



**BC THEOLOGIAN DAVID HOLLENBACH, SJ  
DISCUSSES CHALLENGES FACING CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES IN  
RECENT ADDRESS TO LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**

NOVEMBER 2007 -- Jesuit colleges and universities are sharply confronted with the tension between commitment to sustain and advance the Catholic tradition's understanding of the human good and their efforts to serve the common good of our diverse world in a truly inclusive way, said Boston College theologian Rev. David Hollenbach, SJ, director of the University's Center for Human Rights and International Justice, in a recent address at Loyola University of Chicago.

Fr. Hollenbach's lecture, titled "The Catholic University and the Common Good," was presented at the President's Leadership Retreat to faculty, administration, and staff of the University.

"Catholic thought has long held that the common good is the overarching end to be pursued in social and cultural life. Since education is the activity through which culture is sustained and developed, a society's success in attaining the common good will be largely dependent on its educational endeavors. But there's the rub," said Fr. Hollenbach. "Some conclude that the idea of the common good and the reality of pluralist diversity are utterly incompatible. In such a context, the pursuit of the common good by an educational institution committed to a distinctive tradition may seem self-contradictory.

Thus Catholic and Jesuit education seems to face a stark choice: either remain rooted in the Catholic tradition and abandon efforts to serve the larger good of our diverse world, or intensify efforts to address the demands of diversity and abandon the Catholic tradition," he said.

The Catholic tradition, however, provides evidence that discourse across the boundaries of diverse communities is "both possible and potentially fruitful," he said, and the forum for such discussion is primarily the university.

"It is the role of the university--above all of the Catholic university--to retrieve, criticize, and reconstruct understandings of the human good. The Catholic university, above all, should be a place where professors and students bring their received historical traditions on the meaning of the good life into intelligent and critical encounter with understandings of this good held by other peoples with other traditions."

This has direct implications for the role of religion in the university," he said. "Our culture needs much more conversation about the visions of the human good held by diverse religious communities and real intellectual engagement with these religious visions if we are to avoid the clash of civilizations some see taking shape. The Catholic tradition and many Protestant traditions as well reject the notion that religious faith must be irrational and, therefore, out of bounds within the intellectual forum of the university. Faith and understanding are not adversarial but reciprocally illuminating."

Father Hollenbach also noted that there are "strong currents in American life today that insulate both professors and students from experience of and academic reflection on the human sufferings in our world. A university that aspires both to be Catholic and to enhance commitment to the common good must do more than include nods to the importance of social solidarity in its mission statement. It must translate this importance into teaching and research priorities, and integrate these priorities into its day-to-day

activities in classroom and library. To do so will take both the courage and the humility that the privileged learn only when they encounter real people who face poverty and other forms of suffering.

"Commitment to the common good, therefore, should have both intellectual and social impact on our Catholic universities," he said. "Both intellectual and social solidarity call us to develop new understandings that reach across cultures through genuine dialogue with those who are different. They require a commitment to understanding what the institutions of our globalizing world are doing to the most vulnerable. They call for the development of well grounded proposals on how to transform the institutional centers of decision-making in our cities and our globe so they serve all members of the human race, not just the privileged. In short, they call for research and education that take commitment to the common good as their guiding star.

"The common good, therefore, challenges us to become the kind of university that will be worthy of both deep human commitment and of faithful Christian engagement," Fr. Hollenbach said. "In my judgment, the common good points the way toward a Catholic university that will have a long and bright future

The full text of his remarks are available at the Web site of Loyola's Joan and Bill Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage:

[www.luc.edu/ccih/hollenbach\\_talk.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/ccih/hollenbach_talk.shtml)