavier arose.