

# STUDIES IN CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

A POLICY SERIES GUIDED BY THE PRINCIPLES OF EX CORDE ECCLESIAE

## A Rekindling of the Light: The Past, Present and Future of a Catholic Core Curriculum

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### About the Author

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### Executive Summary

In his Washington address to Catholic educators, Pope Benedict XVI argued that three “goods”—those of the Church, political society and education itself—require the Church’s institutions of higher education have a strong Catholic identity. Although the Holy Father only touched on curricular matters incidentally, his argument entails important consequences in favor of curricula with robust cores in the liberal arts and sciences, philosophy and theology.

The history of Catholic higher education sheds light on Pope Benedict’s *Ex corde Ecclesiae* vision and its application to the current American scene. Six features of the medieval university curriculum working together remain essential. These six features are: (1) a bi-level nature; (2) an initial core followed by specialized, advanced training; (3) a curriculum that centers on books; (4) a curriculum that offers doctrine; (5) a curriculum that is Catholic; and (6) a curriculum that is integrated.

The present “rekindling” of traditional Catholic curricula at new colleges provides models from which larger *Ex corde Ecclesiae* universities may develop.

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**About The Center**

The Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education is the research division of The Cardinal Newman Society. Its mission is to promote the ongoing renewal of Catholic higher education by researching and analyzing critical issues facing Catholic colleges and universities, and sharing best practices. The Center's work is guided by the principles of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

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**A**s part of his apostolic journey to the U.S., on April 17, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to Catholic educators assembled in Washington, D.C. The Holy Father was not breaking new ground, but building on Pope John Paul II's *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (1990) and *Fides et ratio* (1998). His task was to inspire an *Ex corde* vision for American "institutions of learning," which had already been somewhat thrown into relief by *The Newman Guide to Choosing a Catholic College* (2007).<sup>1</sup>

The 21 Catholic institutions recommended in *The Newman Guide* may surprise some readers, because the highest profile Catholic universities are absent. Administrators, faculty and alumni from these and other schools from among the 200 or so Catholic colleges and universities may challenge their non-inclusion.

But Pope Benedict embraced some of the recent trends captured by *The Guide* in his own vision of the "nature and identity of Catholic education today." History helps to understand applying papal principles to the current American situation. It is useful to begin by looking at the history of Catholic colleges and universities, then briefly turn to the American scene, and on this basis attempt to "listen" to Benedict's Washington address, including its hard truths—some explicit, others implied.

## Universities Through Time

Core curricula in Catholic colleges and universities have developed and changed frequently, but never as dramatically as in recent history. Historians have already begun to recognize that the twentieth century saw changes in universities more rapid and extensive than any period since Catholics first created them in the European Middle Ages. Fortunately, two astute modern observers help with the American experience.<sup>2</sup> Philip Gleason and Father James Burtchaell, C.S.C., both begin with the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*, the blueprint for the Society's schools formulated in 1599, but it is instructive to go back even farther in time.

### The Medieval University

While most educational experiments have not stood the test of time, the university—first created around the year 1200 in Paris, Oxford and Bologna—has done so because it possesses certain features that are essential to the central task of higher education, which is creating, preserving and passing on knowledge, even wisdom.<sup>3</sup> Here I isolate six aspects of the medieval university's curriculum.

These six features are: (1) a bi-level nature; (2) an initial core followed by specialized, advanced training; (3) a curriculum that centers on books; (4) a curriculum that offers doctrine; (5) a curriculum that is Catholic; and (6) a curriculum that is integrated. The medieval university provides my illustrations, but my argument is that these six features are essential to the very nature of Catholic universities, which teach both undergraduate and graduate students, and Catholic colleges, which teach undergraduates.

The medieval university curriculum was modeled on the medieval craft guild—with its apprentices, journeymen and "master" craftsmen. This educational structure is still familiar: undergraduates pursuing a "Bachelor's" degree and graduate students pursuing a "Master's"

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1 Joseph A. Esposito, ed., *The Newman Guide to Choosing a Catholic College: What to Look For and Where to Find It* (Manassas, VA: Cardinal Newman Society, 2007).

2 Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Erdmans, 1998).

3 John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), para. 44.

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(comparable to today's Ph.D.). The curriculum was separated into two levels—undergraduate and graduate—because medieval professors, called “Masters,” understood that advanced intellectual training needed to be grounded in what we would now call general education. There would be no physics without mathematics and no philosophy without grammar, then and now. The medieval university curriculum, therefore, was bi-level because general undergraduate studies were separate from specialized graduate studies. Centuries later the undergraduate curriculum in both colleges and universities would itself become bi-level, divided into general or core courses required of all students and specialized “majors” pursued by fewer than all.

The whole curriculum of the medieval undergraduate Faculty of Arts was required of all students. Such a mandatory or core curriculum is sharply different from requirements that can be filled in a number of ways, nowadays called “distribution components.” The medieval core originally consisted of the seven “liberal” arts—the *trivium* of language arts (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the *quadrivium* of mathematics and science (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music)—so called because they “liberate” the mind for higher studies, then limited to theology, law and medicine. This practice recognized that illogical lawyers lose cases, and surgeons who cannot follow the geometry of the human body kill their patients.

The medieval curriculum was a books curriculum. Masters self-consciously preferred primary sources, many non-Christian, to textbooks written by one another. To the few classical and patristic sources available earlier, in the thirteenth century was added a vast array of Aristotle's books. Aristotle's works on logic and the “sciences,” both practical and theoretical, became incorporated into the medieval curriculum. University requirements were spelled out in terms of books. To graduate, the student would be tested on them to determine if he—for centuries it would only be men—were “approved in science and morals (*scientia et moribus*).” The schoolmen were humble and wise enough to see in a books curriculum the basis for life-long learning, because they read other books like they read *the* book, the Bible.

The reason for laboring over books, especially master works, was to understand the truth they are thought to contain. This is what I mean by doctrine, which is not limited to Catholic topics, because the medieval scholars found doctrine in all the disciplines. In medicine, for example, learning correct “doctrine” about the geometry of lines and the nature of light resolved the centuries long dispute over whether seeing is accomplished by rays of light moving from the object to the eye or the reverse. The books in the medieval core were chosen because they imparted both intellectual skills and doctrinal content.

The medieval university was Catholic, but its curriculum was not limited to explicitly Catholic subjects. Centuries earlier Augustine had decided the issue: Greek learning would be integrated into Catholic education, in the way the ancient Hebrews had “spoiled” or appropriated the gold of the Egyptians when Moses led them to the Promised Land. Medieval curricula in theology and canon law were explicitly Catholic, but since these were graduate courses Catholic doctrine was taught to undergraduates less directly. Masters taught through lectures, “reading” books written mainly by classical pagan authors, through disputations on topics of current interest, and through sermons on Sundays and the many feast days on the university calendar.

In all three venues undergraduate students saw the dialectical interplay between faith and reason played out by their Masters, most especially in sermons that were more like essays on scripture and doctrine than what we have today. As one might expect, the Catholic character of medieval universities led from the beginning to disputes over books and doctrines (for example, in Paris, 1210). In the thirteenth century, the changing attitude toward some of Aristotle's books—accepted, banned, accepted again—can stand as a sign that Catholic concerns guided the curriculum.

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Integration is my term for how the curriculum and, more broadly, different strands in the tapestry of knowledge, fit together to produce a unified whole whose parts can be seen to complement each other. In one way, integration is a process of personal development, never complete because each of us must come to see for ourselves if there is such an order and what it is. The medieval curriculum was designed to expedite this personal achievement.

But how the seven liberal arts, early Church Fathers and Aristotelian philosophy fit together was not obvious. In the 1250s, the Franciscan Bonaventure and the Dominican Thomas of Aquino argued that theology stood first among the disciplines and integrated the “arts and sciences” into an ordered whole by providing them a goal beyond themselves.<sup>4</sup> Thus was set the idea that the whole undergraduate curriculum would somehow open the mind to theology and to an active Christian life beyond the university.

These six features—bi-level, core, books, doctrine, Catholic and integration—characterized the medieval curriculum. Though manifested in different ways and degrees in various institutions, these features go to the very essence of what constitutes a Catholic university. All six working together are necessary for the university to achieve its proper “outcomes,” that is, graduates who will be Catholic professionals wise “in knowledge and morals,” and in the masters, books and artifacts that embody the wisdom those graduates need. If so, these six features can be used as criteria to make judgments about Catholic colleges and universities, then and now.

### The Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*

Over the centuries, the expansion of knowledge put pressure on the university curriculum: at first the re-discovery of the past (Aristotle and the classics), and also new discoveries, whose pace quickened with the scientific revolution. The Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* was designed to solve the problem of an expanding core by expanding time in school. The classical studies introduced by humanists from Petrarch to Erasmus were turned into a five-year “humanities” course (Latin, Greek, classical history and literature), designed as preparation for a three-year scholastic “philosophy” course (Aristotelian philosophy and mathematics as taken by Ignatius’s first Jesuits at the University of Paris), which culminated for Jesuits themselves, but not for laymen, in a three-year “theology” course.<sup>5</sup>

Jesuit schools were not part of the older universities, but built from the ground up, their “colleges” being an extension of their “humanities” schools, which we might think of as secondary schools. Typical was the Jesuit school at La Fleche, France, where from 1606 to 1614 René Descartes followed the Jesuit *Ratio* in humanities and philosophy, which qualified him to study law at the University of Poitiers (1614-16). Two centuries later, the seven-year course of study at the Jesuit school in “George-Town on the Potowmack-River” by the 1830s contained the five years of “Humanities,” book-ended by a first year of “Rudiments” for backward Americans, and a last year of “Philosophy,” reduced from the three in the *Ratio*.<sup>6</sup>

The Jesuit *Ratio* covered only core subjects. It was also doctrinal and Catholic. Its humanistic bent had older students reading books, but relegating the classics to younger boys inevitably drew the pre-collegiate curriculum toward textbooks, a change exacerbated when Jesuits

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4 Bonaventure, *On Retracing the Arts to Theology, De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, rev. ed. by Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Press, 1996); Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Boethius’s On the Trinity*, tr. Armand Maurer, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, Fourth rev. edition (Toronto: Pontifical Institute Press, 1986).

5 John O’Malley, in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

6 Gleason, 5; Burtchaell, 565.

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opened courses of study in vernacular languages and sciences.

In comparison with the medieval university, one thing was clearly absent—Jesuit education was not bi-level; it contained only core. And integration was another problem. Theology was still thought of as the “integrating” discipline, but since it was taught only to Jesuits, not laymen, the *de facto* integrating discipline in the *Ratio* was philosophy. Descartes’ decision to separate rational knowledge completely from theology grew out of his Jesuit education. His “tree” of knowledge had three parts: its roots were metaphysics, its trunk the “new physics” and its branches and leaves would be scientific engineering, scientific psychology and scientific medicine. For Descartes and his heirs, philosophy would now integrate a secular curriculum.

### President Eliot’s “Elective” System

In 1884, a crisis in American education was precipitated when President Charles W. Eliot introduced the “elective system” that eliminated the core curriculum at Harvard. Not for the first time, an American was attempting to imitate the Europeans, but without understanding them. Eliot saw that over time European universities had become devoted to specialized knowledge, but he failed to understand that Europeans had developed the *lycée / gymnasium* system, which downloaded the core liberal arts education from university to the secondary school level, something Americans had not done.

At first, Eliot proposed his elective system for colleges, and then even for secondary schools. In an *Atlantic Monthly* article in 1899, Eliot dismissed opposition to his proposal as retrograde religiosity and slammed the Jesuits:

There are those who say that there should be no election of studies in secondary schools.... This is precisely the method followed in Moslem countries, where the Koran prescribes the perfect education, to be administered to all children alike.... Another instance of uniform prescribed education may be found in the curriculum of the Jesuit colleges, which has remained almost unchanged for four hundred [really 300] years, disregarding some trifling concessions made to natural science. That these examples are both ecclesiastical is not without significance.<sup>7</sup>

Eliot’s elective system eventually predominated, reaching its high water mark in the 1960s, when some schools finally swept away all required courses. The elective system preserves none of the six features of the Catholic curriculum, which is why Eliot took after the Jesuits so viciously. Eliot’s curriculum would not even be bi-level; everything would be sacrificed to specialization.

Reaction against Eliot was determined. Samuel Eliot Morison, the chronicler of Harvard’s history, later wrote: “It is a hard saying, but Mr. Eliot, more than any other man, is responsible for the greatest educational crime of the century against American youth—depriving him of his classical heritage.”<sup>8</sup> But in 1900 responding fell to a feisty philosophy professor and president (1894-98) at Boston College, Father Timothy Brosnahan, S.J. *The Atlantic* refused to print his reply to Eliot, so Father Brosnahan had to content himself with the *Sacred Heart Review*, in which he wrote:

The young man applying for an education is told to look out on the whole realm of learning, to him unknown and untrodden, and to elect his path.... He must distinctly understand that it is no longer the province of his Alma Mater to act as earthly providence for him. Circumstances have obliged her to become a caterer. Each student is free to choose his intellectual *pabulum*

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7 Charles W. Eliot, “Recent Changes in Secondary Education,” *Atlantic Monthly* 84 (October 1899): 436-437; Burtchaeff, 718.

8 Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 389-390.

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[nourishment], and must assume in the main the direction of his own studies. If he solve the problem wisely, to him the profit; if unwisely, this same *Alma Noverca* [Step-mother] disclaims the responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

That Father Brosnahan foresaw the debacle that would not fully develop until the second half of the twentieth century is a tribute to his foresight. But what kind of curriculum did he support? It was squarely based on the *Ratio*. American Jesuits quite rightly refused to demote humanities completely to the secondary school, and they knew that without humanities American collegians would not be prepared for the *Ratio*'s three years of philosophy. So for Americans, Georgetown's version of the *Ratio* was best: begin with humanities, that is, Latin and Greek classics, and end with "philosophy," as what we would now call a "capstone experience."

At Father Brosnahan's Boston College, the curriculum was core, doctrinal and Catholic. Following Jesuit tradition, it eschewed bi-level education and textbooks often replaced primary source books. In 1900, integration through theology was still reserved for Jesuits. Philosophy would remain the integrating discipline for laymen, and in the 1920s at Boston College, "[p]hilosophy provided the finishing of one's collegiate education, the worldview which allowed and goaded each undergraduate... to organize all that he or she had learned... within the integrative way of thinking that was provided by Thomist philosophy." And as late as "the 1950s a student would still take ten courses for a whopping twenty-eight credits in philosophy during his or her last two years: logic, epistemology, metaphysics, cosmology, fundamental psychology, empirical psychology, rational psychology, natural theology, general ethics, and special ethics."<sup>10</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, the *Ratio* still guided Jesuit and many other Catholic colleges, but changes were coming.<sup>11</sup>

### The Catholic Light Dying

Already in 1898, Father Read Mullen, S.J., successor to Father Brosnahan as president of Boston College (1898-1903), had introduced an English track that included English, modern languages and sciences, rather than classics, though it still held tight to the philosophy requirement. In 1935, Holy Cross and Boston College dropped the Greek requirement from the B.A. degree, and in 1955 the American Jesuits requested permission to drop the Latin requirement. But if a good core can be run in the vernacular tongue (a reasonable assumption, since Latin was no longer the language of educated people), the Jesuit curriculum still held very much to the *Ratio*, with one significant improvement: place was made for undergraduate majors, which made the undergraduate curriculum bi-level.

Then came the fateful 1960s, with its vehement rejection of tradition, including philosophy, theology and even the very notion of a common core. In its centennial year (1963-64), Boston College cut its philosophy requirement in half to five courses, further reduced it to two in 1971. Throughout the Catholic system, core courses began to be replaced by distribution components fulfilled from a number of options, an application of Eliot's elective system to required courses. The Catholic university became Father Brosnahan's "caterer" at the same time one began to hear the phrase "cafeteria Catholic."

The effect can be seen in courses currently required for a B.A. in Arts and Sciences at St. Louis University, to pick but one and arguably the most traditional of the major Jesuit universities. At St. Louis, the required curriculum is large, roughly half of one's courses (16 to 21 out of 40, depending on foreign language). Vestiges of the *Ratio* can still be discerned. "Humanities" show up in requirements in English, world history and foreign language. Science (including

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9 Burtchaell, 571.

10 Burtchaell, 577.

11 Gleason, esp. 105-146.

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mathematics) and philosophy fall under the *Ratio's* conception of "philosophy." There is also theology.

Such requirements seem to produce a bi-level curriculum, but only of a sort. Of the total required, only six are truly core courses, all the rest are distribution components for which any number of courses might suffice. Indeed, there are 13 variations available for the first required English course; students may choose from 87 courses to satisfy the Cultural Diversity requirement; and the number of offerings that meet the Social Science component is even higher.

The net result is clear. St. Louis no longer has a core curriculum of the sort found in Catholic universities from the 1260s to the 1960s. Distribution components make a books curriculum for all students impossible. Nor is the curriculum doctrinal or Catholic, in the sense that it ensures every student the opportunity to encounter the wealth of the Catholic (or any other) intellectual tradition. It follows that the St. Louis curriculum is not integrated, but fragmented into myriad little pieces. As interesting as they may be individually, they do not add up to a whole, even if a particularly clever or well-advised student can devise a curriculum with all six of these traditional traits. The most important point: St. Louis University is but one example of a widespread problem.

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Along with cathedrals, veneration of the Virgin, Franciscan poverty and knightly chivalry, the university is a world-historical gift from medieval Europeans to the whole human race. The university has been exported around the globe and shows no signs of diminution, because with it humans created a superb educational institution. It has changed over time, however, producing successive "models" of Catholic higher education.

In a papal bull issued in 1231, Pope Gregory IX called the university in Paris "*parens scientiarum*," the parent of the sciences, in homage to its role as a model. And Paris begat the Jesuit *Ratio*, which begat the nineteenth century Neo-scholastic model, which in Hegelian fashion begat what I call the "Freewheeling" 1960s model. From Paris we can learn that Masters and their books are good even though it is unfortunate that universities eclipsed the thriving schools in Benedictine nunneries. The first Jesuits teach us that core and doctrine are good, but they also gave us Descartes and the term "Jesuitical."

From Pope Leo XIII and Americans like Father Brosnahan came pugnaciously Catholic colleges, with curricula integrated by philosophy and theology. But they also gave us awful textbooks that eclipsed wisdom in pursuit of uniformity. The Freewheeling period showed that specialization and professionalization could produce a bi-level undergraduate curriculum. Specialization need not entail secularization, but secularization rode into American Catholic colleges and universities on the coattails of the Freewheeling model. This unhappy fact cannot be denied.

Will the Freewheeling model of a Catholic university be with us for a long time? No, it is already dying because it cannot deliver the kind of truly Catholic education as could its predecessors. Such changes are not unusual; indeed, they are the iron law of history. We should attempt to preserve what is good in the Freewheeling model, especially that research universities must be staffed by the most accomplished researchers.

But imagine yourself in 1229 trying to convince Philip, Chancellor of the University of Paris, that there are no Dominicans professionally qualified for the Chair in Theology he has just secured for the fledgling order. History shows how shallow is this attitude, at that time espoused by the secular Masters of Theology then on strike and what we might now call the "Ivy League syndrome." The first Dominican appointed was Roland of Cremona, whose name is all but forgotten, but within twenty years the Dominicans sent to Paris both Albert of Cologne and

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Thomas of Aquino. The rest is history.

## Rekindling the Catholic Light

The dissolution of the Catholic character of the curriculum at Catholic universities has not gone unchallenged in the post-Vatican II era by individual Catholic faculty in many places and by some reformers. Quite striking during this era have been the “new starts,” small, even tiny, institutions begun during the “dying of the light.” Several were founded in the 1970s, and a second wave is underway, including a few now in the planning stages. Their founders have and still work very much against the common consensus of the American Catholic educational establishment, and for the first time many of them are laymen.

In looking at these efforts to restore Catholicity to curriculum, I would like to distinguish three kinds of institutions, all found in *The Newman Guide*, what I call: (a) the “Great Books” Catholic college; (b) the “Doctrinal” Catholic college; and (c) the *Ex corde* Catholic university.

### The “Great Books” Catholic College

Catholics were not the only educators to react against President Eliot’s elective system. At Columbia, the gifted polymath John Erskine created the first “Great Books” course in 1920. When Robert Hutchins took over at The University of Chicago in 1929, he teamed up with a firebrand philosopher from Columbia named Mortimer Adler to produce the “Chicago Plan.” Neither Catholic nor committed to doctrine, the latter had other central features of the Catholic university: an undergraduate college with a core curriculum featuring books, combined with advanced learning in graduate school. In 1937, near-defunct St. John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland, changed its whole curriculum into a four-year Great Books B.A.

In 1941 Brother Austin Crowley, F.S.C., introduced a Great Books curriculum at St. Mary’s in Moraga, California. By 1968, St. Mary’s was in trouble and, in an oft-repeated error, the curriculum was blamed for problems that had other causes.<sup>12</sup> A vocal minority of the faculty argued that the problem was that the curriculum was not traditional and Catholic enough. Its manifesto, “A Proposal for the Fulfillment of Catholic Liberal Education,” became the founding document for a new Great Books college, Thomas Aquinas College (TAC), founded in 1971.

What Ronald McArthur and his fellow rebels from St. Mary’s did at TAC was to accept the fact that students would no longer be able to read the classics in the original, a lesson that had been very hard for the Jesuits to accept. It seems to me that despair over losing the original *Ratio* led the Jesuits to conclude that the sky was the limit on curricular change. TAC took the opposite view—since mastering Latin and Greek would not return, the content of the *Ratio* should be delivered in English.

The key curricular issue at TAC was: Would the curriculum follow a bi-level model or would it follow the *Ratio* and only have core? The college opted to follow the Jesuits and St. John’s—core and core alone. The next question was how to deliver this curriculum. Here TAC followed the St. John’s books curriculum, with the addition of Catholic doctrine. Vestiges of the *Ratio* abound. Under the *Ratio*’s humanities fall Latin (but only for two years) and “Seminar” (an eclectic four years of texts in literature, history, politics and modern philosophy). The *Ratio*’s philosophy is divided into four different four-year courses: in mathematics, science, philosophy (which means Aristotle) and theology (Thomas Aquinas).

The result is a fine updating in the spirit of the Jesuit *Ratio*. TAC’s curriculum has core, real books, doctrine and Catholicity. Integration is achieved in both the traditional Catholic ways, through theology and philosophy. TAC’s curriculum is resolutely and proudly not bi-level,

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<sup>12</sup> Burtchaell, 675-687.

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which makes it like the Jesuit college and the medieval undergraduate school of Arts. It is for those uninterested in career preparation within undergraduate education, though it is clearly designed to provide its graduates a fine basis for graduate education elsewhere. For this reason, like St. John's College, TAC will remain a minority option and cannot be the model for expanding John Paul II's vision of an *Ex corde* Catholic institution from a small college to a larger university.

*The Newman Guide* lists other schools that attempt a Catholic Great Books curriculum. Notable among them is the University of Dallas (UD), founded in 1956 by laymen and a group of Cistercian educators who had escaped from Hungary during the Cold War. The curricular issue at Dallas was how to incorporate the Great Books into a curriculum divided into majors, and UD's answer was to distribute their chosen list of Great Books among a set of required courses that are housed in the standard academic departments. This choice makes the Dallas curriculum bi-level, and shows the Great Books option offers real promise for larger universities. But Dallas does not yet have the size and breadth to prove the case.

### The "Doctrinal" Catholic College

A second approach is exemplified by Christendom College, founded in Front Royal, Virginia, in 1977. Its core curriculum concentrates on delivering doctrine that is Catholic, but not tied to particular books. This is why I call this category of colleges "doctrinal." Christendom's curriculum devotes the first two years to 24 required courses, while the last two years are devoted primarily to the major. This makes the curriculum fully bi-level, which is the predominant model for *The Newman Guide* institutions.

The language requirement is a distribution component, but all other courses during the first two years are core courses housed in departments. Under the *Ratio's* humanities fall the subjects of English, history, foreign language and political science. The math and science requirement is minimal. Distinctive are large cores in philosophy and theology. The curriculum at Christendom is nicely bi-level, core, doctrinal and Catholic. Integration is to be achieved in the traditional ways—through theology and philosophy—and these two requirements are large enough to do the job.

However, the curriculum is not a books curriculum. On this point, Christendom and TAC are point and counterpoint to each other, with UD lying between them. In addition, while the curriculum is technically bi-level, the small size of the college means only a small number of majors are offered, making it impossible for Christendom's curriculum to be bi-level in a robust sense. While Christendom is a fine example of an *Ex corde* Catholic college, its small size prevents it from being the model for an *Ex corde* Catholic university.

### *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* Catholic Universities?

Perhaps the most striking statement in *The Newman Guide* is that it recommends only one institution, The Catholic University of America (CUA), that is large enough (about 3,300 undergraduates) and with a substantial enough graduate school to count as a "university" according to contemporary standards. None of the largest American Catholic universities make the list.

One major reason for this fact is because institutions that have been the most successful according to the usual measures—size, endowment or prestige—have curricula that have suffered most from that very success. For size and wealth have brought pressure for specialization, multiplication of majors and especially development of graduate programs at previously undergraduate institutions, accomplished by imitating current practices at non-Catholic institutions. There also is the Ivy League syndrome, the desire to follow the elite American universities, even if that means following them down the path that in the nineteenth century trans-

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formed Protestant religious institutions into secular ones, a phenomenon well documented by Burtchaell. All of these factors have combined to bring pressure to bear against the traditional Catholic core.

On this point, Catholic University is the exception that proves the rule. Its history shows it to be out of the ordinary in almost every respect. CUA opened in 1887, as an American initiative in the neo-Thomistic revival begun with Leo XIII's *Aeterni patris* (1879). It started as a purely graduate university devoted to serving the needs of the Church in America for graduate training, at a time when other Catholic institutions were undergraduate. To staff its schools of philosophy, theology and law, CUA turned to Europe for help and has maintained close connections there ever since.

So when it expanded into undergraduate studies, these ties led CUA to follow the older European university tradition of bi-level education, with a strong undergraduate core. Over time, administrators have remained attached to CUA's European roots, in no small part because many of them were educated there. They have been more committed to core, and especially to philosophy within the core, owing in part to the fact that at CUA philosophy is a school, not a department.

During the era of post-Vatican II problems, CUA was affected mainly at the graduate level, as in the affair of Father Charles Curran, who led dissent from *Humanae Vitae* (1968). The removal of Father Curran from the theology faculty in 1986, by then Cardinal Ratzinger, had symbolic impact, the value of which cannot be denied. A more recent symbol was the choice by the same man, now Pope Benedict XVI, to speak at CUA, rather than another Catholic university. So the example of CUA underlines how serious is the problem at large Catholic universities, which thus far have shown themselves willing to follow their Protestant brethren down the road to secularization, offering clever but specious arguments in their defense.

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This brief survey of the American situation yields important results. First, real progress toward "rekindling" the Catholic light has been made at some institutions. I have merely picked four examples, and *The Newman Guide* has not captured all the signs of progress; absent are improvements made in institutions that did not make its list. Second, what these schools have in common is that Catholic identity is central to their educational endeavors and has led them to the kind of curriculum found in the earlier Catholic university tradition, characterized by the six features outlined above—bi-level, core, doctrine, books, Catholic and integrated. These schools package these features in the traditional way, with core courses in the liberal arts, philosophy and theology. Third, if rekindling is to take hold, it next needs to move to medium and large Catholic universities. This is the challenge to which Benedict XVI responded in his Washington address in April 2008.

## Enter Pope Benedict XVI

In his address to Catholic educators, Benedict called himself a "professor" and offered his audience a theological argument.<sup>13</sup> Ever the realist, he courageously focused on the underlying but too often avoided existential question: Why have Catholic schools in the first place? He put the issue this way because "some today question the Church's involvement in education, wondering whether her resources might be better placed elsewhere."

"Some" here certainly includes leaders within the Church in America. The last of Benedict's specific injunctions is directed expressly to them: "Here I wish to make a special appeal to Re-

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Catholic Educators*, April 17, 2008, The Catholic University of America.

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ligious Brothers, Sisters, and Priests: do not abandon the school apostolate; indeed, renew your commitment to schools, especially those in poorer areas.” While many in the Vatican II generation may have closed their ears, their time is rapidly passing away and Benedict understands that younger religious and priests are listening to him closely.

In dialectical fashion, the “professor” himself raises the strongest objection. In a rich nation like the United States, “the state provides ample opportunities for education.” So should Catholic education fade away like the Catholic hospital? Benedict’s address is an extended argument in reply, supporting a fundamental conclusion: American Catholic colleges and universities are needed, but only if they exhibit a strong and vigorous sense of Catholic identity.

Benedict’s understanding of Catholic identity emerges gradually in his message, but for the sake of clarity I shall begin with it. For Benedict, Catholic identity is wide-ranging and comprehensive, including all the essential features of college or university life. At each step of his argument, he weaves together three related themes: how the individual cannot afford to ignore the wider community; how the good of the intellect is tied to the good of the will; and, above all, how reason cannot afford to ignore faith. He uses all three to explain Catholic identity because he is well aware of the temptation to reduce this complex reality to one of its parts.

He rejects the earlier neo-scholastic tendency to reduce Catholic identity to “orthodoxy of course content,” often confined to the departments of philosophy and theology, and the later tendency – widespread after concern for orthodoxy waned in the post-Vatican II period – to rest Catholic identity “upon statistics.” “A university or school’s Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction,” that is, institutional conviction, not just personal choice. He asks, “Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools?” Benedict advocates using many measures of Catholic identity, but understood as signs radiating from its center, the institutional conviction of the truth of the Catholic faith made tangible.

In support of Catholic identity, Benedict offers three distinct lines of argument, or “steps,” following his order of presentation. Step One: For the good of the Church, its colleges and universities should have a strong Catholic identity. Step Two: For the good of communities outside the Church, notably the wider civic good, Catholic colleges and universities should have a strong Catholic identity. Step Three: For the good of their own intellectual work, Catholic colleges and universities should have a strong Catholic identity.

Each of these steps involves consequences for the curriculum, some of which Benedict draws explicitly, while others are left implicit. What emerges from Benedict’s message is not a relaxing of standards in comparison with *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, but a strengthening of them. In response to current problems, Benedict’s comprehensive picture of Catholic identity entails a curriculum with the six traditional attributes featured above, one that involves some version of the liberal arts, as well as theology and philosophy. These steps should be considered in turn.

### The Good of the Church

Crafted to his audience, Benedict’s argument begins outside, not inside, the schools: “Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News.” This one terse sentence sums up the argument of Step One. Catholic colleges and universities are parts within a wider whole – the Church itself. Proclaiming the Gospel to humankind, that is, evangelization, is the fundamental function of the Church; this task absolutely requires education in a broad sense. No education, no evangelization, no Church. Since the part (the school) fits within the whole (the Church), it follows that the goals and activities of the part should serve the whole.

What links evangelization outside the school to teaching within it is what Benedict calls “the

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ministry (*diakonia*) of truth." Benedict selects examples of evangelical truths that are directly relevant to teaching. "God's revelation offers every generation the opportunity to discover the ultimate truth about its own life and the goal of history... guiding both teacher and student towards the objective truth which, in transcending the particular and the subjective, points to the universal and absolute."

This first step in Benedict's argument moves at the level of faith. If evangelization outside the Catholic school requires education, education within the Catholic school should open students to evangelization. He tells us, "First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth." Fostering this encounter requires Catholic identity in a strong sense of the term.

### The Civic Good

Strong Catholic identity also contributes to "a nation's fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person's dignity." U.S. Catholics have proven their value in the public square, a value now widely acknowledged. "It comes as no surprise, then, that not just our own ecclesial communities but society in general has high expectations of Catholic educators," he says.

As throughout his address, Benedict here accentuates the positive from the past and for the future while never understating the challenges. He continues: "The essential transcendent dimension of the human person," traditionally taught in philosophy courses, offers the wider society "objectivity and perspective" to respond to a host of current problems: the "relativistic horizon" that fosters "a lowering of standards," a "timidity" about the difference between good and evil, "aimless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom," a flattening of values that assumes "every experience is of equal worth," and finally, the "particularly disturbing" wholesale "reduction of the precious and delicate area of education in sexuality," where, as Marx put it, "the human becomes animal and the animal human."

But there is a catch here, since these lofty ideals also serve as standards for judging Catholic institutions. The college or university that does not teach the "transcendent dimension" and what it entails is one that lacks a strong Catholic identity and cannot justify its existence by contributing to the civic good. Father Brosnahan's Boston College could pass this test, but that is no guarantee 110 years later.

### The Intellectual Good

The focus of Benedict's address concerns the heart of the university—the intellectual good of knowledge. Here the experience of the "professor," who personally has lived through what he calls "the contemporary 'crisis of truth'," dovetails with his deep understanding of the Church's university tradition. What results is a brief but luminous description of both problem and solution.

The problem originated in Europe and has spread round the globe, now affecting many "societies where secularist ideology drives a wedge between truth and faith." Popularizers of this ideology abound—think of Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker or the ACLU. But the problem is deep and can be envisioned using Descartes' tree of knowledge. Descartes devoted himself to its metaphysical roots and scientific trunk; its branches and leaves had yet to develop. But today they now surround us: gigantic cities stretching up and out are the modern monuments of scientific engineering, our great hospitals are the emblems of scientific medicine, and we are surrounded with the results of scientific psychology, from television advertising to popular journalism to huge prisons unknown in earlier ages.

The intertwined growth of its branches, however, has affected the tree of knowledge itself,

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and not for the better. Benedict points to three problems of “secularism.” First, the “fragmentation” of knowledge means students and their teachers confine themselves to smaller and smaller parts of the whole, become swamped by specialization, and finally lose sight of the whole. Second, the lush growth of the sciences has led many “to adopt a positivistic mentality,” where knowledge is thought to progress in linear fashion, original myths and religions superceded by philosophy, which in turn was left in the dust by modern or “positive” science. Third, fragmentation and positivism have produced a “relativistic horizon” that undermines all claims to know the truth with certitude, both theoretical and practical.

On the theoretical side, “critical” thought, positivism and Derridean “deconstruction” have taken an axe to the tree’s metaphysical roots, so it has come crashing down, ushering in an era of hyper-critical “post-modernism.” On the practical side, scientific psychology has teamed up with scientific socialism and utilitarianism to teach “praxis creates truth,” a relativistic conclusion that has snapped branches overlaid by their own weight, like a giant Southern live oak. In sum, for Benedict “secularist ideology” involves fragmentation, positivism, and relativism.

Since the problem originates in science and philosophy, Benedict expands his solution accordingly, to incorporate modern science and the traditional liberal arts, as well as philosophy and theology. His solution tracks the problem point for point. Distilled to one sentence, it is this: “With confidence, Christian educators can liberate the young from the limits of positivism and awaken receptivity to the truth, to God and his goodness.”

In response to “secularism” taken as a whole, Benedict counters with the “confidence” that comes from Catholic faith in Jesus Christ. As the incarnate logos of God, Christ is both God and man and therefore an appropriate emblem for the harmony between faith (which comes from God’s revelation) and human reason.

In response to fragmentation and positivism (the latter a term students do not know but a mindset that has captured American culture), Benedict responds with the “essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation which ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth.” This “unity” is found, not by reducing the various disciplines to one type—this is the positivist error—but through acquaintance with the full range of knowledge in all its variety. This is a large topic and Benedict does not tarry over the details.

As a sign pointing to the answer, he mentions “metaphysics” and “Catholic doctrine,” one of many names for theology. But it is doubtful these two disciplines, as important as they are, can do the job by themselves. His choice of the term “liberation” seems an intentional echo of the “liberal arts.” So the “unity of knowledge” seems to involve the full range of the disciplines, as present in the Catholic university tradition: from the linguistic arts to the arts and sciences and on to philosophy. “Receptivity to the truth” begins with rational truth, but then can expand to openness to revealed truth about God, in theology.

In response to relativism, Benedict points to “intellectual charity” which “guides the young towards the deep satisfaction of exercising freedom in relation to truth, and it strives to articulate the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life. Once their passion for the fullness and unity of truth has been awakened, young people will surely relish the discovery that the question of what they can know opens up the vast adventure of what they ought to do.” An ethics that is rational but also open to knowledge coming from revelation, and an ethics that involves practice as well as theory, is what Benedict here offers in response. He says, “While we have sought diligently to engage the intellect of our young, perhaps we have neglected the will.” The remedy is that strong Catholic identity must involve Catholic practice as well as doctrine.

In sum, this third and most important step in Benedict’s argument is that only a strong Catho-

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lic identity in the Church's American colleges and universities will offer an adequate response to the "contemporary 'crisis of truth'." It also underscores how thoroughly teleological Benedict's overall reasoning is, for all three "steps" argue from end to means. If the good of the Church requires theology be part of "Catholic identity," the good of civil society requires philosophy, and the good of knowledge requires science and the liberal arts be combined with theology and philosophy to produce a robust Catholic identity.

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While the applications and examples Benedict uses in his argument are completely contemporary, the three steps in his overall teleological argument—the good of the Catholic faith, the good of civil society and the good of knowledge—build directly on earlier Catholic and papal doctrine, notably that of his predecessor Leo XIII.

Leo's promotion of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas is well known, but Benedict has built his Washington address on a less recognized feature of Leo's *Aeterni Patris*, its three staged teleological argument: "While, therefore, We hold that every word of wisdom, every useful thing by whomsoever discovered or planned, ought to be received with a willing and grateful mind, We exhort you, venerable brethren, in all earnestness to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences."<sup>14</sup>

## Curricular Conclusions

Many consequences for curriculum follow from Pope Benedict's Washington message. In the course of his speech he only touches on curricular matters incidentally; but the main line of his argument offers wide-ranging support for the traditional Catholic university curriculum. And Benedict adds some specific injunctions directed to different groups at the end of the speech. One of these is a specific moral obligation concerning Catholicity: "Teachers and administrators, whether in universities or schools, have the duty and privilege to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice." It seems appropriate, then, to arrange the curricular consequences of Benedict's Washington speech under three headings: (a) Catholic doctrine; (b) Catholic practice; and (c) unity of knowledge.

### Catholic Doctrine

The injunction to "teachers and administrators" is to "ensure"—that is, to require of students—"instruction in Catholic doctrine." In an academic setting, instruction means courses, so this obligation is for courses in Catholic theology, crafted so as to support the truth "as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church's Magisterium." The rapid growth of "Catholic studies" in Catholic institutions, as a response to perceived deficiencies in "religious studies" or theology departments, is a sign Benedict is responding to a felt need.

The numerous theological topics Benedict mentions range over three areas: doctrine, scripture and morality. A reasonable inference is that the minimum number of courses be three, because superficial instruction amounts to no instruction at all. But great variation in students, teachers and texts is the reason why such decisions are usually made locally. What is uppermost in Benedict's mind, however, is absolutely clear: providing students the opportunity to encounter orthodox Catholic content presented in a serious and supportive way. This requirement implies a curriculum with several of the traditional features. To have a place for theology, in addition to "major," the undergraduate curriculum must be bi-level, with a true core that mandates theology for all students, and not as a distribution component. At a minimum, theol-

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<sup>14</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* (1879), para. 13.

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ogy in the core must be doctrinal and Catholic, a significant departure from current practice in many institutions.

### Catholic Practice

Benedict's injunction about Catholic "practice" shows his openness to innovation. Courses in moral theology or philosophical ethics would be appropriate, to be sure. But Benedict also seems to be looking for more. Beyond the school itself, he seems to advocate what are usually called "social service" (he might prefer "Catholic service") requirements. Such "practices" can even be brought into the curriculum, when combined with reading and classroom discussion of books in the long Catholic tradition of social justice.

Equally important, on the "practice" side also fall the many social and moral problems affecting campuses themselves, problems teachers and administrators all too often are too timid to tackle: from speaker policies to overnight visitation in dorms, from gay and lesbian clubs to condoms to *The Vagina Monologues*, from discounted tuition to scholarships to endowment investment, to say nothing of drinking and driving. Institutions that provide a campus environment in accord with Catholic "practice" teach ethics by example, always the most effective way to do so. In short, this injunction strikes me as a revival of the medieval idea that students should be educated "in morals" as well as "sciences." To the extent "Catholic practice" enters the curriculum, this requirement is a step in the direction of integration, through integrating Catholic theory with practice.

### The Unity of Knowledge

The problem of the "essential unity of knowledge," when put in curricular terms, is nothing other than the problem of integrating the curriculum. So the consequences for the curriculum that flow from Benedict's argument based on the "unity of knowledge" are numerous and important.

#### *Philosophy*

The one philosophical discipline Benedict mentions by name is "metaphysics." The traditional function of metaphysics in the curriculum, of course, concerns the existence and nature of God. Setting out "the division and methods of the sciences" is also a properly metaphysical task. Benedict turns to metaphysics as a direct reply to positivism. "Recognition of the essential transcendent dimension of the human person" is a topic treated in what is now often called "philosophy of the human person." And an ethics that is philosophical but open to revelation is a hallmark of Catholic philosophy curricula.

It is hard to see how this much philosophical content can be presented in fewer than three core courses. Benedict's argument readily lends itself to courses in metaphysics, ethics and the human person; but other ways of presenting this content are also possible. The effect of adding philosophy to theology requirements in order to achieve "Catholic identity" is to make the curriculum exhibit more fully the traditional features of being bi-level, core, doctrinal and Catholic. In addition, a metaphysical response to positivism necessarily promotes an integrated curriculum, in arguing that human knowledge itself is "integrated" or "unified."

Far from abandoning the traditional roles of theology and philosophy in the curriculum, Benedict argues for their expansion in comparison with current common practice. And his way of arguing from end goals to curricular means undermines the current practice of turning the few remaining philosophy and theology requirements into non-standard electives bereft of consistent content. Such courses cannot ensure the ends of Church, civil society and knowledge itself are addressed.

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## *The Liberal Arts*

A great advantage of Pope Benedict's mode of argument is that it promotes philosophy and theology, not by papal fiat or as isolated requirements, but by putting them into their real context, the larger whole he calls the "essential unity of knowledge." This "unity" involves three points. First, Benedict rejects the positivist rejection of non-scientific disciplines; there is knowledge beyond the limits of the scientific method. Second, Benedict recognizes that truths acquired in the various disciplines can exist in harmony or "unity" with each other, even if our contemporaries have despaired for this unity. Third, Benedict realizes there is a hierarchy among disciplines, because there is a hierarchy among truths, all stemming ultimately from Truth itself as found in God.

An unstructured curriculum is but another sign of the false sense of freedom Benedict rejects. So the first curricular conclusion here is that Catholic identity requires core beyond theology and philosophy, spread over some variety of disciplines, as the necessary base for a humane and religious intellectual life.

Acquainting students with all disciplines and all world traditions and all the great books is impossible. For a curriculum that is bi-level and has core, there must be a canon, choices must be made among disciplines, books and authors. Here the traditionalist may immediately turn to the humanistic subjects that have had a preponderant place in the Catholic teaching of the liberal arts, to the neglect of modern science and its offshoot, the social sciences. Benedict's teleological argument, by contrast, is not taken from a history some educators have rejected, but from what the various disciplines can accomplish—their ends.

Even when most successful, each discipline succeeds in capturing only part of the complexity of truth, which is why over the centuries humans have invented a variety of ways of knowing. Such large-minded wisdom is the antithesis of small-minded positivism. A second conclusion, then, is that a Catholic core curriculum should include a selection of disciplines (or authors or books) that cover the range of ways of knowing reality, both for the sake of seeing its diversity, and also to see the "unity" that lies on the other side of diversity.

This second conclusion immediately generates the next question: What disciplines must be included? The reason the linguistic studies of the medieval *trivium* and the mathematics of the *quadrivium* were core is because they are skills courses providing the "language" of thought—both literary language and mathematical language—that makes possible knowledge gained in the higher disciplines. Deficiencies in these basic skills are the primary complaint "market-place practitioners" have about American education, problems brought on where specialization trumps general education. So such "arts" should still be mandated in a "Catholic core."

The remaining terrain—the vast expanse of specialties and sub-specialties—is huge, but Benedict helps us negotiate it by using the classic distinction between theory, whose task is to explain the world, and practice, whose task is to act in it. All students must be given the opportunity to see that the kind of theoretical knowledge achieved in literature or physics is not the same kind as the practical knowledge in ethics or finance or engineering, and that one cannot supplant the other.

On the theoretical side, the curriculum should show the student that explanations in humanities like literature or history or fine arts, which "portray" individuals in ways that implicitly or explicitly carry universal messages, are different from "sciences" (whether ancient or modern), that explicitly articulate universal messages (through principles, or laws, theories or equations) covering a multitude of individual cases. And students should see that practical disciplines are different still, because designed to produce individual and corporate actions. There is no algorithm for determining the exact mixture of skills courses, humanities, theoretical sciences and

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practical disciplines the curriculum requires. This is why traditions, once put in place, tend to last. But what is clear on Benedict's argument is that a sufficient and organized sample should be required, in order for students to see "the essential unity of knowledge."

Benedict's argument requires some set of "liberal arts" in a "Catholic core," for two reasons. First, the liberal arts highlight the different, but legitimate, modes of knowing—a lesson directly contrary to all reductionisms, especially positivism. Second, the liberal arts also show the diverse disciplines cohere together as an ordered whole, both in comparison with each other and by pointing beyond themselves, to philosophy, which articulates that order, and to theology, which shows the ultimate source of that order.

A curriculum that exhibits both the diversity and unity of knowledge must have the six traditional traits. In order for such a curriculum to teach the "essential unity of knowledge" it must be integrated, which in turn requires that it also be bi-level, core, doctrinal, Catholic and—I would also add, though this is less obvious—a books curriculum. If not, the curriculum will not be able to achieve the ends of supporting Church, civil society and knowledge itself.

While these six criteria certainly validate a curriculum whose liberal arts follow Catholic tradition that is heavy to humanities, giving less weight to modern "science" and "social science"—as do many of *The Newman Guide* colleges—they also can provide standards for Catholic identity apart from that traditional course structure, even for a curriculum that strikes out in very new directions with a non-traditional conception of "liberal arts," perhaps one weighted much more toward modern science.

In similar fashion, I believe Benedict's argument certainly supports a more traditional liberal arts curriculum; but it is also open to innovations about what should count as liberal arts, subject to an important caveat. Any new liberal arts must perform their central task of "liberating" the mind to see the unity as well as the diversity of the various modes of knowing, thereby opening the student to philosophy and ultimately theology.

### *Interdisciplinary Studies*

If the multiplicity of intellectual disciplines has produced the problem of the "crisis of truth," it stands to reason that moving through multiplicity to unity is the answer. Pope Benedict certainly advocates turning to the disciplines that make up the traditional Catholic liberal arts. But there is a second alternative to disciplinary study of the liberal arts—interdisciplinary studies—that have grown as another way to overcome the "fragmentation" Benedict finds such a problem. John Paul II clearly recognized both the promise and the problems interdisciplinary studies present, in the way he recommended them in *Ex corde*, para. 20:

While each discipline is taught systematically and according to its own methods, interdisciplinary studies, assisted by a careful and thorough study of philosophy and theology, enable students to acquire an organic vision of reality and to develop a continuing desire for intellectual progress.

Examples of non-departmental "core" programs abound, but they do not play a major role in the curriculum of *The Newman Guide* schools. John Paul II's idea of using interdisciplinary studies, combined with philosophy and theology, seems to me quite consistent with Benedict's vision of Catholic identity.

### *Academic Freedom*

From Benedict's comprehensive conception of Catholic identity comes another injunction that concerns the curriculum, one directed toward faculty: "I wish to reaffirm the great value of academic freedom. In virtue of this freedom you are called to search for the truth wherever

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careful analysis of evidence leads you. Yet it is also the case that any appeal to the principle of academic freedom in order to justify positions that contradict the faith and the teaching of the Church would obstruct or even betray the university's identity and mission." Here he rejects an absolutist conception of academic freedom that derives from faculty foreshortening their gaze to self or discipline, to the detriment of the greater good of the university itself and, beyond that, the "unity of knowledge."

Such a cramped view of the freedom to pursue one's discipline is but part of the broader "contemporary 'crisis of knowledge'." It can indeed lead to the perception that there is a contradiction between discipline and Catholicism; but Benedict is confident that in the long run there will be no real contradiction. What seeming contradictions invariably uncover is error, such as the error of positivism; and to hold that academic freedom means the freedom to espouse what is false is a direct assault, not just on the "unity of knowledge," but on knowledge itself. Faculty, as well as students, can have a confused notion of freedom. "Catholic identity," in short, has absolutely no obligation to give way to error.

## Prospects

Benedict's Washington address coheres nicely with the lessons that come from Catholic university history and from the current state of American Catholic colleges and universities. Neither the medieval university nor the Jesuit *Ratio* nor the contemporary Freewheeling American university provides a detailed blueprint for every feature of a contemporary institution with strong Catholic identity. We need the virtue of prudence to shape principle to problem and circumstance. Let us recognize that graduate courses are no longer confined to theology, law and medicine, Latin is no longer spoken in the classroom and Jane Austen is unfamiliar to many undergraduates.

But on the other side, it is simply shallow nominalism to call an education "Catholic" that does not require Augustine's *Confessions* or Dante's *Comedy*, housed within a core curriculum devoted in part to the "liberal arts," philosophy and theology. The six features of the curriculum that history shows are central to the Catholic university tradition are worth preserving because they lie at the very heart of a Catholic college or university. So far as I can tell, history, current good practice and now Pope Benedict XVI all point in the same direction. The next model for the Catholic university, as well as the Catholic college, will be the *Ex corde* model already emerging at some Catholic colleges. Staffed by professionals, it will include a curriculum that will be bi-level, core, books, doctrinal, Catholic and integrated. I think I see it developing, but time will tell.

This paper is available online at [www.CatholicHigherEd.org](http://www.CatholicHigherEd.org).

