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Introduction

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Introduction

The papers collected here are the result of the conference, “Faith, Freedom and the Academy: The Idea of the University in the 21st Century,” held at the University of Prince Edward Island on October 1-3, 2004. At that time, the Department of Religious Studies at UPEI was in the process of negotiating a significant financial commitment from St. Dunstan’s University in support of our new Centre for Christianity and Culture, and its first program offering in Catholic Studies. The year 2004, as it turned out, was worthy of celebrating because it represented the 150th anniversary of the founding of St. Dunstan’s (Catholic) University (UPEI is the secular descendant of St. Dunstan’s). We decided to celebrate this anniversary and the beginnings of our new initiative with a timely and important intellectual event.

Given our idea to (re)establish UPEI as a significant centre for Christian thought in Canada, both SDU and UPEI recognized that an international conference addressing the place of religion in the modern university would provide vigour and lively debate to what we knew would be a controversial idea. The intellectual climate generated by some faculty at modern academies views Christianity as a threat to freedom. Of course, such thinking is often the result of myopias built on weak theoretical grounds. The conference would give us the chance to pursue this issue in an open and rigorous manner, and we hoped it would provide the Centre with an immediate presence on campus. In the end, the conference proved to be an immense success, spawning not only the beginnings of an active and lively Centre for Christianity and Culture (with its programs in Catholic Studies and Christianity and Culture), but also the fine papers that are collected here.

This project would not have been possible without its initial impetus from Brendan O’Grady, and the financial and moral support from SDU. To this I add my gratitude to Philip G. Davis, Dan Cere of the Newman Centre, and Dean of Arts, Richard Kurial.

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