

The Unique Role of Agnes Scott College
in Education Today



By
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We are gathered here tonight to review the program, work and plans of Agnes Scott College, a unique institution for the education of women, that has brought to this community and our entire region distinction and acclaim.

As a preliminary, I want to call your attention to the difficult and dual role that has befallen, or perhaps beset, the life of woman in modern society.

Solomon is reputed to be the wisest of men. Certainly Proverbs, a book of wisdom and understanding, justifies his reputation. Solomon closes the Book of Proverbs with a tribute to woman in an age in which her activities were restricted indeed; yet the tribute expresses in poetic language the respect for woman and her far-reaching influence in those ancient days.

Solomon says of a virtuous woman:

Her price is far above rubies.

She is like the merchants ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that she shall have no need of spoil.

Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

When Solomon paid this tribute to womanhood he exhausted his wisdom and understanding and closed the Book of Proverbs.

No change in the history of the changing world has been more marked than the changed position of women in the past hundred years. The powder horn and the musket have given way to the atomic warhead; the oxcart has yielded to the airplane; the electric light has supplanted the tallow candle; radio, television and telephone have multiplied many times the avenues of communication. Yet none of these things are more fundamental to our future destiny than the position modern woman has achieved in present-day political, social, economic and religious life.

In Solomon's day her influence was limited to her husband, her children, her household and to the needy. There were no women's organizations, no church societies, no P.T.A. groups, no garden clubs. All of these today are dominated by women. They own much of the wealth of the world. They hold important jobs in every field of endeavor and successfully operate various business concerns. Some of them earn as much or more than men, and many young women support their husbands while they are finishing their college education, especially in medicine and law and other professions. They organize and run voting leagues and take a leading part in educational and religious work. In the field of civic affairs

their influence and effectiveness is too great to be measured.

This emancipation of women has paralleled the growth of colleges for women. The first woman's college was Wesleyan at Macon, Georgia, established in 1836, and the first fully endowed college for women was Vassar, established in New York in 1861.

The problem of the woman's college is to equip the student to meet all the opportunities and responsibilities of modern life, to answer the calls of civic, social, business and religious responsibilities thrust upon her, without detriment to her God-given creative function of childbearing and child rearing, and at the same time to enable her to maintain in the home the respect, trust and love of her husband and children.

Our host, Agnes Scott College, located in Decatur, Georgia, in the environs of greater Atlanta, is a privately controlled college of liberal arts for women. The college is not supported or controlled by the church, though it was founded by Presbyterians and has always maintained a close relationship to that church. While special care is taken not to interfere in any way with the religious views or church preferences of the students, the study of the Bible, the spiritual values arising therefrom, and the Christian heritage of our western civilization are emphasized.

The 65-acre campus and the permanent plant have a value of approximately five and one-half million dollars. The book value of the securities constituting the endowment is approximately eight and three-fourths million dollars with a current market value of a little less than twelve million dollars.

The total student enrollment is 646, representing twenty-seven states and seven foreign countries. Seventy-five full-time teachers constitute the faculty, forty-four of whom hold earned doctor's degrees.

Agnes Scott's academic standing and scholarship rank the college among the top women's colleges in the nation, and Agnes Scott has achieved every recognition that can be accorded a woman's college. In 1907 Agnes Scott was admitted to membership in the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and in 1920 was placed on the approved list of the Association of American Universities. Agnes Scott is among the sixteen independent colleges for women east of the Mississippi River that have Phi Beta Kappa chapters and was the first institution to receive a chapter on the invitational plan. There are only two Phi Beta Kappa colleges for women west of the Mississippi River—Mills in California and Saint Catherine's in Minnesota—among this selective group.

You will also find at Agnes Scott national chapters of honor societies that recognize and require the highest standards in various fields of education, such as Mortar

Board (service and leadership), Eta Sigma Phi (classics), Sigma Alpha Iota (music) and Chi Beta Phi (science).

The college is a charter member of the American Association of University Women and of the Southern University Conference and was a leader in establishing the University Center in Georgia, a cooperative endeavor of eight colleges in the Atlanta area, the chief features of this program being to permit reciprocity in library services, exchange of professors, interdepartmental conferences, provision for visiting scholars and avoidance of overlapping in certain areas of instruction.

Two studies, one by Knapp and Greenbaum and the other by the National Academy of Science, based upon the proportion of undergraduate students who continue their education by obtaining the Ph.D. degree, rank Agnes Scott ninth among the women's colleges in the United States.

Among the present student body Agnes Scott has ten National Merit Scholars, selected through competitive examinations on a national scale, and in the period 1955-60 Agnes Scott students were awarded 11 Fulbright Fellowships to France, England, and Germany; 4 Southern Fellowships Fund Career Teaching Fellowships; 9 Woodrow Wilson Fellowships at Wisconsin, Yale, Columbia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Bryn Mawr, and Duke. In proportion to total enrollment, Agnes Scott ranks fourth in National Merit Scholars among women's colleges and ranks fourth in Woodrow Wilson Scholars in proportion to the size of the graduating classes since these fellowships were instituted.

The achievements of Agnes Scott in academic ranking as well as the awards to its students through national competitive examinations amply justify the statement of Dr. J. R. McCain, President Emeritus of the college, made in 1939 while he was President, to wit:

The standards of scholarship at Agnes Scott are equal to the best for either men or women in this country. The search for truth, avoidance of shams and short-cuts, maintenance of the honor system, fearlessness of purpose, and efficiency in the performance of every duty are expected to characterize those who study here. The College aims at stimulating scholarship and making it attractive to the student.

As we turn to financial assets, we find that Agnes Scott ranks eighth among the women's colleges of America in financial strength. Only three states in the nation have women's privately endowed colleges with greater financial strength. Of these Massachusetts has four, New York two, and Pennsylvania one.

The Bradley Observatory which houses the 30" Beck telescope is the largest of its kind in the country for strictly undergraduate instruction, and the program of study in astronomy is equaled by that of few, if any, undergraduate institutions in the nation. Agnes Scott also has in its library one of the most complete collections of the works of the great American poet Robert Frost.

As strong as Agnes Scott has become in the realm of intellectual and scholastic attainments (equal to any in the nation) these achievements have not been made at the sacrifice of religious truth or spiritual values.

Secular knowledge discovered by man and revealed knowledge given by God are recognized and pursued with equal diligence and fervor. On this question, Dr. McCain has said:

The intellectual attitude at Agnes Scott does not oppose religious impulses; the atmosphere tends to confirm and strengthen faith and to give the religious emphasis its proper place. Religious services are marked by simplicity and earnestness, their aim being to make religious life wholesome and sincere without being ostentatious.

On this same general subject President Wallace M. Alston in his annual report of July 1959 had this to say:

This confrontation of a student with Christian truth, in an atmosphere where academic excellence is cherished and where intellectual interests are dominant, is so integral to Agnes Scott's purpose that those who know the college can scarcely conceive of a valid reason for its existence if this should ever seem improper or unimportant.

The major premise in all that we are attempting to do at Agnes Scott is our concern with the *whole* person—her mind, her physical welfare, her social development, and her spiritual life. We consider that we have failed a student when we merely provide information without insight, facts with little increase in wisdom, fragments of knowledge with no compelling motivation of will and molding of character. We believe profoundly in the validity of offering an academically demanding program of liberal studies in a community of Christian concern where personal relationships are both creative and satisfying.

The tendency of many colleges over the years is to build curricula upon the false assumption that religious truth is in conflict with the principle of academic freedom. Accordingly, the study of the Bible and of our religious heritage arising from Judaism and Christianity are no longer a part of their course of study. Secular knowledge alone constitutes the entire content of the program of such institutions.

This omission has resulted in a crucial weakness in college programs and is disturbing to many thoughtful people, including prominent educators. Even colleges originally mothered by the church have fallen into this error. These colleges have gained a whole world of knowledge and lost their sense of mission. Expensive committees and commissions of learned men have been appointed to find out where the trouble lies and to recommend a remedy. Their reports elucidate many aspects of the educational process but never seem to come to grips with the root of the matter.

According to a recent study and report, one of the aims of a general education is to "break the strangle-hold of the present upon the mind."¹ That is a neat statement with which I am in full agreement. Our minds become so

¹ *General Education in a Free Society*, Report of the Harvard Committee (Cambridge, 1945), p. 70.

filled with present-day events, with current desires and ambitions that the past has no lessons for us, and the future is not a matter of concern.

Those of you who thoughtfully listen to the speeches of our political leaders may be impressed as I am with the shallowness of their thought and the paucity to their knowledge. As we listen, we feel concern for our destiny. The current likes and dislikes of the audiences, the effort to satisfy well-organized groups by legalized bribery, the immediate gain in benefits to a class regardless of ultimate consequences seem to be all that is considered relevant. Cause and effect, considered in the light of the on-rush of history, have no place in the discussions. The strangle-hold of the present upon the mind is in evidence everywhere. The question is: How can our great educational institutions break that strangle-hold?

This same report continues: "These abilities . . . are to think effectively, to communicate thought, to make relevant judgments, to discriminate among values."² Here again educators are speaking to the point, for the mark of the truly educated is the ability to think, to communicate thought, "to make relevant judgments" and "to discriminate among values." To meet a person with these attributes is to stand in the presence of one whose mind has broken the strangle-hold of the present.

But I pose the question: How can an educational institution develop these attributes in its students?

I searched for a statement of the curriculum of the typical liberal arts college and found that educators agree in substance that the courses of a liberal arts college should acquaint the student "with knowledge of his own biological and physiological nature; with a comprehension of the roots of human behavior as revealed in modern scientific studies and in historical and literary sources; with knowledge of the physical and biological world in which he lives; with knowledge of his own and other cultures and with the nature of his own society; with a historical review of man's achievements, social, economic intellectual and artistic."

We all agree, I am sure, that these subjects are an essential part of a liberal education and that without an understanding of each, one's education is deficient. But are these subjects alone adequate to develop fully one's personality or to satisfy one's aspirations and ideals or to fulfill the requirements of one's nature?

In the curriculum just stated, no reference to distinctively spiritual values or to our religious heritage is made as essential or even desirable to the educational process. Revealed truth is neglected, and secular knowledge alone is taught.

Secularism has a strangle-hold on education and that may be why the present has a strangle-hold on the mind. It would seem, then, that educators need to relearn that students cannot live by bread alone.

Many thoughtful educators are aware of this vital omission in the educational program of some of our institutions of wide reputation. Even institutions that were mothered by the church are given over entirely to secularism in their educational pursuits.

Dr. Harold K. Schilling, Professor of Physics and Dean of the Graduate School of Pennsylvania State University, noting this tendency of educational institutions to discard spiritual values, has said:

. . . when we look out upon our culture and upon higher education, we note thought patterns prevailing that seem to take for granted that there is no objective reality beyond that contained in the atom and photon. We further note that these patterns employ predominantly scientific, discursive language that predisposes us to think that anything it cannot express—such as the basic insights of religion—must necessarily be without meaning. Thus whole areas of the world and experience are almost automatically excluded from thought and study and therefore from the purview of higher education as ordinarily conceived and practiced.

Perhaps no stronger or clearer statement on the same subject can be found anywhere than that given by President Alston in his annual report for 1959. He said:

Despite the fact that the curriculum appears to be so rich and varied, serious students of American higher education are increasingly concerned that *many institutions either exclude religion altogether as an area of learning that yields bona fide truth, or else treat it with such casualness (or flippancy!) as to relegate it to the periphery of academic interests where it is assumed to be relatively unimportant.* This is often a subtle thing, but it is, I am convinced, an undeniable phenomenon of much of our higher education in this country.

May I ask the pointed question: Is it possible to equip the student to form just judgments, to discriminate among values, to break the strangle-hold of the present upon the mind, while denying to the student knowledge of religious truth and the values that spring therefrom as revealed through Judaism and Christianity?

Is it not our religious heritage that has shaped our western civilization, laying the foundations for our freedoms and mothering and undergirding our great institutions that preserve and protect these freedoms?

Is it not this heritage that gives us our sense of justice and right, teaches us piety, charity and love, and in the end points the way to salvation?

Is it not this heritage that gives meaning, significance and purpose to every phase of life and learning?

Only when these spiritual values are known and understood and striven for does knowledge have its true implications and life have its full meaning. These values are derived from our religious heritage and are fostered by our faith. Unless a student is confronted with revealed truth and its meaning, how can that student develop his full personality or understand the true meaning of life? How can the student be expected to discriminate among values while he is ignorant of the most important values,

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

the moral and spiritual values, that spring from religious truth?

It was the aim and purpose of the founders of Agnes Scott to establish an institution of high intellectual attainments "abreast of the best institutions of the land" in an atmosphere in which spiritual values would be recognized and in which the Kingdom of God would be advanced upon earth by the students who drank deeply at the fountain of knowledge while kneeling at the throne of God.

This double purpose of combining scholastic excellence and religious truth, so faithfully adhered to and so intelligently administered at Agnes Scott, is a singular and unique attainment among educational institutions in the twentieth century. The presentation of religious truth and spiritual values as revealed in the Bible has not lowered the standards of scholastic excellence but enriched them. Nor has it interfered with academic freedom. Religious faith and practice and intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of secular knowledge go hand in hand. Upon this foundation of scholastic excellence and religious faith Agnes Scott has made its progress.

This unique achievement of Agnes Scott, which is making educational history, can best be understood when we look at the founders of the college and at the cornerstone upon which they built.

The story of Agnes Scott's beginning is a romance in faith. In 1889 two remarkable men joined hands to start an educational institution in Decatur, Georgia, then a small town of one thousand inhabitants. The school was to be for girls, because it was thought that to educate a man made a good citizen but to educate a woman influenced an entire family.

One man was a Virginian, a preacher, the Reverend Frank H. Gaines, then pastor of the Decatur Presbyterian Church and formerly pastor of the Falling Springs Church of Rockbridge County, Virginia. The other man, George W. Scott, was an officer in the Reverend Mr. Gaines' church and had formerly lived in Alexandria, Pennsylvania. In 1850 at the age of twenty-one, Mr. Scott came south seeking a better climate for his health. As he was without financial means, he paid the expenses of his trip by selling jewelry along the way.

At the outbreak of the War between the States, he espoused the southern cause, entered the Confederate service, organized the Fifth Florida Battalion, known as "Scott's Cavalry," and served with distinction until he surrendered his command May 23, 1865. The war cost him the loss of a fortune that he had accumulated at Tallahassee. Colonel Scott, however, was undaunted and set out successfully to recover his financial position. This aim he was able to accomplish, and by the 1880's he had settled in Decatur, Georgia, where he soon had Dr. Frank H. Gaines as his pastor.

Dr. Gaines was a wise, saintly, strong and able man, whose chief end in life was to serve God. Mr. Scott like-

wise had a strong religious faith, a reverence for the Word of God, habits of prayer and Bible reading and church attendance. In the Providence of God these two men joined hands in establishing the little school that was to develop into the Agnes Scott that we know today. Nor should I omit to note that they were helped immeasurably by a great woman—Miss Nanette Hopkins—who came to Agnes Scott in 1889 and who continued with the school for forty-nine years as the first dean and guiding example for unnumbered young women.

At the very beginning those responsible for the school formulated a written charter of ideals and purposes. They are worth recording here:

1. A liberal curriculum, fully abreast of the best institutions in this country.
2. The Bible a textbook.
3. Thoroughly qualified and consecrated teachers.
4. A high standard of scholarship.
5. All the influences of the College conducive to the formulation and development of Christian character.
6. The glory of God the chief end of all.

This charter of ideals and purposes was reinforced by a written prayer covenant in which the signers agreed to pray daily for each other in their work for the institution, for the trustees and faculty, for the unconverted pupils, for an increase in faith and usefulness, for a baptism of the Holy Spirit, for so much endowment and prosperity as could be used for God's glory and for the institution to be constantly in God's care. This covenant was faithfully carried out during the life of all the signers and through their successors continues in force to this hour.

Thus in the establishment of Agnes Scott, the North and the South were united, learning and religion were joined together—in common cause for the upbuilding of young womanhood for service in the Father's vineyard.

Is it any wonder that Agnes Scott has held to its original ideals notwithstanding the strong pull towards secularism in our modern educational institutions? Is it any wonder that every campaign for funds has succeeded and not one has failed? Is it any wonder that every teacher who has died within the past quarter of a century has remembered Agnes Scott in his or her will, two of whom left their entire estates to the College?

Is it any wonder that the school has had only three presidents over its entire history—Dr. Gaines, Dr. James Ross McCain, now President Emeritus, and Dr. Wallace McPherson Alston, now President and still a young man?

The great private colleges of the country, looking ahead, are preparing to meet the requirements of the space age. Agnes Scott must not only maintain but strengthen its position among the great colleges of the country. To this end, Agnes Scott is currently engaged in an eleven million dollar program, launched in 1953 and

culminating in 1964 with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the college. Of this total approximately \$8,000,000 is for endowment, and \$3,000,000 is for buildings now greatly needed—a fine arts structure, a physical education building, an additional dormitory, and the conversion of the present gymnasium into a student center. The last one-half million dollars of this eleven million dollar goal has already been pledged by an anonymous donor if the other ten and one-half million dollars is raised by January, 1964. In the past eight years the college has made remarkable progress (without an intensive financial campaign) toward the Seventy-fifth Anniversary goal of \$11,000,000. Of the total goal, \$2,114,133 remains yet to be secured in cash and pledges.

Among educational institutions Agnes Scott is not alone in seeking to strengthen its position. Harvard has recently raised eighty-two and one-half million dollars for its college of arts and sciences; Princeton in 1959 announced a program to increase its assets by fifty-three million dollars. Dartmouth has concluded a program for seventeen million dollars. Among women's colleges, during the two-year interval between 1957-1959, Vassar added more than five million dollars to its endowment alone; Smith added over three million dollars; Mount Holyoke, over four and one-half million, and Bryn Mawr, more than two million.

As we look at the work of Agnes Scott over the years, we see approximately ten thousand alumnae entering every walk of life, carrying into the home and into business, into social life and religious service that fine degree of efficiency and outlook of Christian service that come from the training at Agnes Scott. They carry with them not the germs of mediocrity but the ideals that all things they touch must be first class.

Thirty-two hundred have gone into educational work; more than eleven hundred are in social service work, including the Red Cross, YWCA and various governmental agencies, and over a thousand have gone into business or into specialized professions. Wherever they are, they carry the message and set the example of service on the highest level.

In a great city like Atlanta, especially one that is undergoing tremendous development and growth, great institutions, particularly educational institutions, constitute a tremendous asset. People judge a city by its cultural, educational and religious standards.

Georgia and the South are indeed fortunate to have an Agnes Scott at a time when it is a national fad to downgrade the South, its peoples, its ideals and its institutions, in many instances unjustly.

But particularly we here in Atlanta are in an enviable position regarding Agnes Scott. In a peculiar sense the college is ours—one of the crowning glories of our metropolitan life. In a very special sense, too, Agnes Scott is our responsibility. Through the years countless Atlantans have taken the college to their hearts, have loved it, nurtured it, and supported it. It is Atlanta that has furnished the successors to Dr. Gaines and Col. Scott as chairmen of the Trustees—men like S. M. Inman, J. K. Orr, George Winship, and Hal Smith. It is Atlanta that has provided the great chairmen of Agnes Scott's finance committee—leaders like John J. Eagan, Frank M. Inman, John Bulow Campbell, C. F. Stone, and George Woodruff. Atlanta can also claim Agnes Scott's greatest benefactor Mrs. Frances Winship Walters. And once again it is Atlanta that has the privilege of insuring Agnes Scott's continuing effectiveness and greatness—of providing in the deep South an institution of national and international renown. Surely Atlanta will want to underwrite the remaining balance of a little more than two million dollars to complete successfully Agnes Scott's great 75th Anniversary Program.

This is a difficult period the South is now experiencing. Neither protests nor resentments will solve our problems. Superior schools and colleges and high character among the people will be our salvation. Qualities of merit, stamina, good will and forbearance will bring us through. Agnes Scott is a training ground for the development of these qualities and is an example of that excellence that demands respect everywhere. Let us, therefore, my fellow Atlantans, join hands and hearts and resources in the progress of our great college. For in a real sense Agnes Scott's future rests in our hands.