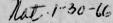## Strings to the bow

Seeming vs. Being at St. John's

By Frank Morriss

Men should be what they seem, wrote Shakespeare. The same should be said of causes.

Dr. Rosemary Lauer has at least made the teachers' strike at St. John's university, New York, resemble more what it actually is than it has appeared before. It is part of a movement to put up a wall of separation between the Catholic Church and higher education.

Dr. Lauer, a strike leader, says the Church has no busi- ness running colleges or universities since the Church exists to indoctrinate. Father Peter O'Reilly, another strike leader, believes she has a point.

In view of this I am compelled to write again about the St. John's university affair. I do not want it on my conscience that a movement was mounted against Catholic higher education and I remained silent, nor will I be silenced by the fact I am geographically removed from the scene of the first skirmish. Every Catholic has some- thing at stake at St. John's university. As it goes, so goes the Catholic college closest to home. *Nat. 1-30-66*

The charge that the Church exists to indoctrinate is bald untruth. Coming from a professor of philosophy such as Dr. Lauer, the statement is difficult to excuse on the grounds of ignorance.

The Church exists to present the Good News. It does not exist to compel its acceptance, even were it able, which it is not. There is not a thing incompatible in the presentation of that Good News and the operation of a university. The very opposite! The operation of a university and the absence or minimizing of the Gospel are incompatible.

Must then, the Catholic university, tolerate the existence of every opinion. In a sense, of course, it must. To try to shield its students from the fact that opinions are as numerous (and transitory) as autumn leaves would be the height of naivete. But that the university must sponsor the presentation of such opinions, give them a roosting space in the groves of Academe, allow them equal podium time, is also naive.

Father O'Reilly, for example, says the university has no right to prohibit a teacher from presenting the personal opinion that Christ is not really present in the Eucharist. Nonsense! No one could seriously maintain that a university would have to keep on its staff a mathematician who taught his students that two plus two equals 10. It could be argued that a teacher of English has the right to teach that Bacon wrote Hamlet; but no one could say he has equally the right to maintain that Shakespeare is pronounced Wagner. A history teacher should be tolerated if he maintains the North started the Civil War; but if he were to tell his students Lincoln was born before Washington, then he should be sacked as quickly as possible.

A teacher of Catholic Eucharistic theology has no more right to tell his students Christ is only symbolically present in the Eucharist than a teacher of geography has to tell his students the Mississippi is longer than the Amazon or that it snows regularly at the Equator.

Granted, a Catholic university might invite lecturers of contrary opinion; it might even allow a course of non-Catholic opinion regarding matters theological. But saying that it is obliged to, or that it must sponsor them; or even more so that it must allow the presentation of opinion on defined doctrine in classes of Catholic truth is being unfair to the nature of things.

The struggle at St. John's is between two currents of thought — traditional metaphysics and subjective Existentialism. The latter is seeking entry at every academic level, regardless of the fact it will vitiate some 6,000-years of the Judaic-Christian heritage.

The survival of Church-sponsored education at every level is vital for the triumph of sanity in Western culture.

Of all true culture's enemies, the worst have been those who wanted to see their own reflection in history — like Narcissus peering in the pool.

The Catholic university must continue to exist so that there will be one place that will present all things as they are known to be — not as they seem, or are desired.