

“Christ and the Catholic University”

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Sometimes it takes a while to notice the things that surround you. I have lived in Cambridge, Mass., for 15 years, under the spreading, sometimes intimidating shadow of Harvard University. I use its libraries often, go to concerts in its auditoriums and constantly take shortcuts through its quads on my way to the subway. Yet it was only a few years ago that I actually took the time, one day, to look closely at one of the many reproductions of the Harvard coat of arms that is carved, in various sizes, into so much of the University's venerable masonry. The basic device, of course, had long been familiar to me, on ties and sweatshirts and official stationery: three open books arranged on a field, with the letters of the Latin word for truth, *Veritas*, imposed on those books and divided among them. What I had never noticed, however, was that older representations of the Harvard coat of arms--representations painted or carved before World War II, in any case--also bear a legend on a band or open scroll under the shield, which I take to be the original motto of the university: *Christo et ecclesiae*--"For Christ and the church."

I have not done any research into the origins of this motto, or into its present official status. It seems almost needless to say that it no longer appears in ordinary representations of the university's arms today. But what intrigues me about it is the way in which its Latin datives sum up, with unsurpassable concision, the original self-understanding of a large, diverse, highly secular university founded over 350 years ago for a specifically Christian purpose--the training of "learned ministers" for a Calvinist commonwealth, as an act of service, of dedication to Christ and to the community confessing His name.



American Catholic education, which began, on the primary, secondary and university levels, as a highly concrete form of pastoral ministry to a culturally marginalized Christian minority, is simply another form of that same impulse to communicate a Christian culture, "for Christ and the church"--a form that has managed, in general, to retain its religious identity and sense of religious purpose somewhat longer than its older Protestant kin, perhaps because it started later.

Modern Western culture, of course, has been radically secularized over the past 100 years or so, as society has become more and more focused on the freedom of the individual, the development of the autonomous self. University education has come to be seen, in the 20th century, more and more as a process of personal enlightenment, of liberation from the prejudices of one's ancestors--often including their religious faith--as well as a process of personal preparation for professional life.

So the most gnawing and elusive question facing Catholic universities today, especially here in the United States, is, as most people involved in the business acknowledge, the question of Catholic identity: What does it mean to be a "university in the Catholic tradition," to live and flourish within the continuity of one's own historical identity as a religious and educational institution? Are Catholic universities inevitably being drawn on the same road toward non-sectarian inclusiveness that Harvard and Columbia have traveled, simply in virtue of their striving to maintain accepted educational and social standards?

Even if the Catholic label often serves as a good recruiting tool and a *sine qua non* for continuing alumni support, does it really indicate a qualitative difference in the way a university teaches, tenures, plays ball, spends its resources and plans for its future? *Should* it indicate such differences? Can a university really *be* Catholic in any recognizable and consistent sense and still promote academic freedom, open its students to cultural diversity, train them for secular competitiveness and genuinely welcome people of other religions, or no religion at all, into its common life? Is there a third choice, for the Catholic university, besides practical secularization and returning to the ghetto?



I personally believe that at least some of our Catholic universities in the United States must survive as distinctively Catholic institutions of serious study and learning, if the Catholic Church is to remain in vital contact with contemporary American culture. The question always remains, what makes a university Catholic, in more than a nominal sense?

My purpose here is to offer some reflections about *Christ* and the Catholic university, not to discuss that more controversial and complicated aspect of the university's Catholic identity, its relationship to the *church* as an institution. At the start, however, I think it is important to remember that the pairing of Christ and church in the Harvard coat of arms is not fortuitous, and that the two are only separated to the detriment of authentic Christian faith and practice. The Jesus of Catholic (or Calvinist) faith is not simply a great religious leader of the past, now painfully reconstructed by historical research to inspire us with His words and example. He is the Jesus witnessed to by the community of disciples as "Christ" and "Lord," encountered in the community's worship and preaching, identifying the church with Himself as His "Body," His continuing human presence in the world. And the church of Catholic faith is not simply a historical human institution, claiming allegiance but always in need of reform (though it is that), not simply a voluntary association of like-minded idealists who find Catholic worship moving (though it is that, too). It has its authority and its importance for Catholics only because it is the place where they can most reliably come to know Christ and experience the quiet surge of His life, transforming their own. Apart from Christ, the church has neither lasting meaning nor practical relevance. Apart from the church, Christ remains a historical abstraction.

My question here, however, is what meaning Jesus Christ can have for defining the distinctive identity of a Catholic university, and how that Christ-centered identity--if such it really is--can be practically fostered and realized in an institution that will and should be inclusive, respectful of cultural and religious diversity, and well integrated into the patchwork conversation of modern American culture.

What I propose to do is to consider briefly first the meaning and then the means: first, to reflect on the implications of the *person* of Christ, of His *work* and of His *style* or way of



living, as they are understood within Catholic tradition, for the life and work of a modern American university; and then to reflect more briefly on at least three ways and means by which this understanding of Jesus might have an effect on a university's life, through the study of *theology* ("the proclamation of Christ"), through *prayer and religious symbols* ("the worship of Christ"), and through the personal *engagement* of individuals in a university's common Christian enterprise ("the following of Christ").

I. Christ as Meaning

The Person of Christ. The heart of all Christian faith, it could be argued, is the conviction that in Jesus of Nazareth God has personally become a human being. Today, writers on Christology (which is intelligent reflection about who and what Jesus is) often remind us of the importance of beginning our thinking about Jesus "from below": starting with what we can know about Jesus' historical words and actions, as the first disciples did, rather than starting "from above," with the Christian conception of a God who has chosen to enter history in the life of Jesus. "Christology from below," however, if it takes seriously the convictions and growing faith of the early disciples, must soon begin "ascending" to the point where it confesses Him not simply as a prophet and martyr, but as the Son of God, the Lord of the ages, the Word of God who has always been the principle of order and intelligibility in creation and who now has "become flesh and dwelt among us."

Christian faith sees in Jesus God made human; and that paradox, which can never be neutralized or rationalized into seeing Him as *just* God or *just* a "marginal Jew," has wide-ranging, even revolutionary consequences for the way Christians understand themselves, the world around them and the mystery of ultimate and abiding truth they call God. In the words of the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon, God and a fully functioning human being have in Jesus become "one and the same," a single historical individual, "without confusion, without change, without separation, without division." God and a human being have in Jesus become identified as a single personality, a single subject, without battling for "turf."



The implication, for the Christian way of seeking ultimate meaning, is that although God is, in His own reality, not part of this world--although God, in creating, has powerfully and lovingly set this world's reality free to be itself, to live according to its own laws and enjoy its own integrity, because it is other than God--still God has freely and graciously chosen to become a participant in this world's history, to live among us a fully human life that is also fully His own.

This paradoxical faith in the simultaneous distance and nearness of God, as realized in the person of Christ, has important consequences for culture, and for the work of education. First of all, it is a ringing affirmation of the accessibility of truth with--in history, of the presence--what George Steiner calls the "substantiation"--within our limited human categories of a source of meaning that can be apprehended but never exhausted, contemplated but never wholly controlled. Christian faith in the Incarnation of the Word is the intuition that order and purpose and intelligibility have been and can be discovered dawning within human history, despite the ambiguity and absurdity that constantly swirl around us. It is in principle opposed to philosophical nihilism, to doctrinaire relativism and materialism, to theories of art and literature and history that deny in principle the possibility of finding abiding meaning in human gestures and words, because it is convinced that there is a transcendent reality that continues to reveal itself within human categories in a mysterious way.

So, too, the Christian understanding of the person of Christ leads to a new kind of humanism: a reverence for the human person and the world based, not simply on wonder at their natural beauty and order, but on the presence within them of the holy mystery itself. Inspired by faith in the Incarnation of God's Word in our own humanity, Christians can undertake the study of human culture and achievements and of the structures of the world itself, with the genuinely mystical expectation that in encountering created reality as it really is they will be able to glimpse something of the reality, the "home" of God. Like the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, eager to discover how "each mortal thing" in nature "selves--



goes itself," the Christian recognizes Christ as somehow identifying God with the world without ever confusing their realities:

...For Christ plays in ten thousand places,

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his

To the Father through the features of men's faces.

For the university, dedicated as it is to studying all aspects of human and natural reality, all the strategies and ramifications of human thought, faith in the Incarnation provides both a goal and a sense of companionship for our wonder: This world is a holy place, a shrine of meaning, because God has made it His own.

The Work of Christ. A second aspect of Christology that seems to me to have important implications for the distinctive character of a Catholic university is the Christian sense of the work of Christ: of how Jesus' mission was understood in His own time, by Himself and His disciples, and of how it has been understood since then by the tradition of the church.

According to the synoptic Gospels, the main message of Jesus during His years of ministry was to announce to his Jewish contemporaries that the Kingdom of God was at hand. So Mark, for example, at the beginning of his Gospel, writes that after the arrest of John the Baptist (who apparently had preached a similar message), "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mk. 1:14).

This notion of God's coming rule or "Kingdom" was current in several streams of Jewish religious thought at the time and meant, above all, the manifestation of God's power and justice in the midst of human society and its physical surroundings, bringing the world back to the order and harmony in which it was created. God's Kingdom, in late Jewish thought, was both an activity of God--God ruling in His world, God making the world His own--and a state of human society, an "order" we can welcome and hasten and enter into, through our decision to live in a way that expresses its coming reality. In Jesus' preaching, the Kingdom of God was already powerfully present in the world, showing itself in His own healings and



exorcisms, and in His proclamation of the forgiveness of sins to those willing to accept it (see, for example, Mk. 2:5-12, Mt. 12:28).

At present, it is a hidden reality, tiny and fragile as a mustard seed (Mk. 4:30-32). Yet its power to transform the world is already evident, working like leaven in dough (Mt. 13:33). Those who are best suited for the Kingdom of God, in Jesus' teaching, are described in the Beatitudes: the poor, and those who accept their lack of resources as a place for the coming of God's Spirit; the non-competitive, the powerless, the grieving; those persecuted in the cause of right. The Kingdom is also for the repentant sinner, for tax-collectors and prostitutes, for those able to recognize their own inability to claim rule over the world for themselves, and to accept God's rule as a costly and transforming gift. And although Jesus and other ancient Jewish sources often speak of God's Kingdom in the image of a great banquet, of a miraculously transformed universe, the heart of early Christian expectation was for a renewed relationship of peace between the world and God and within humanity itself-- for the inner reconciliation of the universe and all its factions (Col. 1: 13, 19), for "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom.14:17).

The work Jesus undertook during His years as a prophet and teacher was to proclaim the powerful nearness of this Kingdom. The divine work that early Christian faith saw as accomplished by Jesus' life, by His death in fidelity and obedience to God, and by His astonishing resurrection from the dead, was the realization of that Kingdom, that powerful rule of God, in His own person, as a first concrete step in its realization among all humanity. The Kingdom of God, for Christian faith, is what happened to Jesus: the triumph of God's life in the very midst of human weakness, violence and mortality, the communication of transcendent meaning within the ultimate expression of the absurdity of creation.

So the mission of the Christian community since its beginnings has been to continue proclaiming the nearness, the accessibility and power, of this Kingdom revealed in Jesus risen. The Christian Gospel is not just good news about Jesus but good news for the world, precisely because it is a message of consolation for humanity at its weakest. Its challenge to Christian hearers, its call to a conversion of life, is not simply the challenge to accept this



consolation interiorly, but the call to let the promised justice and peace of the Kingdom begin reconciling our relationships and transforming our actions--to begin living by the ethical and religious principles of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The implications of this understanding of the work of Jesus for a Catholic university are, of course, enormous. If Jesus' mission was principally to reveal both the promise and the demands of a world transformed by a God of justice and love, then a university wishing to continue in its historic dedication "to Christ and the church" must see the proclamation of this renewed world, in terms of both theory and practice, as a central part of its educational mission. This means, concretely, that the work of a Catholic university can never *simply* be the development and communication of knowledge for its own sake--even though faith in the Incarnation moves us to value and love the world simply for what it is.

The work of a Catholic university, it seems to me, must always be in large part a concern for the human implications of the knowledge acquired, for the relevance of teaching and study and research to the building of a more just and more unified human society. Although its academic standards must be as high as those of any secular institution of parallel resources, the Catholic university cannot simply be ruled by a dedication to academic excellence. It must also have a constant concern for the benevolent *application* of knowledge: a recognized emphasis on teaching, with a correspondingly high demand for pedagogical skill among the criteria for tenure and promotion; a public commitment to service, especially service of the poorest and most marginalized members of society; a programmatic interest in engaging faculty, students and staff both in a personal ethical conversion and in the "pastoral" work of social transformation.

This dimension of university life is, of course, already well developed in many American universities--not only in ones that identify themselves as religious. Many higher-education administrators have recently expressed concern at the neglect of teaching, especially in our larger, research-oriented universities. Student service programs, which facilitate volunteer work among the needy during the academic year and vacations, are now a familiar feature of American campus life. My point is simply that Catholic universities, if their Catholicism is



not simply a matter of history or a public relations tool, have no choice but to involve themselves openly and energetically in these things, letting their pursuit of wisdom change the world. Social and human concern, for them, is not a luxury but a matter of basic mission. *The Style of Christ*. One of the most challenging--and potentially embarrassing--aspects of Christian faith is that it calls us not simply to acknowledge Jesus as God made human, not simply to "get with the program" and prepare the world for God's Kingdom, but also to imitate Him: to let His way of acting and His mode of self-understanding become our own. In the Gospels' portrait of Him, Jesus did not simply preach deliverance to the "little ones" of Israel. He consciously chose to act and live as such a "little one." Jesus repeatedly calls on His disciples to join Him in this same attitude of freely chosen humility, obscurity and service:

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not to be so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:42-45).

Humility, self-emptying, an attitude of self-effacing service are far from unquestioned ideals in contemporary American society, particularly among progressive academics. We tend to identify such attitudes with an unhealthy self-image, a potentially pathological lack of self-esteem. Perhaps because the individual's sense of his or her role and worth in the social fabric is often less secure in America today than it has been in other ages and cultures, we find Jesus' invitation to self-effacement threatening. Yet popularized psychology is in more than superficial tension here with the tradition of Christian spirituality. Through the ages, humility of self-understanding and simplicity, even austerity of life, have been regarded as a central ideal of Christian practice.

For the Catholic university, this question of a Christ-like style seems to me also to be an indispensable key to maintaining a real Christian identity. Academic life, as all of us know, is one of the last remaining bastions of protected self-aggrandizement--perhaps, as a wag once



said, "because the stakes are so low." The real moral danger of the teaching profession, I think, is its tendency to become an ego-trip: a way of holding the attention of 30 bright young faces riveted on oneself for three hours a week, of making their advancement dependent on one's own tastes and whims, a means of subtle or not-so-subtle exploitation of a captive population.

Vanity, pomposity, snobbery, self-delusion are surely among the central academic vices: evident in the costumes academics wear on grand occasions, the expansion of their Rhetoric at departmental meetings, the ploys we sometimes work to win and hold our colleagues' recognition. And the vice reaches further than faculty antics: local triumphalism and a fondness for victory bulletins can haunt the best-intentioned trustees' meetings. Prestige, recruiters tell us, rather than the publications of faculty or the quality of the library, is what draws students to apply to our undergraduate institutions and motivates their parents to pay the bills. The prestige of a university's graduate programs, more than current faculty or research potential, is unfortunately what makes a new Ph.D. marketable. Even sports, in the academic world, are really all about prestige: The success of a university's teams, their exposure on national television, the image of the other teams they play, are all more important, it seems, for recruiting students and assuring alumni support than a good intramural program or a well-equipped recreational sports center.

All of this may be simply the way of the world. But Jesus tells His disciples emphatically: "It shall not be so with you." If a Catholic university, again, is to be Catholic in more than simply name, it has to question seriously these dominant patterns in the academic style of modern America, and to take steps to cultivate the style of Jesus. Modesty, truthfulness, a clear-sighted emphasis on the university's human and educational purposes have to be cultivated publicly and concretely, on an institutional level, by the institution's leaders. Students should be explicitly encouraged to think of themselves, and to plan for their futures, in a realistic and altruistic way. Teams should be coached to play their utmost, and if possible to win. They don't have to make the Orange Bowl or the Final Four every year, and they don't really even have to be in Division I-A.



The value of stewardship, of self-limitation, of fearlessly being less than first, "for the sake of Christ and the church," need to be introduced into the common discourse of a Catholic university over and over, if it is not to lose its soul. The style of our architecture, the grandeur of our celebrations, the quality of our rhetoric--visual and verbal--in development office publications, even the size of the president's car, all have to be subjected, in a Catholic university's continuing conversation, to the same nagging and subtle, but crucial question: Does this really communicate a desire to be of service to God's world? Is our style the style of Christ?

II. The Means to Meaning

A sense of ultimate reality incarnate in our world, a desire to proclaim God's Kingdom of justice and peace to that world, a cultivated simplicity of manner: All of these are aspects of lived faith in Christ that have, it seems to me, concrete and far--reaching implications for a university that desires to be Catholic in more than name. In the contemporary American academic scene, they are clearly "alternative," even counter-cultural ideals: They rub against the fashion of post-modern hermeneutics and Straussian elitism, they challenge our professional schools' cult of success, they call on us to temper our ancient tribal desire to see alma mater lifted gloriously above all her peers.

But even if we accept them as part of what should be the collective ideals, the underlying axioms, of a Catholic university, these things tend to strike us as utopian, laughably unattainable. How can one advance them today in a concrete and practical way? Alongside them, after all, we also want to affirm, in some form at least, the liberal ideals of modern academic life that are more widely held today: the value of cultural and religious diversity in our faculty and student bodies, for instance; the right of competent scholars in the community to conduct research without interference from on high or outside; the freedom of civil discourse on the campus, and the right of all within the community to dissent from common values in a socially responsible way. How can a university be dedicated "to Christ and the church" as a body, how can it continue to reflect in its collective behavior the ideals



of the church's Christ, without trying to impose them by force and so destroying the fragile constitution of the whole educational enterprise its love for Christ and the church has moved it to begin?

Clearly, the means a Catholic university has at its disposal today for realizing its Christian ideals cannot mainly be legislative (mission statements and regulations) or quantitative (Catholic quotas in the faculty and student body) or simply administrative (a believer, even a priest or religious, as president or dean). The main means a university must use to maintain and develop its religious identity, it seems to me, must today be *persuasive*: to maintain, by the dogged efforts of a wide variety of people on the university team, a level of serious Christian conversation and reflection and prayer that will make the community as a whole a place where faith in Christ can seriously flourish, and that will challenge each individual--whatever his or her religious position--at least to refine constantly the choices and motives that govern his or her life.

To put it more concretely, I suggest that the main means of keeping Christ at the center of a Catholic university's operative values and ideals include at least having a serious theology department ("the proclamation of Christ"), supporting prayer and spiritual growth on the campus ("the worship of Christ"), and encouraging individual members of the university community to live out their religious convictions seriously, or at least to ask serious questions of religion (in a broad sense, "the following of Christ").

The Proclamation of Christ. For a university to be Catholic in any real sense, it seems to me indispensable that it include the serious study and teaching of Catholic theology among the intellectual disciplines to which it is irrevocably committed. Theology, as I understand it, is not the same as "religious studies," which looks at all human religions from an objective, external viewpoint as a manifestation of human thought and culture. Nor is it the same as the philosophy of religion, which asks how far it is possible to talk meaningfully about a transcendent Being.

Theology, in the Catholic tradition at least, is "faith seeking understanding": It begins with the faith of the church, as it is expressed in the worship and preaching, the culture and



practice of the community over the past 2,000 years, and uses all the means reason can apply to integrate this faith into the rest of what we humans know and believe, to "give account of the hope that is in us" to the unbelieving world (I Pet. 3:15). As thoughtful reflection on the church's faith, Christian theology always begins and ends in Christ, who is for Christians the complete and unsurpassable revelation, in human terms, of what the mystery of God is and of how God behaves toward us.

John Henry Newman devoted the first three of his famous lectures *On the Scope and Nature of University Education*, in 1852, to the place of theology in a university curriculum. Arguing against the assumption of the mid-19th-century academic world--still very much with us--that religion is a matter of the feelings, a private and subjective symbolic response to the world of experience, rather than an encounter with reality itself, Newman insisted that "the being of God," as presented to us both by philosophical inquiry and by historical tradition, is "a truth in the natural order, as well as in the supernatural." If this is so, and if theology is not simply apologetics or the historical study of Christian Scripture and sources, but "the science of God," then theology, in Newman's view, must play a central role in the integration of all the branches of knowledge studied in a university:

"I cannot understand at all how, supposing it to be true, it can fail, considered as knowledge, to exert a powerful influence on philosophy, literature, and every intellectual creation or discovery whatever ... It meets us with a profession and a proffer of the highest truths of which the human mind is capable; it embraces a range of subjects the most diversified and distant from each other. What science will not find one part or other of its province traversed by its path? What results of philosophic speculation are unquestionable, if they have been gained without inquiry as to what Theology had to say to them? Does it cast no light upon history? has it no influence upon the principles of ethics? is it without any sort of bearing on physics, metaphysics and political science? Can we drop it out of the circle of knowledge, without allowing either that that circle is thereby mutilated or, on the other hand, that Theology is no science?"



The question Newman raises on the place of theology in a university curriculum is still apposite, even in American Catholic colleges and universities. Genuine theology has had, in many of them, a meteorically brief career. In the decades before 1960, theology was generally considered, in Catholic circles, a discipline reserved to the clergy. Very few lay people studied it, or had the opportunity to study it even if they had wished to, and what was offered in most Catholic colleges was a bland, intellectually unchallenging mixture of apologetics and higher catechesis.

In the early 1960's, theology as a legitimate branch of university study for all suddenly began to sprout and bloom. Marquette University began a highly successful doctoral program in theology, open to all comers, before the end of the Vatican Council in 1965, and was shortly followed by Notre Dame, Fordham, St. Louis University and several other large Catholic institutions. But by the end of the decade, many theology departments had begun transforming themselves, in name and in curriculum, into departments of religious studies, presumably with the understanding that a less confessional, more academically objective approach to religion was more compatible with the ecumenical spirit of the times. The result has been that theology, as a serious intellectual study of Christian faith that presupposes commitment and an ecclesial anchoring, began to wither on the American university scene almost as soon as it had grown.

I am not arguing here against the importance of the study of religion from a phenomenological or sociological or philosophical point of view. Clearly it deserves a place within the range of subjects that examine the products and driving forces of human culture. I would simply suggest that such study is very different from theology, and must not be allowed to replace theology in a Catholic university if the role of Christ in the intellectual life of the university community is to remain vital. Even though not every member in the university community can be assumed to share the church's faith, the presence of serious, faith-based theology in the midst of its academic undertakings is one means of assuring that the faith the university nominally professes is also part of its continuing intellectual conversation.



The Worship of Christ. A second essential means for keeping the Christian heart of a university's Catholic tradition alive and functioning is what I here call by the very general title of "worship": the whole range of religious symbols, liturgical services, public and private opportunities for prayer and spiritual reflection that create a chance within the university community for experiencing the power and presence of the transcendent God.

Prayer in academic institutions has become a politically charged subject, and with some reason. If done with sincerity, a public act of prayer is always a gesture of openness toward the God who is confessed by faith, an act of setting the mind and heart ready to attend to the mystery as something real and near. Religious faith is not primarily a matter of ideas, but a matter of worship, of acknowledging God's presence within a community and a tradition in a way that provides words and images to evoke and respond to that presence. That is why a Catholic university, to really be what it claims to be, has to cultivate the practice of Christian prayer in a variety of ways: prayer to the God of Israel, offered through Christ and in the manner He taught, with a consciousness of the power of His Spirit as its driving force.

A Catholic university has to have chapels, with a variety of regular liturgical services that prominently include the Catholic Eucharist, and visible religious art that communicates the symbols of the Christian religious tradition in a powerful way. It needs a vibrant campus ministry program, good preaching, programs for religious instruction and retreats, opportunities for religious counseling and spiritual direction that will meet the varied needs of students and faculty, whatever their religious affiliation may be. It is appropriate, too, that Catholic universities should celebrate great occasions like anniversaries and commencements and the start an academic year with an act of Catholic worship attended by faculty and major administrators, rather than simply by the kind of least-common-denominator secular liturgy prevalent in other universities. None of these things, in a Catholic university setting, is simply decoration. Each of them can easily--and rightfully--avoided by those not ready to enter into their world meaning, yet together they form a powerful and cohesive matrix in which the living presence of Christ can be encountered, by those who will, as the focus of all the university collectively says and does.



The Following of Christ. Most difficult to define, perhaps, is the role each member of the university community plays in determining the reality or unreality of its Catholic identity. It seems evident, however, that just as the collective beliefs, assumptions and practices of a community play a determining role in shaping the intellectual and spiritual world of each member, so the inner life of the community is mainly determined, in the long run, by its members' choices and beliefs. Like the church, in Avery Dulles's celebrated set of "models" or types, the Catholic university can probably best be described as a "community of disciples": a community of people, committed to pursuing truth, who are ready to be taught by Jesus. It is the active, reflective presence of disciples in a university community, in the end, that will shape its common religious identity.

Discipleship, in the Christian tradition, can mean a wide range of things. The Gospel of John includes, among the disciples not only the Twelve, but also Joseph I of Arimathea, who was "a disciple of Jesus in secret, for fear of the Jews" (20:18), and Nicodemus the Pharisee, who came to consult Jesus alone, by night, with seemingly insoluble questions. Neither of them, in John's Gospel, seems to have felt able to acknowledge Jesus publicly, yet it was they who showed him His friends' final act of respect by burying His body. Being a disciple of Jesus can include, I think, what Iris Murdoch once described as her own religious position: being a "Christian fellow traveler."

The important thing for a Catholic university, however, if it is to be Catholic in reality, is that every member of the community should be able to live comfortably in a world marked by Catholic practices and symbols, should treat the Catholic tradition of faith with respect, and should occasionally be willing at least to ask religious questions seriously. For practicing Catholic students and faculty, discipleship surely will mean getting involved in the religious life of the university community.

For those who belong to other religious traditions, who are less than sure of their own faith, or who have no clear religious faith at all, discipleship in the university context will rather mean a readiness to enter into serious conversations about the ultimate meaning of what the institution does, to ask hard questions about the implicit human values of curriculum,



research and student life, and to hold the university's leadership accountable for practicing what they preach--for letting the vaunted ideals of the Christian Gospel really make a difference, really transform the institution into something distinctively and selflessly humane.

It is the Nicodemuses and the Iris Murdochs, I think, in the large community of disciples, who keep the Peters and Mary Magdalenes honest, and who sometimes are the only ones left to do the decent thing, when the rest have run away.

A friend of mine, an American Jesuit who works in Nepal, tells the story of journeying high up into the Himalayas once to visit a monastery of the Karma-pa order of Tibetan Buddhism. While he was there, he was granted an audience with the leader of the sect, who is known as the "Black-Hat Lama" because of the black miter he wears on great occasions, an ancient garment said to be made of the hair of countless *dakinis*, the tutelacy goddesses who protect the monks of his order from danger. The Jesuit and the lama sat on the floor for an hour or so, drinking strong tea and conversing quietly about the problems of religious people in Tibet and Nepal. When my friend was getting up to leave, thanking the Black-Hat Lama for having received him so graciously, his host suddenly looked up at him and said, "Will you bless me in the name of the Lord Christ?" And of course the Jesuit did, deeply moved: He laid his hands on the lama's head and made the sign of the cross over him, asking that the blessing of the almighty God whom Christians confess, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, might come down on him and remain with him forever.

A Catholic university, I think, is one in which every member, Catholic or not, is ready in his or her own terms to be "blessed in the name of the Lord Christ" by sharing in some personal way in the vitality of His church's living tradition of faith. For those who work and who learn in such a university, who do these things "for Christ and the church," the challenge is always to find ways to let that blessing become real.

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