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Enhancing a Catholic Intellectual Culture

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by Rev. D. Paul Sullins, Ph.D.

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Executive Summary

Rejecting secular and Protestant norms and ideals, Catholic universities today must assert a distinctive Catholic intellectual culture featuring the unity of faith and reason, the acceptance of magisterial teaching and an active critique of culture. Such a Catholic intellectual culture will foster Catholic intellectuals and dispose students to the truth, and has the potential to preserve and restore elements of reason and humanity that are being lost in Western civilization.

Specific institutional strategies for promoting a Catholic intellectual culture are suggested. These include promoting the disciplines of theology and philosophy and integrating them across the curriculum; developing a holistic approach to Catholic identity; integrating faculty into the Catholic and overall academic environment of the university; recruiting Catholic scholars who live out their faith; guarding against outside research and professional pressure; and promoting Catholic identity through a senior official for Catholic mission.

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About The Center

The Center for the Advancement of Catholic Higher Education (CACHE), a division of the nonprofit Cardinal Newman Society, advises and assists academic and religious leaders in efforts to strengthen the Catholic identity and academic quality of Catholic colleges and universities.

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Enhancing a Catholic Intellectual Culture

This paper encourages Catholic universities in the development of a genuine Catholic intellectual culture by identifying the main features of such a culture and suggesting specific institutional strategies to promote them. First, however, it is necessary to address a certain set of cultural obstacles which impede the realization of a Catholic intellectual culture.

I. Understanding the Catholic Difference

Almost two decades after the publication of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (hereafter *ECE*), very few Catholic universities can be said to have fully implemented the norms and goals envisioned there. This is not, for the most part, for lack of trying. Indeed, despite some initial opposition to *ECE*, the large majority of Catholic university faculty and administrators has recognized the need, and has sincerely sought, to recover a genuine Catholic identity in the intellectual life of their institutions. Much effort and creativity has been invested in this task, with some success overall and notable success in some places.

Yet the reform has not, in most places, been as successful as it might have been, nor made as much progress as it could reasonably have been expected to have made. Recently (2006) Melanie Morey and Father John Piderit, S.J., reported, based on representative interviews with 124 administrators of Catholic universities, that despite the fact that “[a]lmost all Catholic institutions are currently seeking ways to be more ‘Catholic’ . . . most administrators in the end admitted that their colleges and universities [sic] had rather weak Catholic cultures.”¹ The leadership of Catholic universities,² it appears, despite widespread attempts to express an institutional culture that is vibrantly Catholic, has generally been impeded from fully realizing this goal by persistent obstacles or roadblocks.

From the perspective of an administrator, these obstacles are visible in the organizational or interpersonal dynamics that often resist change, collegiality or coherence in an institution. Such forces are particularly strong in any university and present real challenges to reform. If this were not the case, after all, it would not be worth considering, as we do at length below, what Catholic institutions can do to reform and improve their Catholic identity. Yet the failure of reform, particularly as it pertains to Catholic intellectual culture, is also made possible, and the institutional forces of opposition are strengthened, by the particular susceptibility of Catholic universities in America to corrosive cultural forces that operate upon them from outside by means of institutional ecology or cultural context.

Morey and Piderit observe, “The dominant culture, despite obeisance paid to cultural diversity, wants religious institutions to provide the same services as secular ones, and they expect to judge them according to the same standards.” These standards then become internalized: “Senior administrators at Catholic universities. . . gave witness to the strong pressures they experience to conform to the practices of their nonsectarian counterparts. The legitimacy of these institutions as colleges and universities is claimed on the basis of how similar they are to

1. Morey, Melanie and John Piderit, SJ, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17, 5.

2. To avoid undue repetition in this essay I am using the word “universities” in an inclusive sense, to include colleges and universities and other similar institutions of higher education.

all other colleges and universities.”³ This pressure to conform to a secular model of being a university constitutes, I suggest, a broad roadblock that tacitly undercuts institutional programs or efforts for reform in American Catholic universities. This expectation is particularly effective in impeding the reform of the university’s intellectual culture, because the blockage here is at root intellectual and cultural, not institutional. In order to have any hope of establishing a vibrant Catholic intellectual culture, then, administrators at Catholic universities must first critically re-evaluate the prevailing secular understanding and standard of what constitutes a university, and thus of what constitutes the distinction between a Catholic university and a secular one.

Because it is the dominant cultural form, it is natural and common to think of the university as typified by the absence of a dominant intellectual commitment, a “marketplace of ideas” in which free inquiry leads to a variety of fundamental conclusions about the universe. On this view there are, on the one hand, generic, mere or normal universities, which work to preserve the absence of a dominant intellectual commitment, and on the other hand religious, including Catholic, universities, which embody a prior commitment to particular truths about the universe. The designation “Catholic,” then, is a qualification of the idea of a “university” generically.

However, whether acknowledged or not, every university, just as every culture, embodies particular intellectual commitments and perspectives in its common life. A secular university pursues a particular way of being a university, just as a Catholic university pursues a particular way of being a university. A secular university is just as committed, in its own way, to a particular view of the universe as is any religious institution.

The idea that the intellectual culture of a secular university is open-minded and tolerant while that of a religious university is, by comparison, narrow and intolerant is almost axiomatic for the leaders of secular institutions, who studiously marginalize religion. It is also reflected in the leaders of Catholic universities, however, when they strive to assure observers that their institution is just as tolerant and open as a secular school. Yet the premise is demonstrably false, not (only or necessarily) on theoretical grounds but on empirical ones. As the experience of numerous religiously-minded faculty members and students attest, the range of acceptable opinions in a secular university is quite narrow, while that in a religious institution is quite wide, to the point that the notion that a secular institution is open while a religious one is closed has no basis except, ironically, in the intellectual prejudice of secularists.

Many have noted this irony of the modern academy, but perhaps none better than the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu observes that while the formal structures of a modern secular university, centered in the ideal and operative mechanisms of academic freedom, provide powerful protection against imposing views on scholars, the informal structures of a secular university operate just as (and perhaps more) powerfully to dispose scholars to affirm a relatively narrow range of acceptable opinions, hypotheses, judgments, lifestyle choices and political views.⁴ The prescriptive power of political correctness in professional settings, well-known to American academics, provides a good example of this dynamic; and any religiously-committed scholar who has tried to integrate her faith and scholarship in a secular institution can testify to the powerful, if informal, institutional controls that are placed on violations of such tacit secular orthodoxy.

How does a secular university impose such conformity? Not by explicit rules or faculty selection, but by its intellectual culture. As Bourdieu points out, the ideas which can be dis-

3. Morey and Piderit, *op. cit.* 349.

4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 167-169. In *Homo Academicus* (San Francisco, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), Bourdieu provides an extensive application of these ideas to modern academic institutions.

cussed and taught in a secular university's academic culture are circumscribed by understandings, ideas and values which everybody knows, which are "taken for granted," and are all the more powerful because they are uncontroversial and unstated. Such axiomatic assumptions are compelling for persons in a culture, not because they are rigidly enforced or defended, but because they need no enforcement or defense whatever. They are not merely unquestioned, but unquestionable. They are the things that go without saying. Such undiscussed assumptions, which Bourdieu collectively terms "doxa" set the limits for both formal orthodoxy and heterodoxy regarding what can be discussed, researched or taught in the secular university.

For those concerned about a university's intellectual culture, whether secular or religious, this is a crucial point, to which I will return below. At the root of any university's intellectual culture lies a tacit consensus about fundamental matters that limits and directs its intellectual life far more powerfully than any overt administrative or formal faculty actions or programs. The implications of this for the reform of university intellectual culture are clear and stark: Just as the open formal structures of the secular university, as necessary as these are, cannot prevent the development of a narrow and restrictive doxa, so the imposition of formal mechanisms to promote Catholic identity and culture in a Catholic university, as necessary as these may be, cannot by itself or necessarily bring about a doxa that supports truly Catholic teaching and research.

In practice, just as the secular university sincerely proclaims an ideal of open inquiry while unconsciously fostering a restricted intellectual culture, so many Catholic universities, while sincerely professing to seek a distinctive Catholic intellectual culture, have unconsciously adopted the informal norms, the doxa, of secularity. They have done this, not because they wish to be secular, but because they wish to be a university, and have uncritically accepted the false assumptions noted above, i.e., that the secular university is more open-minded than a religious one, and that this is the pure or normal form of the university. In order to be a genuine university, respected and successful among its peer institutions (and among a secularized Catholic laity from which come its prospective students and parents), many Catholic universities have tried to combine a Catholic faith commitment with the implicitly secular academic structures of a "normal" American university.

The result was, and continues in many cases to be, a tense and uneasy mix of incompatible norms. The tension between the norms is reflected in institutional and interpersonal tension that accompanies such a strategy to instill a genuine Catholic culture. The efforts to resolve or manage this tension have resulted in various often-noted partial and ineffective results for these institutions, such as the balkanization of Catholic intellectual life, with some departments determinedly secular and others just as persistently Catholic; relegating Catholic identity to campus ministry and occasional liturgies which have minimal effect on the intellectual culture or formation of the university; and confining student formation in the Catholic intellectual tradition to one or two required courses in theology or philosophy, which may or may not actually address the Catholic faith.

Compared to other religious universities, Catholic universities in the United States experience added definitional tension because, where the institutional norms of higher education in the 20th century have not been secular, they have been largely Protestant. As Kathleen Mahoney chronicles clearly, in the late 19th century "liberal Protestant leaders of the university movement linked the newly created modern university with the cause of a Protestant America." On the other hand, "Catholics' status as members of a religious minority complicated the ways in which they could respond to the reforms that remade much of higher education."⁵ Subsequently, the effect of the Second Vatican Council, for better or for worse, was to lessen or

5. Mahoney, Kathleen, *Catholic Higher Education in Protestant America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 2 and 7.

remove many of the features of Catholic life and thought that distinguished Catholics from Protestants. Catholic universities today therefore face the double forces of conformity not only to a dominant secular civic culture but also to a dominant Protestant religious culture, which have together shaped the intellectual culture of the modern academy.

The worst result of living in tension with secular and Protestant universities is the tendency for Catholic universities to minimize the true distinctiveness and difference that Catholic faith and commitment makes to the business of being a university. The basic problem with many current attempts to restore a university's Catholic intellectual identity is that the attempt itself expresses only a secularized, eviscerated notion of what it is to be Catholic. Morey and Piderit observe that Catholic universities "are willing to put a dash of religion in their collegiate stew, but, wary of having it overpower, they put just enough to make it interesting, not enough to make it truly distinctive."⁶

Such attempts at accommodation do not preserve Catholic identity, but, on the contrary, result in the eventual loss of anything distinctly Catholic. Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to Catholic educators on the occasion of his recent (2008) visit to the United States, suggested that such nominal Catholic institutions may not be worth continuing. As R. E. Houser succinctly summarizes his argument: "American Catholic colleges and universities are needed, but only if they exhibit a strong and vigorous sense of Catholic identity."⁷ It is important, therefore, that Catholic administrators consider carefully what constitutes the distinct features of a Catholic intellectual culture.

II. Features of a Catholic Intellectual Culture

The previous section raised a crucial point about intellectual culture with respect to Catholic reform: a genuine Catholic intellectual culture cannot be something "added on" to fundamentally secular norms of university life. Such norms carry with them a *doxa* that is inimical to Catholic life. Rather, implementing or seeking a genuine Catholic intellectual culture changes everything about the nature of a university. The goal of such reform, then, must be to introduce, not just new norms and structures, but a new *doxa* in the university. This section attempts to define some of the common features of a Catholic intellectual culture so conceived. While each of these features, I suggest, are *sine qua non* for the intellectual culture of a genuine Catholic university, some institutions may emphasize some of them more than others.

Unity of Faith and Reason

The central affirmation of a genuine Catholic intellectual culture is that faith and reason, doctrine and discovery, piety and learning are mutually enlightening and reinforcing modes of life and knowledge. In a direct rejection of secularism, a Catholic university begins with the assumption that the convictions of faith and the conclusions of rational observation and reflection are never incompatible. This fundamental assumption underlies (and integrates) the activity of a Catholic university. Like most fundamental assumptions, it has the strongest influence on scholarly activity when the teachings of faith and the findings of reason seem most irreconcilable. By way of analogy, the fundamental assumption of order and regularity in nature that underlies physical science operates most powerfully when such order is not apparent, thus stimulating research to seek to discover the underlying order involved or transcendent order implied.

For Catholics, faith and reason are not only compatible, they are not severable. Faith enlight-

6. Morey and Piderit, *op. cit.*, 349.

7. R. E. Houser, "A Rekindling of the Light: The Past, Present and Future of a Catholic Core Curriculum," (Manassas, VA: The Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education, 2008), 12.

ens reason, as Augustine affirmed; and reason completes faith, as Aquinas affirmed. To paraphrase Kant, reason without faith is empty, and faith without reason is blind. For this reason theology, which attempts to express faith in a reasonable way, and Christian philosophy, which explores reason in a faithful way, are essential disciplines of a Catholic university.

The affirmation of the unity of faith and reason in this way is distinctively Catholic. For Protestant thought, since salvation is by faith alone (*sola fide*), human reason can add nothing essential to faith, which is fundamentally nonrational. Modern Protestant thought, therefore, has tended to assert that faith is subjective, a matter of feelings (Schleiermacher), a “leap across the abyss” (Kierkegaard) or an affirmation of the will (Barth). Liberal Protestants, therefore, welcomed the secularization of the university so long as the nonrational activity of faith was not excluded. Evangelical Protestants, by contrast, have strived to uphold the reasonableness of faith, arguing that, while faith is nonrational, it is not irrational. On this basis some evangelical universities have managed in impressive ways to inhibit secularization and foster a generic “Christian world view”. Evangelicals have been less successful, however, in exploring the faithfulness of reason, since they lack consensus on many points regarding the intellectual content of the faith. In sum, Protestants are hampered in achieving the goal of a university by a deficient view of faith and reason (and, correlatively, Scripture and Tradition) as being separate modes of knowledge that can operate critically upon each other. The full integration of faith and reason that a university requires is today only possible among Catholic universities.

This should not be overstated, however. A Catholic university does not exist “over against” non-Catholic Christian colleges and universities in the same sense that they may stand over against schools of other denominations. Protestants protest Catholicism, by definition, but Catholics do not protest Protestantism. Indeed, Vatican II teaches that the church, in its most basic sense of *communio fidelium*, includes those “separated brothers” of Protestant faith. Thus, a university that comes “from the heart of the church” will seek to explore and express, not only those truths that are particular to Catholics, but also, and perhaps especially, those that are common to faithful Catholics and Protestants alike.

Fostering Catholic Intellectuals

In practical terms, the first and foremost task for the development of a Catholic intellectual culture in a university is fostering an environment that supports the formation and sustenance of Catholic intellectuals. *Ex corde Ecclesiae* calls for a majority of the faculty to be Catholic, a point upon which much effort and energy have been expended in the past two decades. The achievement of a statistical majority of Catholics, however, will be ineffective in producing a genuine Catholic culture of the intellect, if the “Catholic” faculty are merely nominal Catholics, who think essentially like secular persons, rather than persons informed with a Catholic world view, who actively seek to discover truth within the context of revealed truth.

The tensions which can easily undermine the university’s mission—between faith and reason, autonomy and authority, dogma and academic freedom—cannot be resolved by the institution until they have first been resolved in the minds and wills of the faithful scholars who comprise the faculty. It is in the hearts of the faculty that the integration of knowledge, the unity of faith and reason, is first and fundamentally achieved. As John Henry Newman puts it:

Some persons will say that I am thinking of confining, distorting, and stunting the growth of the intellect by ecclesiastical supervision. I have no such thought. Nor have I any thought of a compromise, as if religion must give up something, and science something. I wish the intellect to range with the utmost freedom, and religion to enjoy an equal freedom; but what I am stipulating for is, that they should be found in one and the same place, and exemplified in the same persons. I want to destroy that diversity of centres, which puts everything into confusion

by creating a contrariety of influences. I wish the same spots and the same individuals to be at once oracles of philosophy and shrines of devotion.⁸

Clearly, on this ideal, to be such a scholar/worshipper, or what I have called throughout this essay a faithful Catholic scholar, does not mean (necessarily) that a scholar favors religious topics or questions in her research, or selects a research agenda that supports the teachings of Christianity in some instrumental way. Rather, it means that, in whatever questions are pursued, the scholar's orientation is toward seeking wholeness and understanding of her path of inquiry within the larger understanding, and mystery, of God's creation, incarnation and engagement with the world as revealed by the Church. Stanley Jaki, writing on "The Catholic Intellectual", applies Newman's ideal more directly to the modern research setting. It is not the case, he says,

. . . that only those Catholic intellectuals qualify for being considered Catholic who work on specifically "Catholic" topics. [But when research raises ultimate questions] ... [a] Catholic intellectual must be ready to face up to such questions and in a genuinely Catholic sense. And if he has not acquired the ability to cope with such questions, he at least must have a vivid conviction that Catholic answers can be given to such questions, and indeed have been given time and again. And, most importantly, the Catholic intellectual must not turn the truth of those answers into a function of the measure of their acceptance in secular academia, which is well nigh zero in most cases.⁹

Such scholar/worshippers cannot be sprinkled among the faculty in an isolated way, where they may be tolerated or marginalized by the prevailing culture of the university. Rather, for a genuine Catholic intellectual culture to exist, such scholar/worshippers must comprise the prevailing culture of the university. They must form a genuine community of scholars devoted to the common service of faith and truth, who encourage, challenge, exhort and dispute one another in collective pursuit of their common commitment to the truth about God and the world. As noted above, all scholars pursue their vocation within an intellectual and institutional context, which shapes their scholarship in ways that are no less powerful for being often unrecognized. In a truly Catholic university, faithful Catholic scholars must become for each other what sociologists call a "plausibility structure", in which the Catholic world view of each scholar is confirmed, sharpened, refined and extended by ongoing interaction with others who operate from a shared faith commitment, a *doxa* that presumes Catholic faith.

Submission to the Magisterium

The advantage a Catholic university has in being able to integrate faith and reason is lost entirely if the intellectual culture of the university is not predicated upon a full and free submission to the truths proposed by the Catholic Magisterium. The acceptance of magisterial teaching cannot be only a collective policy of the institution; it must be instantiated in the thinking, research and teaching of each scholar in the university. After all, an institution cannot believe; only persons can freely offer the voluntary assent which magisterial teaching calls for. Such assent must be part of the *doxa* of the university, that is, those elements of common life that are unquestionable and given.

Jaki explains clearly why this is essential for Catholic scholarship:

8. John Henry Newman, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* (London: Longman, 1870; Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1968), 13.

9. Stanley Jaki, "The Catholic Intellectual," in *The Gist of Catholicism* (Pinckney, MI: Real View Books, 2001), 34.

“Catholicism means above all the surrender to the greatest fact of history, Jesus Christ, or the flesh and blood, and therefore very provincial (Catholic) reality of the incarnation of the Son of God. But an integral part of that reality was His intention to teach with universal authority and, in all evidence, to have that authority of his concretely (that is very provincially) perpetuated. Therefore the Catholic intellectual’s submission to Christ must be preceded by a submission to those who today are the concrete factual voice of Christ’s authority, which renders their teaching strictly authoritative. Only then can the Catholic intellectual begin the task of unfolding the conceptual implications of the fact of the Incarnation for an understanding of Catholicism in its full range. . . . A Catholic intellectual must have for his foremost standard of reasoning an unconditional, total commitment to the voice of Rome as the only factor that puts him in proper contact with the greatest fact which is Christ.¹⁰

The particularity of such a faith commitment has always been scandalous to secular reason, and it is understandably difficult for scholars, accustomed to relying on their own reason and expertise, to humbly come to the Church to be taught. Yet in order to find what it can know, the Catholic university must be able to know what it does not know. In order to teach the world, its scholars must humbly come to the Church to be taught. Without this, the university – notwithstanding fine chapel services, social service efforts, or other elements of Catholic life – remains at best essentially Protestant in its intellectual life, suffering the same deficiencies of that form of Christianity for achieving the goals of a university noted above.

Due to the special mission of the Catholic university within the Church, however, its relation to the magisterium is not simply one of being given the faith, on analogy with being catechized. On this point, both those who support and those who oppose the submission of the university to magisterial oversight have tended at times to misread *Ex corde Ecclesiae’s* “from the heart of the church” as “from the heart of the Magisterium.” The university does not merely take delivery of the deposit of faith, but also participates in certain ways in appropriating, expressing, framing and developing the truths of faith. This function is explicit in canon law, which states that the the Church establishes universities, in part, “to complement the Church’s own teaching office.”¹¹ There is, in a real sense, a give and take. The work of Catholic theologians and philosophers often finds its way, *sub rosa*, into the formal declarations of the Magisterium; but the same dynamic is true for scholars in all fields of inquiry. Popes and bishops often consult scholars in Catholic universities, speak at their forums, and request them to undertake particular initiatives to help develop and apply Catholic truth. Church councils and commissions seek out the best scholarship of the Church’s universities in order to better address the truths of faith to the issues of the day.

This mutual exchange is a vital part of the *reception* of the faith theologically understood, or its *articulation* in a cultural sense. In this situation Catholic scholars do not serve the Church well by being merely passive to its teaching. They are called (more or less, depending on their field of inquiry) not merely to receive the faith with the receptivity proper to the Church’s teaching authority, but also to join with the Magisterium in a common assent to the truth of Christ and the Gospel.

Disposing to the Truth

The secular mind objects on principle to the idea of a university pursuing its mission in light of religious truth. On this view, to privilege religious truth is to distort the very freedom of inquiry for which the university exists, and to impose adherence to religious tenets on the mind

10. Jaki, op. cit., 29-30.

11. *Code of Canon Law* (1983), Canon 807. The full canon states: “The Church has the right to establish and to govern universities, which serve to promote the deeper culture and fuller development of the human person, and to complement the Church’s own teaching office.”

of its faculty undermines academic freedom altogether. A university, it is said, cannot be a church. Its object cannot be to indoctrinate, but to encourage the exploration of truth in many realms, unencumbered by dogma and tradition.

This objection misunderstands the purpose of a university, but begins by misunderstanding the purpose of the Church. It is true that the purpose of a Catholic university cannot be to indoctrinate, but not because the university is not part of the Church, but because it is, and the purpose of the Church is not to indoctrinate—at least, not in the manner intended by the objection. The Catholic Church insists that all men and women be free from every constraint in the area of religion, so that religious truth can be freely and genuinely chosen by the believer consistent with the dignity of conscience. As Pope John Paul II stressed, “*The church proposes. She imposes nothing.*”¹²

If it is the work of the Church to propose the truth, then I suggest that it is the work of the university within the Church to dispose to the truth. A successful Catholic intellectual culture will create an environment in which the truth proposed by Catholic faith “rings true”. It builds a cultural disposition to the truth by seeking the comprehension and integration of knowledge, not merely its pursuit and acquisition. It thus aims at truth, not merely truths; that is, an intellectual structure by means of which all knowledge, wherever derived, can be understood. As the name implies, a university is premised on the conviction that knowledge forms a universe, and thus some knowledge is universal.

The university fosters a personal disposition to the truth in its faculty and students by the formation of what has been called the liberal mind. This is not a mind that necessarily knows and understands the truth, but it is one that is disposed to be open to the truth wherever it is encountered. In classical language, the university seeks the formation of minds that are ordered to the truth. The fruit of such formation is the ability to recognize and dismiss shallow reasoning, the intellectual fads of the day, the peril of easy answers, the sophistry of self-deception, and a thousand other intellectual and moral impediments to knowledge; and to consider what presents itself as truth sincerely, deliberately, judiciously and without prejudice, cant or cavil. The possessor of such a mind, being still alive and growing, will not have apprehended all of the knowledge that, in the destiny of her life, it will be her task to discover. She may not comprehend all of the Catholic faith (does anyone ever?). But she will be disposed to hear, understand, and integrate into her life that which validly presents itself as true, in whatever context it may come.

The goal of such formation is not, as I have said, the acquisition of all truths, even all of the truths of faith. As St. James reminds us, it is quite possible to know and believe the specific truths of the faith, yet not have a mind or life that is ordered to truth itself.¹³ The goal of a Catholic intellectual formation is not to know many things, but to be able to know how to know. This goal militates against the practice—nearly universal among Catholic universities, copying their secular counterparts—of exposing undergraduates to a smattering of many different areas of knowledge, as if such an education produced a comprehensive understanding of the world. From the standpoint of a Catholic education, it would be better if students studied less broadly and more deeply. In coming closer to mastering one discipline, or at most a few, they would be more likely to acquire the skills and liberal outlook by means of which they could more readily apprehend other areas of knowledge.

12. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Encyclical Letter: 1990), 39. Emphasis in original.

13. James 2:18-19 (NAB): “Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works. You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe that, and tremble.”

Exposing the False

Any culture, but especially a minority subculture, thrives not only by preserving its core identity and by cultural reproduction but also by vigorous boundary maintenance. As noted above, too often religious universities have tried to minimize or elide their differences from nonreligious ones. The predictable result of this failure of nerve is a weakened and inconsistent intellectual culture in the religious university. On the contrary, a vigorous religious intellectual culture needs to clearly articulate—inoffensively yet unapologetically—what distinguishes it from secular models, the depth and profundity of that distinction, and the advantages the difference conveys.

Catholic universities need to engage in a double critique; a wide-ranging critique of secular academic culture, and a more narrowly focused debate with Protestant (and other) religious alternatives. An exploration of the elements of these critiques is beyond the scope of this essay, although some have already been noted, and the main points can be briefly stated. Secular thought is increasingly showing itself to be empty and incomplete for addressing the human condition;¹⁴ and cannot correct itself, since among the consequences of positivism, i.e., the rejection of metaphysics and mind, is the loss of the ability to expose the hidden presuppositions of positivism. The Protestant mind can go a long way toward an integrated universe of knowledge, but is impaired, from a Catholic point of view, by a defective notion of the relation of faith and reason and by an abstract, partial notion of the Church.

Catholic universities need to articulate, with humility and respect, such a boundary critique, or “apology” in the classical sense of that word, for the good of their own self-definition, irrespective of the real prospects of convincing or changing those who hold alternate views.

Such a stance does not preclude, and is in fact enhanced by, an active critique of Catholic life and culture at the same time. The difference between these areas of criticism, we must confidently hope, will be that secularism and Protestantism will be shown to be deficient due to their principles, while Catholic culture fails when it opposes or neglects its principles. In this way Catholic culture can show its integrity and fearlessness in the face of criticism, and its willingness to be held to account for its convictions and to change when necessary.

By the same token, with appropriate prudence, and while faithfully affirming the truths taught by the Church, a genuine Catholic intellectual culture must be willing, even eager, to dialogue with those hostile to the faith. To do this itself expresses faithfulness to the Magisterium. As the fathers of Vatican II said:

the desire for such dialogue, undertaken solely out of love for the truth and with all due prudence, excludes no one, neither those who cultivate the values of the human spirit while not yet acknowledging their Source, nor those who are hostile to the Church and persecute her in various ways.¹⁵

By engaging in boundary debates and critiques, Catholic universities simultaneously build up their own identity and tear down the false misconceptions of non-Catholics. Confident that truth is whole, and that all truth is God’s, the intellectual culture of the Catholic faith is unafraid to face challenges to its convictions from any quarter.

14. For example, the celebrated philosopher Charles Taylor maintains that modern forms of secularization, as closed and exclusively immanent world structures, have resulted in restless dilemmas rather than satisfying answers to ineluctable questions of meaning and the significance of life and death. He concludes: “Our age is very far from settling in to a comfortable unbelief.” Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 727. See also chapter 19, “The Unquiet Frontiers of Modernity,” 711-27.

15. Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution: 1965), 92, as quoted in John Paul II, Pope, *Fides et Ratio* (Encyclical Letter: 1998), 104.

Whatever else comes of such engagement, it demonstrates that, despite secular prejudice otherwise, Catholic thought is truly the most democratic, open-minded system on offer today. While appealing to the highest authority and warrant for its claims, it submits itself for free ratification to the conscience of each person. In affirming tradition both Christian and classical, it does not discount or ignore any reasoned contribution to knowledge on the merely adventitious grounds that the author happens to be dead. In valorizing revelation, the Catholic mind prefers concrete historical experience—the witness of shepherds and fishermen—to the abstract theories of elites.

Restoring Civilization

As noted above, only a Catholic intellectual culture can fully unify faith and reason in the kind of coherent understanding of reality in which the work of a university can be grounded. In separating faith and reason, Protestantism and secularity respectively devolve into a faith which does not fully understand itself or a reason which is blind to the things that matter most: mind, meaning and the nature of human life. Empirically, both secularity and Protestantism have tended, in their intellectual cultures, to fragmentation in a kind of truce among ultimate commitments, out of which has not come any unified notion of reality. Today only the Catholic tradition possesses fully the intellectual and faith-related resources to form a true university of discourse.

The implications of this for the mission of a Catholic university, in recovering and sustaining a genuine Catholic intellectual culture, are profound. Surely in expressing and exploring this unique unity of knowledge that it possesses, the university will be both serving the Church and recovering its own *raison d'être*, the meaning of its own life. Just as the application or transmission of faith takes place through knowledge, so the integration of knowledge takes place through faith. But it will also be doing much more than this. In taking on the task of forming a genuine Catholic intellectual culture, the university will be advancing, as no one else can, the true interests of Western civilization.

The historian Christopher Dawson is probably the best known proponent of the view that a persistent Christian culture has been expressed alongside the increasingly secular political culture of the West. Whether or not this is the case, it is an expression of the larger and more general view that, as religion is at the heart of culture, so culture is the carrier of religion. If this is true, then the Catholic university must recover a genuine Christian culture not only for the sake of Catholicism but also for the sake of Western civilization itself. This was Dawson's view. It is also the view of Pope Benedict XVI, who sees the intellectual task of the Church to be nothing less than the restoration of reason to the culture of the West.

Although Protestants will (naturally) protest and secularized academic culture will not appreciate the point, today it is only in Catholic institutions that the intellectual heritage of the West has any chance of developing, and therefore surviving.¹⁶ As Catholic monks famously

16. Many Protestant scholars, however, would strongly affirm the critique and claim of this paragraph if it were widened to include Protestant universities. William G. Pollard, a scientist and Episcopal priest, argued a generation ago, in "The Recovery of Theological Perspective in a Scientific Age," in Jaroslav Pelikan et al., *Religion and the University* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1964), that scientism has ushered in a "new dark age" of restrictive knowledge, in which "it is primarily the business of the university to maintain ... the imprisonment of our time." More recently and concretely, George Marsden (in "Religious Scholars and the Academy," delivered at The Future of Religious Colleges, a conference held at Harvard University, 2000, as quoted in Stephanie Mixon et al., "Secularization and National Universities: The Effect of Religious Identity on Academic Reputation," *Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 4(2004), 400-19) has asserted that "[r]eligiously-defined liberal arts colleges are finding that by preserving some of their traditional ways they are now offering more of what people are looking for in higher education and hence are ahead of the game."

kept the light of civilization burning in earlier ages of barbarism, so today Catholic scholars have the opportunity and challenge to preserve the intellectual heritage of the West, the coherence of knowledge and indeed reason itself, in an age which has lost the ability to recognize the truth.

III. Specific Suggestions

The following are some specific practical and programmatic suggestions for supporting a Catholic intellectual culture. They are derived from the ideas outlined above, pertinent magisterial teaching and suggestions and thoughts from other Catholic scholars. This list is not intended to be comprehensive.

1) *Favor theology and philosophy.*

These two disciplines should receive special emphasis in a genuine Catholic intellectual culture, as those that deal most directly with the integration of faith and reason. A Catholic university without strong offerings and leadership in these two fields will be less likely to succeed in instituting a vibrant Catholic intellectual culture.

As already noted, philosophy that presupposes revealed truth has a special function in a Catholic intellectual culture, which suggest an essential role for a department of philosophy that engages the rich tradition of Christian philosophy proper. More than this, however, it implies a special role for philosophical thinking about the relation of each department of knowledge in the university to the larger truths that fulfill and integrate each specialty into a coherent view of the life and the world. Such intentional application of philosophical norms to today's specialized branches of knowledge may or may not be done by those in the philosophy department. As *Fides et Ratio* (paragraph 30) states, "The truths of philosophy, it should be said, are not restricted only to the sometimes ephemeral teachings of professional philosophers." This point leads to the next suggestion:

2) *Don't confine theology and philosophy to departments of theology and philosophy.*

Academic departments or schools of theology and philosophy cannot provide the comprehensive integration of knowledge which a Catholic university seeks. As academic disciplines, neither theology nor philosophy is integrated in themselves; there are many different and competing theologies and philosophies, even among faithful Christian scholars. Moreover, theologians and philosophers are limited in making applications to other academic specialties, both because theologians and philosophers are generally as limited in their understanding of other specialties as those in other specialties are in their understanding of theology and philosophy, and because, no matter how knowledgeable, theologians and philosophers function according to the autonomy, norms and interests of their own disciplines rather than those of some other discipline.

Indeed, the best contribution of philosophy departments may not be to "solve" the problems of the humanities or social sciences, but to stimulate a culture of philosophical reflection by practitioners of the other fields. What is needed is not philosophers crossing disciplinary lines (though this has its own value), but philosophical thinking on the part of political scientists, psychologists, linguists, historians and all the other specialized scholars of the university.

The critical analyses and unifying connections that are the special province of theology and philosophy need to be disseminated broadly among all the disciplines of the university in order for a genuine, coherent intellectual culture to be expressed. Each member of the faculty should carry some theology and philosophy, and some devotion, into her/his classes and research. Indeed, they already do so by default, whether they know it or not.

This model of integration, rather than leaving it up to theology/philosophy departments, is clearly envisioned by *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. For example, regarding dialogue between faith and science, *ECE* (46) notes: “This task requires persons particularly well versed in the individual disciplines and who are at the same time adequately prepared theologically” Likewise, canon law calls for “lectures which principally treat of those theological questions connected with the studies of each faculty.”¹⁷ All the academic specialists—scientists, engineers, mathematicians, economists, etc.—of the university should also be theologians and philosophers, to the extent needed to perceive and articulate the horizon of ultimate truths to which their particular research and teaching leads. Achieving this may involve special interdisciplinary efforts and conversations involving philosophy and theology.

3) *Involve the whole institution in Catholic identity.*

The notion that a university’s Catholic mission can be carried by a campus ministry or a few departments, or a well-crafted mission statement that is generally ignored, is probably the greatest single source of failure to fully reform Catholic universities today. In order to foster a genuine Catholic intellectual culture, Catholic principles, aims and ideals—a Catholic doxa, in Bourdieu’s sense—must permeate every aspect of educational and institutional life. The impress of Catholic life and thought should be evident, not just in the mission statement, but in the administrative procedures, student and faculty handbooks, honor code, institutional review board, personnel policies and so on; not just in the campus ministry, but in every lecture, classroom, dining hall and dormitory; not just in the Board of Trustees, but in every administrator, board, committee, academic council, school, department and student organization.

4) *Fill the faculty with scholar/worshippers.*

The commitment of the faculty to a life of faith is *sine qua non* for a genuine Catholic intellectual culture. Not that every faculty member has to be Catholic—in fact a minority of other faiths can enhance the development of a Catholic intellectual culture—but every member should be a person of active faith, and concerned about the faith formation as well as the intellectual development of each student. The large majority of faculty should be Catholic; the bare majority envisioned in *ECE* should be considered a minimum standard. And, consistent with the previous suggestion, the majority principle should be applied at the level of the department (or smallest academic unit), lest there develop some “secular” departments and some “Catholic” ones, thus impeding the full integration of knowledge and providing mixed experiences for students.

5) *Promote departmental integration, faculty sharing and cross-registration.*

Strong walls between academic departments reflect and further the secular fragmentation of knowledge. Today widely disparate fields often cover the same intellectual ground, with slightly different emphases, with little awareness of the duplication. Replacing departmental competition with cooperation in a common task helps scholars to work together to seek unifying themes in their specialties. Being able more easily to cross departmental boundaries helps both faculty and students to integrate and find unity in the various areas of knowledge. The resulting interdisciplinary discussion and reflection serves both the development of a liberal mind and the discovery of common truths by which knowledge can lead to genuine understanding.

6) *Define faculty identity and success with reference to the university rather than to the academic field.*

Modern scholars envision the possibility of changing institutions, but rarely of changing fields, in the course of their careers. As a result, institutional goals and distinctives become secondary to those of the academic professions, their journals and professional associations, which are almost

17. Canon 811, Section 2.

uniformly secular. Sadly, the standards for faculty productivity and career advancement in Catholic universities routinely collude with this dynamic, explicitly encouraging faculty achievement and reputation in secular academic fields, to the detriment of their own mission. The most committed faithful Catholic scholar will be hobbled in the pursuit of a genuine Catholic intellectual culture as long as s/he defines career success in terms of recognition in an (secular) academic field.¹⁸

A Catholic university which promotes such a definition of success among its faculty, therefore, contradicts its own mission. In the long run, identifying with the goals of the institution will often provide scholars an intellectual advantage in their academic fields, where the questions and synthesis possible in a Catholic intellectual culture are not generally addressed. It will also encourage more productive scholars to remain with the Catholic institution rather than trading up to a more commodious appointment in a secular university.

7) Be very selective about extramural research and grant funding generally.

External research grants are awarded in order to promote research in particular areas and topics; for a Catholic institution it can easily turn into a case of the tail wagging the dog. Of course, research that serves agendas hostile to Catholic teaching (abortion or alternative forms of marriage come to mind) should not be considered. But even benign, defensible research can distract the university from its central mission and become an attractive nuisance with regard to fostering a Catholic intellectual culture. In some fields, of course, there are agencies that promote Catholic oriented research; but in most there are not. In the hard sciences, for example, it is doubtful that any agency can even articulate what questions arise from a Catholic view of the universe as opposed to a secular one. It would not be a bad idea, though perhaps not feasible or prudent, to simply reject all extramural funding, or perhaps funding from certain agencies, on principle.

8) Resist the encroachment of technical, occupational and professional level skills on the liberal arts.

This suggestion should be considered more or less, as some Catholic universities have a greater mission to the professions than others; what I am concerned with here is the tendency for instrumental education and pragmatic concerns to displace the ideal and practice of intrinsically valid learning. In a Catholic intellectual culture, knowledge must always be an end, and not merely a means. The most important knowledge may be “useless” in terms of career success. A faithful Catholic university, therefore, must subsume the acquisition of skill to the inculcation of truth. Regardless of whether they learn how to make a living, it is paramount that students are formed in how to live.

9) Institute a senior administrative position devoted to strengthening and assuring the Catholic nature of the institution.

The important goals of a university today are expressed in vice-presidential appointments. A

18. The reciprocal relation of religious identity and academic reputation is a complex topic that cannot be explored fully in this paper. George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford, 1996) and James Burtchae, *The Dying of the Light* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998) chronicle the decline of religious distinctiveness in the pursuit of academic recognition over the course of the 20th century among Protestant and Catholic universities. A generation ago Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, in *The Academic Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1968) presented evidence that, while colleges focused on teaching and on local constituencies could thrive with a religious identity, a religious identity was a deficit for an institution that aspired to become a research university with national influence. My claim here is that, whether or not this may be the case for institutions, it is true for the research interests of individual faculty members.

Vice President—or other senior administrator—for Catholic Mission who has genuine administrative authority powerfully communicates the resolve of institutional leaders to develop and sustain a genuine Catholic intellectual culture. This office can oversee and provide resources for the integration of Catholic thought in all the activities of the institution, as outlined in the suggestions and themes discussed above.

IV. Toward a Truly Human Culture

A culture is an expression of human aspirations, ideas and relationships. The best policies and programs imaginable will still be ineffective to recover a vigorous Catholic intellectual culture if those who administer and enact them do not aspire, in their deepest selves, to the great vision of good that such a reform entails. In the busy round of demands and pressures of university administration and management, it is easy to lose sight of the larger purpose of our actions. The urgent particular needs in front of us can crowd out our awareness of ultimate purpose of our work. But the unfinished task of Catholic university reform requires more than technocrats, or those merely skilled in the processes of education. It calls for those who can also imagine or envision a fully formed Catholic intellectual culture, be personally committed to it as a great good, and nurture it into reality with devotion and passion. I invite you, therefore, for just a moment, to imagine.

Imagine with me a world in which hundreds of universities maintain a vibrant intellectual culture that stands athwart the shallow, sterile secularism of our day; in which the classic culture of the West is probed, inculcated and extended, not as a historical curiosity, but as a living conversation; in which wonder and wisdom, the integration and the synthesis of knowledge, complete the accumulation of facts; in which the full range of human life, being and value is explicated in every particular discipline of knowledge.

Imagine degrees in which the acquisition of technical skill is made to serve the attainment of a good life, focusing on how to live, not just how to make a living; in which a college education does not corrode, but strengthens and deepens the apprehension of revealed truth; and where intellectual development is matched with moral formation.

Imagine an active community of such schools, which earn the respect (perhaps grudgingly) of their secular counterparts by the insight of their scholarship and the integrity of their students; and which engage in endless discussion, debate, rebuttal and exploration of all the facets of knowledge, life and belief that offer themselves for research and examination.

Today this vision is being fulfilled in some places and in some respects. Imagine the power for good it can be when it is brought to pass in all places in all respects. It is nothing less than the power to renew the world.

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