Foreword

Was it really so long ago, or was it just yesterday? This question is especially true for universities, where the green turf is saturated with years of study, and the buildings stratified by the rolling semesters, and each student like a fingerprint on a glass window. Places have memory. More powerful than yearbook pictures, the spirit of a place is an inheritance of those who were here before. Who is there to tell the story of the University of St. Thomas? The students are the primary makers of a university, but of course each class is a product of the admission office’s desired demographics. Rather, to find the origin story of this place we must reach back, looking for a genesis. Not just Bishop John Ireland founding the St. Paul seminary, but the start of the modern institution, the emergence of a university. One need not look far.

No one forged a greater part of the University of St. Thomas than Monsignor Terrence J. Murphy. He became the president of St. Thomas College in 1967 and the institution grew immensely under his care. Under his guidance the College of St. Thomas became a co-educational university that by 1991 had increased its budget by $70 million. The institution expanded from its campus in residential St. Paul to a second campus in downtown Minneapolis, and the student population quadrupled to nine-thousand students. Additionally, St. Thomas added its first master’s and doctoral programs, and the business and law schools. In commemoration of his exceptional leadership, the National Catholic Education Association awarded Monsignor Murphy the Elizabeth Ann Seton Award for his service in Catholic education.

Murphy’s biography can be found in select featurette articles in the University of St. Thomas newsroom, and in the local papers dated around the day of his passing, February 24th, 2004, at age 83. His list of accomplishments is so voluminous that these biographies tend to
I was not introduced to Monsignor as a biographer or historian, but through reading his own words. As part of my Catholic Studies graduate student assistantship, I was asked to transcribe the handwritten and typewritten sermons and speeches Murphy had given throughout his career and which had recently been compiled by his family. I had no idea how precious these documents were and what great work I was being entrusted with. Immediately impressed by the strength of the rhetoric, I was compelled to hunt down more information on the life of this priest. It’s still an honor, more than a year later, to think that I got to know him in the text of his written works before I knew him as a painting in the foyer of Terrence Murphy Hall in Minneapolis. I had yet to find the threads of his life woven in hidden places around campus: his military uniform displayed in the lower level of the Murray-Herrick Center, his statue outside McNeely Hall, or his namesake on the Minneapolis classroom building. I was able to meet Monsignor Murphy the man long before I was walloped with the gargantuan list of his life’s accomplishments. Thanks to access to these documents—now made available in this archive—something of the personal character of Monsignor Murphy can at last speak directly to a new generation.

In this archive he stands patient, pastoral, convicted, never shying from the details of a homiletic fine point. He is attentive to nuance, to distinction, and uncompromising in the orthodoxy and tradition of the Catholic faith. His writing seems rooted and tough, but also
humble, almost doting. To read his works is to experience simultaneously the grounding that only a good father can give, and the incentives that can only come from a good leader.

I am thrilled by the launch of this archive because it means, at last, access not just to the historical Monsignor Murphy, but to the man to whose honorary degree read, “For all of your success you often have said that you would like to most be remembered as a good priest.”

That wish must now be coming true.

With the publication of this archive comes also an insight into the heritage of the place that is the University of St. Thomas. That St. Thomas has continued to drastically change since Murphy’s departure in 1991 is no scandal or surprise. Organic and even ambitious growth in Murphy’s own entrepreneurial spirit, must be anticipated for any modern university where a larger business model is a necessity for maintenance of so large a campus. But regardless of current changes, a place’s history—it’s foundations—is permanent. For scholars wondering where the roots of the university lie—what its founding principals were and where the core of its identity lies—they may find not just glimmers of it in the mind of Murphy, but explicit outlines.

The core at the heart of the University of St. Thomas is its Catholicity. This is evident in Monsignor Murphy’s 2001 book, *A Catholic University: Visions and Opportunities*, wherein he describes how a Catholic vision enabled a small college to become a university with such an entrepreneurial spirit, and how this vision enhanced the relationship of the community and the Church.

Monsignor Murphy wrote that in years of increased secularization in the University of St. Thomas classrooms, it is common to see a sentiment of shyness towards engaging religiosity. But in *The Catholic University*, Monsignor Murphy wrote, “For too long religion has been ignored and relegated solely to the private lives of people: their moral convictions were to be left
at home and not influence their lives on the job, in community endeavors, or in the relationships with other people…Such a philosophy impoverishes people’s lives and undermines the health of society. For this reason, the conviction that religion should enter the marketplace and public forum became a guiding star that set the direction of the university. ”

Access to these homilies and transcriptions of Monsignor Murphy witnesses to his understanding of the advocacy for the partnership of religion and university. His writing is cohesive. His vision is a comprehension of the integrated human person—faith and reason working together in academic comprehension. Contrary to much modern belief, their coexistence does not in the least cripple the open-mindedness or expansive character of the university. Rather, the unity of the Catholic vision equips the college for growth, a growth that is wholesome and resilient against the brittle fault lines of separate visions.

As the University of St. Thomas continues its rapid growth, I hope that these archives may help inform the leaders of this place that we love about the great vision of our past president and his route for future success. In his inaugural address, Monsignor Murphy said, “I confess to you today a very personal conviction that has grown upon me with ever greater clarity almost from the moment that my appointment was announced. I am increasingly aware of the extent to which the work of this college is the work of God expressed in concern for and service of others. If it is His work, then surely it must succeed.” May all of us—students, faculty, and administrators of the University of St. Thomas—be able to say with Monsignor Terrence Murphy, “To this end, and with his grace, I pledge my best efforts.”

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