

C21 Resources

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A “catholic” Intellectual Tradition

TIMOTHY P. MULDOON

The desire which motivated medieval religious communities to found the first universities was rooted in a basic confidence about the knowableness of reality, a trust that all things to be known found a unifying principle in the belief that God created them. Some—Thomas Aquinas most notably—carried this confidence enough to engage even the intellectual work of Jewish and Muslim thinkers.

It is this sense of confidence about reality that has animated Catholic intellectual life at its best. Today, however, some question the possibility and relevance of an intellectual tradition that calls itself Catholic. It was during the modern period that the Middle Ages were called “Dark,” precisely because moderns judged religious belief to be unscientific and therefore inconsistent with the methods of rational inquiry. If one cannot prove God or any of the doctrines about God, how could a Catholic intellectual tradition be anything more than a myopic pre-modern world view?

There is an inherent paradox in the term “Catholic” when used to describe an intellectual tradition. On the one hand, it is a specific term used to make reference to a specific community of people. Ignatius of Antioch was the first to use the term around 110, to describe the nascent Christian community: “Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be, even as where Jesus may be, there is the universal [katholike] Church.” On the other hand, Ignatius sought, as do Catholics today, to describe the Church in a way that reflects the universal theological import of Jesus’ commission

to the disciples: “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18). The Catholic Church seeks to be a catholic community—that is, a community spread throughout the world, sharing what Jesus taught for the welfare of all people.

Today it is common to use the term “Catholic” in the former, specific sense, as a reference to a particular community and its history. To be sure, in a world in which only one of every six people is Catholic, and in which another one of every six is a member of a Christian community which is not in communion with the Catholic Church, it seems presumptuous to suggest that the hallmark of the Catholic Church is universality. Yet the peculiarly theological import of catholicity is that it suggests a kind of reaching for universality. Using the image of yeast, Walter Ong suggests in his essay (beginning on p. 10) that the Church is “a limitless, growing reality, destined ultimately to be present everywhere and to affect everything, though by no means to convert everything into itself.” The catholicity of the thinking Church is not to be found in an attempt to colonize human reason, but rather in a desire to know what is true. It was this desire which animated the original university communities, and it is this desire which can re-animate intellectual life today.

In this issue of *C21 Resources*, we have brought together essays which explore dimensions of the Catholic intellectual tradition as a resource for both the Church and the world. There are four essays (by Margaret Steinfels, Sidney Callahan, Robert Imbelli, and Walter Ong) that address the tradition as a whole. Further, the essays by John Haughey, Alan Wolfe, Michael Himes, Alasdair McIntyre, J. Michael Miller,

and Stephen A. Pope focus more specifically on the college and university context which nurtures this tradition. Finally, the essays by Mary Ann Glendon, George Coyne, and Greg Kalscheur offer specific examples of how the Catholic intellectual tradition has informed our understand-

ing today in the areas of human rights, the origins of the universe, and democratic political life. Interspersed throughout these essays are shorter reflections from a number of thinkers, including faculty members at Boston College.



Stained glass of an Irish scribe in Baptist Library - Photo by Gary Wayne Gilbert

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The Catholic Intellectual Tradition

BY MARGARET STEINFELS

Catholic intellectual life is central to Catholic identity. It is fundamental to the life of the church, big *C* and little *c*, cathedral and congregation—to its continued vitality and to the Church's missions in this culture. This is not a narrow ecclesiastical tradition, but a broad and infinitely useful one. *Commonweal* has fostered and questioned that tradition. Our writers and readers reflect that affection and that criticism. They are university people and journalists, book editors, lawyers, physicians, scientists, politicians; they are bishops, clergy, and ordinary Catholics, who in their daily lives practice and depend upon the kind of thinking, reasoning, reflection that make up the Catholic intellectual tradition. Furthermore, this tradition is also explored and appreciated by writers and readers who are Methodists, Episcopalians, Orthodox as well as Catholics, and not only Christians—Jews, secular humanists, those lapsed from every religion known to humankind.

This tradition is carried on, pursued, criticized, developed, wrestled with by example from many different backgrounds. The way they think and write, read, and reflect very frequently rests on their education in American Catholic colleges and universities. So along with the preservation of knowledge, the scholarly work of retrieval, the building up of bodies of knowledge, and the education of the young, your schools are central to the practice of the Catholic intellectual life. Colleges and universities cannot claim to be Catholic if this tradition is not part of its core understanding; this tradition cannot survive if Catholic colleges and universities do not renew it, maintain it, nourish it, support it, and pass it on.

In the last several decades, Catholicism in the United States has become more charismatic, more Pentecostal, more experiential, open to both old and new currents of spirituality and meditation; it absorbs individualistic and congregational attitudes from American religion generally. But Catholicism is also and always has been a church with a brain, with a mind. So as important as these new

manifestations may be, it is essential to the Church, to its mission in the world, to the lives of ordinary people, that there be a vigorous and Catholic intellectual life. And *Commonweal* can't do everything!

Of course, the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities can have many expressions: honoring the founding mothers and fathers; worship and prayer; service projects; works of social justice like basketball and football; campus ministry; statues, medallions, and endowed lectureships; the work of notable alum and prestigious faculty. But all of this would be a thin

Tradition is the record of a community's conversation over time about its meaning and direction. A living tradition is a tradition that can raise questions about itself.

facade if it did not include at its core a living experience among students and faculty of Catholic intellectual life.

Yes, carrying on this tradition is an enormous challenge. You have to overcome bigotry and bias, including especially the prejudices Catholics themselves have against their own tradition. A Catholic intellectual is not an oxymoron. You do not have to be a Jesuit to be a Catholic intellectual. Yes, Catholicism and Catholic ideas have a checkered history. What institution, tradition, idea does not? From Plato to Foucault, from nominalism to deconstructionism, if human ideas have consequences, we can be sure some of them are bad. We have our fair share.

Many people, perhaps some of you, consider that the Catholic intellectual tradition is singular in its intellectual repression and oppression, its narrow-

ness and dogmatism. Well, I say go read a history book! Some of you may be skeptical that the adjective *Catholic* adds anything to an institution or discipline except the judicial authority of ecclesiastical officials. I disagree. For 2,000 years, Christians have struggled in multifarious ways with everything from body and soul to kingship and regicide, from usury to voluntary poverty, and today still struggle with everything from medical decision making to political theory, from child care to spiritual counsel, from race to gender. It is this tradition that pressed through the centuries—and reminds us in the Gulf War, in Bosnia—the idea of civilian immunity. The distinction between ordinary and extraordinary care of the sick and the dying remains a viable one because this tradition teaches it.

It is a deep and rich tradition; it is a tradition worthy of our attention and study. If this tradition does not have a place in Catholic colleges and universities, what is that you are doing? What tradition has a better claim?

All thinkers and thinking are based in some tradition. A tradition is not a browned and dried-up certificate of deposit in the bank of knowledge, but a locus for questioning, a framework for ordering inquiry, a standard for preferring some sets of ideas over others; tradition is the record of a community's conversation over time about its meaning and direction. A living tradition is a tradition that can raise questions about itself.

What am I talking about? Let me at least sketch what I think the Catholic intellectual tradition looks like.

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the women and men of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts....Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history."

That opening paragraph from *Gaudium et Spes* speaks of our responsibility for all that is genuinely human, for what draws the minds and hearts

of women and men. The Catholic intellectual tradition is universal in its breadth and its interests, that is a notion set forth, defended, repeated, and encouraged throughout the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

I quote the quote because there is an odd nostalgia for something like Neo-Scholasticism, if not Neo-Scholasticism itself—nostalgia for a framework that provided the high level of integration said to have been the guiding light of preconciliar Catholicism. From my post at *Commonweal*, I am inclined to think that we are a long way from holding or even recovering, at least with any integrity, that kind of framework. In a postpositivist, post-Enlightenment world, no body of human knowledge enjoys that degree of authority.

But if we do not have such an integrated system, we do have ideas, habits of mind and heart, we have preferences and predilections, intuitions, and practices. We have a history. As *Gaudium et Spes* says, our tradition is not set against the world. But neither is it naively accepting of every current of opinion that washes up on the shores of a pluralistic culture. It helps us to maintain a robust and refreshing level of skepticism. What do I find of value? A tradition where reason and discourse based on reason are honored and practiced.

Let me describe just a few of its characteristics.

First, reason and faith are not antagonistic or unconnected. In the Catholic tradition we do not accept what we believe blindly or slavishly—we are urged to think about and to understand what we believe. This is in some contrast to the society in which we live. American culture, with its Protestant history, tends to see religion as an expression of the individual, the subjective, the emotional, the immediate. In public life, religion and religious belief are confined to the realm of the private and personal, sometimes in an absolutist reading of the First Amendment, sometimes with the prejudice that religious thought has nothing to contribute. For the revivalist, faith is a personal and private encounter. For many in the cultural elite, as Stephen Carter argued in *The Culture of Disbelief*, faith is understood as a curious avocation, a personal hobby.

It is a loss to the whole society when any religious group accepts that role. In contrast, Catholics—the bishops, but many Catholic politicians and citizens as well—have often brought a philosophical and linguistic sophistication to public policy issues. If, for example, laws that would permit euthanasia and assisted suicide are kept at bay in the United States, it will be because the bishops, Catholic institutions, nurses, doctors, lawyers, ordinary citizens, have been willing to express their deeply held beliefs, religious and philosophical, in a reasoned discourse that can build consensus across the whole society.

A second and closely related characteristic: Catholics have a tradition that takes philosophy and philosophical thinking seriously. This means that from the beginning, Christianity had to adapt systems of thought that were alien and even contrary to its religious beliefs and yet were crucial to its mission: that is, rendering its knowledge of God's presence and action in the world in a way that would make sense to others.

We don't usually think of Paul of Tarsus as a philosopher, but there he was in the agora debating Epicureans and Stoics, and in front of the Areopagus explaining the heretofore unknown God. Nor did it stop there. Eusebius, Bede, Augustine, Ambrose, Anselm, Thomas, Catherine, Teresa, etc., right down to our own time: American Catholic colleges and universities in the years after World War II were often the home to diverse philosophical schools—phenomenology, existentialism, Hegelianism, liberalism, pragmatism, and Thomism—at a time when secular schools prided themselves on a univocal voice in their philosophy departments. The sometimes imperfect hospitality in our tradition expresses the conviction that a disciplined mind and systematic thought can help discern important things about what is real.

A third characteristic: Our tradition challenges the belief that facts come in pristine form—no baggage; no assumptions, no preconditions, no ends, no language that fills it with meaning. Our culture likes to treat facts as a given, as autonomous, unadorned objective realities; but a fact is an abstraction from something thicker and deeper containing implicit ends, whether or not the researcher, commentator, or

scholar acknowledges them. There are virtually no value-free facts, from the construction of public opinion polls to descriptions of brain synapses or histories of the decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima. The Catholic tradition reminds us that the fact/value distinction is practically a nil one, although our tradition is tempted sometimes to think there can be fact-free values.

Nonetheless, in our tradition epistemology and ethics are always inter-related. So, for example, the notion that education can be a value-neutral process in which teachers simply convey facts and the students simply receive them, in which behavior is neither right nor wrong but a matter of personal choice, in which judgments are neither better nor worse but simply someone's opinion, is nonsense, as the condition of so many schools grimly illustrates. This same analysis could be applied to psychotherapy, opinion polling, political analyses, medical decision making, etc.

This brings me to a fourth and last point: It is a characteristic of our tradition, at its best, to resist reductionism; it does not collapse categories. Faith and reason are compatible but not equivalent. Our tradition rejects fundamentalistic readings of Scripture; the human person is neither radically individualistic nor socially determined. Empirical findings are not solely determinative of who we are and what we do. Yes, absolutely: Findings in psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, neurobiology enrich our understanding of the human person and the human project, but they do not exhaust that meaning or determine that trajectory. We are neurons and neuroses, but not only neurons and neuroses; neither DNA or TGIF fully determine who we are or what we will do this weekend. There is space for grace and free will, thought, conscience, choice.

Time flies, and the list goes on: Symbolism is taken seriously; so is analogical reasoning; images provide us with alternative ways of knowing. All of these are implanted in minds and hearts by our sacramental and liturgical practices. Our tradition takes mysticism seriously, so we know that ordinary everyday consciousness is not the last word about reality. The practice of caring for the poor and thinking about caring for them shapes political philosophy and social theory. The struggle

everywhere to link faith and culture blesses us with an abundance of fictional worlds from Shusaku Endo's *Deep River* to Isabel Allende's *Eva Luna*.

To sum up: Yes, these characteristics can be found in other traditions. Yes, the Catholic tradition has been untrue to them at times or embraced them only kicking and screaming; but finally they have been embraced because our tradition becomes part of the culture in which it finds itself—it must become part of the culture intellectually as in all other ways. Why? Because of its mission to transform the world, as we read in *Gaudium et Spes* (No. 40): The church, a visible organization and a spiritual community, “travels the same journey as all humankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world; it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God.”

Today in our culture, where the commodification of human life, human relationships, body parts goes on everywhere, that engagement, that mission, means keeping the human person at the center of our inquiry. The human person must be seen in his or her social context, where an implicit and shared understanding of the good can be found and expressed.

All of this is deeply congruent with a religious tradition that is incarnational and sacramental, that keeps before us the idea of a God who acts in history on our behalf, a God who sent Jesus, who lived among us, who taught, who died for us, who rose from the dead and is present in the eucharist. We are to love the Lord and love one another as he has loved us.

And there's the rub and that's the challenge. Catholic higher education, Catholic identity, Catholic intellectual life, the Catholic Church and its work in the world must finally be the work of a community of believers. In our culture that is a suspect category, nowhere more so than in the university.

Margaret Steinfelds is the past editor of *Commonweal*, and currently serves as co-director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham University.

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Getting Our Heads Together

BY SIDNEY CALLAHAN

Today there exists very little activity that can be described with the exclusive term “American Catholic intellectual life.” Educated Catholics have been assimilated into the larger culture and now find themselves subject to the same general social conditions that militate against all varieties of intellectual life in this country. Within the Catholic community there are other forces that further impede intellectual dialogue. Our present situation, in my view, represents a decline from the level of recent previous decades. But mere nostalgia will not restore the intellectual and spiritual liveliness of a simpler time, with its clear-cut verities. If Catholics are to fashion new creative strategies, we must first come to terms with current social realities.

When I use the term “intellectual life,” I mean something broader than narrowly focused academic scholarship, or highly specialized scientific work, or the current state of education in colleges and universities. Intellectual life arises from the broad-ranging activity of reading, discussing, and responding to ideas and arguments devoted to the meaning of events, the interpretation of human experience. Intellectuals, as opposed to pure scholars, pure scientists, practicing professionals, or social activists, are engaged in reflective cognitive wrestling with contrasting ideas, current controversies, and opposing world views.

Intellectuals may also be scholars, professionals, artists, or activists, but when operating as intellectuals they are constructing and reconstructing their culture’s paradigms or cultural maps. Within a society, the intellectuals are those thinkers making the maps and discussing the proper rules for making maps, rather than the people doing the detailed specialized drawings emerging in the research of lab, library, or the field. Intellectuals are neither purely scholars nor purely hands-on activists. Rather than engage in hand-to-hand combat at the barricades, or in the courtroom, or in the missions, intellectuals shape the course of activism and give general directions to the professions; they are one step removed from the battle, reflecting on the whys and wherefores of the war.

As the intelligence service of society, intellectuals have to be generalists geared to taking a larger perspective, constantly scanning the theoretical weather, the changing terrain, and the movements of different bodies of troops. In other words, intellectuals have to be able to raise their heads from their own narrowly focused projects (and from their own careers) and think critically about what they see. The writers among them then persuasively communicate ideas to others in nontechnical language that everyone can understand, i.e., English. English is the *lingua franca* of the interdisciplinary intellectual life, bridging the jargon of the two-and-twenty cultures of the day.

Bridging the gaps between cultures, bringing news of the currents in a society to its members are important activities. While intellectuals have come in for a lot of scorn and contempt over the course of history, especially in America, they are nowhere more hated and persecuted than in totalitarian regimes. Intellectuals and the intellectual life seek just that general level of applied truth and relevant meaning that can question the status quo and all its operations. Detailed analyses are by nature too specific to cause trouble. No matter how many papers Freud published in the scholarly medical journals, he could never have changed the map of the modern world but for his masterly prose and large syntheses of ideas.

In the current organization of work and professional life, narrow specialization and enormous expenditures of time are required and rewarded. Along with the competitive crowding there has been an information explosion. Everywhere we see a marked increase in the complexity and specialization of jobs so that the ordinary workload, in both the hours required and the imposed pace of work, is heavier than before. In academia and other professions, we see for the first time in history an affluent educated elite who follow slave-labor schedules and endure increasing stress from competition and overwork. These conditions are legitimated by a cult of productivity and ambition, and are imposed upon all aspiring candidates, who, in a tight labor market, have been fairly desperate to succeed.

Typically, in academia, requirements for publication, teaching, research, and service are simultaneously increased and enforced by financially pressured institutions. Only highly specialized research published in scholarly refereed journals will count toward more and more exacting standards for promotion and tenure decisions. The resulting pressure for turning out scholarly publications means that most intellectual energy is directed toward highly focused projects, which only a small group of other scholars can read with profit.

With the increase of educated per-

sons in larger and larger corporations, professions, and educational institutions, we find a proliferation of worlds within worlds. There is more and more specialization as size, dispersal, and relocations of educated populations transform social groupings. There are more and more publications, but they are increasingly targeted for professional, scholarly, or recreational reading. Fewer general journals and magazines exist in which serious intellectual ideas can be publicly discussed. Politics as the common serious concern of all public citizens has become discredited by rampant corruption, political scandals, and recent campaigns designed for the media. The growth of television has made serious inroads on the written forms of communication. A great deal of general intellectual writing used to convey general ideas of importance to a similarly educated population, who shared common cultural concerns despite their different occupations, and who had enough leisure to converse.

Leisure has disappeared from American society. Since leisure is the basis of culture and one of the cornerstones of the intellectual life, we suffer cultural deprivation in the midst of material plenty. Even if there were more common forums and publications, would the harassed, overworked masses of educated Americans have time to read and reflect on them? It takes psychological energy to think and focus attention; it is tempting to skip those expenditures of energy that are not immediately necessary for survival—those things that are not “in my field.” Only fairly leisured persons can partake of the high form of cultural play that makes up the intellectual life. Our educated classes are working extremely hard at work—and working equally hard at home.

Family life has changed. Servants have disappeared, the extended family is no longer a practical support, and women have gone to work and may pursue their own demanding careers. The leisure that Oxford dons once enjoyed was built upon the backs of various submerged and exploited populations—the servant classes, the toiling natives of the Empire, and women. Women, even educated,

THOMAS AQUINAS:

It was necessary for human salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason.
From *Summa Theologica I, 1.11*

This doctrine is wisdom above all human wisdom; not merely in any one order, but absolutely. For since it is the part of a wise person to arrange and to judge, and since lesser matters should be judged in the light of some higher principle, one is said to be wise in any one order who considers the highest principle in that order: thus in the order of building, the one who plans the form of the house is called wise and architect, in opposition to the inferior laborers who trim the wood and make ready the stones: “As a wise architect, I have laid the foundation”.
From *Summa Theologica I, 1.6*

privileged women, have always done the “shadow work” of family, household, and culture, the maintenance work that made intellectual leisure possible for an elite group of males.

Among lay Catholics who became educated in large numbers after World War II, the sense of vocation or calling once limited to the religious orders was taken up with enthusiasm. Many men did not feel called to be priests but were eager to be professors. A great deal of idealism was felt by those laypersons called to intellectual work: One studies and seeks truth for the greater glory of God; one writes and teaches and professes to further the Kingdom, out there in the university and the real world, rather than in the monastery.

In that first flowering in the forties and fifties it would be appropriate to speak of the American Catholic intellectual community as fairly cohesive and homogeneous. It was a very small group, its liberal wing sometimes labeled “Commonweal Catholics.” In those days, the relatively small number of educated Catholics who were engaged in an intellectual life would all know one another, read one another’s books and articles, and share a common faith and education. Insight into the spirit of this earlier era can be had by reading Wilfrid Sheed’s account of his parents, *Frank and Maisie*.

Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward were a force unto themselves, who through publishing and frenetic lecturing single-handedly engendered much of pre-Vatican II intellectual life in Catholic America. They also lived their faith in an exemplary style, as did other influential Catholic writers such as Dorothy Day. Other memoirs of those years among Catholic intellectuals can be found in the writings of Raissa Maritain, Abigail McCarthy, Christopher Dawson, and Richard Oilman. Prominent intellectual converts were received into the Church, and when they became Catholics they joined a well-defined faith, clearly demarcated, with its own distinct intellectual community. There were various circles and centers, and various publication ventures in the East and Midwest, Fordham, Georgetown, Chicago, St. John’s, Notre Dame, Boston. Educated Catholics gathered in enclaves to study and discuss their faith; they were trying to integrate their faith

with the intellectual currents of the day. Much energy was also spent on matters of internal church reform and liturgical renewal—an endeavor which was confirmed by the calling of Vatican II and its surprisingly dramatic unfolding.

Such gatherings of Catholic intellectuals for study and mutual support were necessary because in general the intellectual and professional worlds of the time were fairly hostile to Catholics. Persecution, as it always does, engendered high morale, cohesion, and loyalty among those who did not fall away under the pressure. The forties and fifties were times in academia when doctrinaire secular atheism inherited from the Enlightenment reigned supreme. All religion was a remnant of superstition and Catholicism was the very worst of all. As one secular savant accurately noted, “anti-Catholicism was the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals.”

The crying need of educated Catholics is for sustained intellectual grappling with the challenge of integrating Christianity with their work and their worlds of secular thinking.

The crudest misunderstandings and antipathies could be encountered in Ivy League establishment circles, whose members were rigid in their own certainties that either Freud, or David Hume, or science had settled the God question forever. The ecumenical movement was also in its infancy, so Catholics were subjected to suspicion, bias, and subtle pressures from their Protestant neighbors, as well as from the secular world. The prejudice and scorn that Catholics could meet, say in the Harvard philosophy department, would seem quaint today.

During this period, many educated, married Catholics were also unassimilated to the mainstream in their sexual manners and mores. They were not only attempting to live new forms of the ancient intellectual vocations (Dominican, Jesuit), but also to practice distinctive spiritual ideals in their family lives. Here again there was an attempt to integrate the influence of the Catholic Worker movement’s stress on

providence and poverty (Franciscan) with the liturgical movement’s revival (Benedictine). Many intellectual Catholics were attempting to live by a radically different sexual ethic, sans artificial birth control, aspiring to ideals of love and sacrifice through having large families. Women were exhorted to live out a particular ideal of the valiant woman, which could not easily encompass career aspirations. The ban on artificial contraception produced intense pressures among educated Catholics, caught in contradictory aspirations—the solitude of the study versus the active labor of domesticity.

Looking back on that period in American Catholic intellectual life, I can see that the atmosphere of the community was charged with a great deal of sublimated erotic energy. Allan Bloom mentions that the sexual restraints of an earlier generation of students lent a romantic or erotic edge

to higher education that heightened the life of learning. I found this point intriguing, because I think there was an erotic intensity informing the atmosphere of postwar educated Catholic life. A heightened existential erotic style of faith was idealized: it could be found in Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* and Graham Greene novels, and still can be seen today in Walker Percy’s writings or John Paul II’s discourses on love and sex. Catholics were clearly different from others in their faith, in their thinking, and in their chastity, sexual practices and commitments.

When all went well with these first- or second-generation of educated lay Catholic intellectuals, things went very well indeed. The commitment and integration of living a vocation to the intellectual life that combined abstract thought with intense liturgical practice, with erotic energy and intense family commitments—in the midst of social persecutions—produced an *esprit de corps* and an exciting sense

of bonded community. Dorothy Day’s work, along with that of the worker priests and Young Christian Workers, had been influential in persuading Catholic intellectuals that they must be committed to social justice and live a simple life devoted to sacrifice and love. Intellectual Catholics knew who they were, and what they were about. Their vocation was to fight the good fight, seek truth, and persevere in social reform efforts inside and outside the Catholic Church. They could talk and argue with one another, but stayed united in order to gain support for the struggle with a sometimes hostile world. Literature, philosophy, and above all politics were considered fertile fields for combining religious commitment and intellectual work. Passion and ideology were united.

What can be done now? Perhaps a two-pronged effort could be envisioned. One is a decentered, self-reliant, do-it-yourself, till-your-own-gardens strategy. At the same time, a larger campaign might be mounted to move Catholic institutions toward different goals that would address the cultural problems of overload, over-specialization, under-formation, and isolation of so many educated Catholics. A combination of a bottom-up, base-community approach and a top-down, institutional tactic might make some headway.

I know less about the larger institutional approaches but I can at least imagine what might be done from what I have observed of creative efforts at some Catholic colleges and archdiocesan programs. Catholic colleges might start to fight back against the overspecialization of academia by starting interdisciplinary institutes and more public programs devoted to topics which meet the problems of Catholics in secular culture. Many programs I have attended—for instance on the family, on death and dying, on aging, on computer technologies, or the changing church—have brought in Catholic professionals from the local community to meet with the students, faculty, a guest speaker.

Such interdisciplinary intellectual endeavors have often been funded by grants from outside the institutions, such as the state councils on the humanities or corporations. These efforts have also often been the brainchild of some creative retired religious sister on the faculty who no longer has to

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fight for tenure with constant publishing to update her curriculum vitae. If Catholic educational institutions truly want to encourage the intellectual life as a search for integrated truth, they will have to provide institutional supports and rewards that can compete with the rewards offered by academic grants for narrow specialization and value-free inquiry.

If other institutions in the Church wish to further the intellectual life, the world of Catholic adult education awaits. Individual parishes may not have the resources to go it alone, but dioceses, seminaries, centers for spirituality, retreat houses, and other institutes and organizations can provide programs to stimulate the intellectual life. These would have to be broader than courses in Scripture or theology, or studies of the mystics, spirituality, and prayer. The present great revival of spirituality, complete with institutes and publications devoted to spiritual

practices, presents a model for an intellectual revival. Spiritual institutes and retreats teach centering prayer and integration of self. But today's Catholics also need centered, integrated thinking. The crying need of educated Catholics is for sustained intellectual grappling with the challenge of integrating Christianity with their work and their worlds of secular thinking. Perhaps a national Catholic great books course or a university of the air as in Great Britain could spark such a movement. Perhaps the USCCB, or the Paulists, or the Jesuits, or even the Knights and Daughters might fund a prime-time Bill Moyers-type series of intellectual Catholic conversations on TV to begin the great revival. A project looking to intellectual renaissance could be sponsored in cooperation with Catholic educational institutions and Catholic magazines. Every intellectual Catholic magazine should be working to get its networks of readers together for more sustained inquiry—

and thereby ensure a future readership.

Many have noted that the secular liberal establishment is crumbling in its old certainties. What has been called liberalism's "thin theory of the good" is breaking down. Catholicism, with its avowal of a more communitarian social justice ethic and its full-bodied view of human nature, has something to offer tired blood and anemic individualism. This may be "the truly Catholic moment" in America. Or perhaps we should say the time is ripe for many different Catholic moments, since the intellectuals in the church, being argumentative, are not speaking with one party line. But the larger culture may be ready to listen to diverse streams of the Catholic tradition in new ways. Our intellectual task is to work harder at understanding how the good news we offer relates to other quests for knowledge. All we want in the end, of course, is to enlist the hearts and minds of all humanity in a mutual seeking of love, peace, justice, and truth. Americans are born utopians: The impossible only takes a little longer.

Sidney Callahan held the Paul J. McKeever Chair of Moral Theology, St. John's University, Queens, NY in 2002-2003 and she was a Professor of Psychology at Mercy College from 1980-1997.

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What Is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?

BY ROSANNA F. DEMARCO

At the center of my education as a graduate student at Boston College and now as a faculty member in the Connell School of Nursing is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. I characterize a Catholic intellectual tradition as rigorous scholarship based in 1) a reflective spirit of inquiry, 2) ethical values, and 3) knowledge developed and shared with my students so they may continue a circle of engaged service to others. My clinical specialty is community/public health nursing science. By the nature of this concentration it is very easy for me to contemplate and reflect on persons' lives in their neighborhoods and how their living and wellness intersects with dreams and realities. It is here where I work with women living with HIV and AIDS. Many of the women I have come to know live in the inner city of Boston. They are poor and have had lives that have empowered and disempowered them and their families cyclically. I have learned that creating culturally relevant and gender sensitive prevention education, measuring its efficacy, and engaging my students in service through this process is the way to translate these women's voices into health interventions that are meaningful. My research questions, the conduct of the process, and the answers I find are the ways I can encourage and excite nursing students in class and clinical settings to not just care for individuals but to strive for something more profound: the common good. It is precisely this notion of the common good that I believe is how learning from a neighborhood can help us shape a neighborhood and our own lives. It is here I hope my students lay cornerstones of what I see as the evolving Catholic Intellectual Traditions to come in nursing science.

Rosanna F. DeMarco is an Associate Professor in the Connell School of Nursing at Boston College.

POPE JOHN PAUL II, FROM THE ENCYCLICAL *FAITH AND REASON* (1998)

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.

In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply. It is a journey which has unfolded—as it must—within the horizon of personal self-consciousness: the more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness, with the question of the meaning of things and of their very existence becoming ever more pressing. This is why all that is the object of our knowledge becomes a part of our life. The admonition "Know yourself" was carved on the temple portal at Delphi, as testimony to a basic truth to be adopted as a minimal norm by those who seek to set themselves apart from the rest of creation as "human beings," that is as those who "know themselves."

Moreover, a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life? These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the Veda and the Avesta; we find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao-Tze, and in the preaching of Tirthankara and Buddha; they appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives.

The Church is no stranger to this journey of discovery, nor could she ever be. From the moment when, through the Paschal Mystery, she received the gift of the ultimate truth about human life, the Church has made her pilgrim way along the paths of the world to proclaim that Jesus Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jn 14:6*). It is her duty to serve humanity in different ways, but one way in particular imposes a responsibility of a quite special kind: the *diakonia* service of the truth. This mission on the one hand makes the believing community a partner in humanity's shared struggle to arrive at truth; and on the other hand it obliges the believing community to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully" (*1 Cor 13:12*).

Stewards of the Tradition

Christ the Center

BY ROBERT P. IMBELLI

The rubric under which this evening's presentation is placed is "Stewards of the Tradition." My own contribution will be to focus our attention upon what I consider to be the very heart and center of the Catholic intellectual (or, as I prefer, "wisdom") tradition: the Lord Jesus Christ himself. My presentation will be in three parts. First, I will consider the notion of tradition and defend the claim that Jesus Christ is indeed the living center of the tradition. Second, I will suggest that the "crisis" of the Catholic intellectual tradition is, at its most profound, a Christological crisis. Third, I will hazard some suggestions regarding the context of the Catholic college and university and the challenge of reaffirming the Christic center. Because of limitations of time, all this will be done briefly, but, I hope, in a way suggestive of further development.

The Christic Center of Tradition

In considering "tradition," I find it helpful to distinguish three interconnected senses of the word. Prior to Vatican II when Catholics spoke of "tradition" they most commonly intended the *tradita*: those things that had been handed down, whether Scripture, creeds, or catechetical formulations. These *tradita*, often referred to as the "deposit of faith," were presumed to be the venerable Latin of the Tridentine Mass and the texts of Denzinger.

A second sense of "tradition," come newly to the fore since Vatican II, is that of *traditio*. Here, tradition indicates less what has been handed down than the very process of handing down, of "traditioning" (as is sometimes said): the ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation of the past into the present. Here the center of concern is the present and the future; and one often encounters the language of "accommodation" and "inculturation."

But I would suggest a third sense of tradition, less frequently invoked, yet foundational to the previous legitimate

uses. I refer to this by the Latin designation, *Traditus*. Here, tradition is the One who is handed down, Jesus Christ himself as the living heart and center of Christian tradition. Thus when we speak of "Stewards of the Tradition," at its theologically most profound level we are speaking of our institutions and ourselves as bearers of the multiple riches of the mystery of Christ.

Now this Catholic wisdom tradition, in all three senses, but especially the third, comes to privileged expression in the Eucharistic liturgy. Here, the Real Presence of Christ is proclaimed and enacted. I concur, then, with authors like Ida and Kavanaugh and Catherine LaCugna who speak of liturgy as *theologia prima*, the living theology which nourishes and sustains our second order reflection. Liturgy is the primary bearer of tradition, because here, in sacramental fullness, Jesus "hands himself over" for the life of the world.

Here, tradition is the One who is handed down, Jesus Christ himself as the living heart and center of Christian tradition.

The Crisis of Tradition

With such testimony by distinguished witnesses, it would seem that the tradition's center is secure. Yet, if the Catholic mind or intellectual tradition is in a state of acute crisis today, I would suggest that a key dimension of that crisis is the loss of a robust Christic center. Obviously, here too I can only signal some signs of the times pointing to what I discern to be a Christological amnesia and neglect in some quarters of contemporary Catholicism.

For a number of years now, I have noted in theological writings, both scholarly and popular, what I call a "unitarianism of the Spirit." As the term implies, these authors tend to speak almost uniquely of God in terms of "Holy Spirit," neglecting the traditional language of "Father" and "Son." Sometimes this development is fueled

by a misguided ecumenism that seeks not to cause offense. But its outcome is the invocation of a "generic brands" deity that only exists in an abstract realm, uninhabited by any living tradition. Have we not unfortunately heard such anodyne invocations in faculty convocations and commencements even in Catholic colleges?¹

Moreover, do not such vague and nondescript generalizations seep all too readily into our attempts to articulate the vision and mission of our institutions of higher education? So, to choose an example with which I am most familiar, one hears repeated, in almost mantra-like fashion, that the aim of education in the Jesuit tradition is "to educate men and women for others." Undoubtedly, an admirable sentiment; but one not at all distinctive to Jesuit colleges and universities. Indeed, its incantation risks carrying an undertone of smugness regarding other institutions' purposes.

appeals to terms such as "sacramental consciousness" and "incarnational sensibility" (more often than not accompanied by a well-known line from the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God"). Now, I do not dispute the validity of these claims, or the beauty of the verse. But I maintain that unless this widespread appeal is explicitly founded upon the confession of the unique Incarnation in Jesus Christ, who is thereby *the* Sacrament of encounter with God, we will lack the one sure foundation for renewal and transformation, both personal and institutional.

In sum, reading and listening to statements of vision and mission, I often feel as St. Augustine did in his *Confessions*. Augustine gratefully benefited from the writings of the Platonists he had read, but failed to find there the one salvific name he longed for: that of Jesus Christ.³ What Ignatius and Hopkins and Arrupe took for granted, we must learn to appropriate and articulate anew.

Renewing the Christic Center

Having reviewed some signs of Christological forgetfulness, let me pass on to signs of promise, hopeful indications of Christological renewal.

I would first point to the theological work of Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J., who is a participant in our conference. Father van Beeck is the author of a multivolume work on Catholic systematic theology entitled *God Encountered*, that, when complete, will be a milestone in American Catholic theology. In a preliminary programmatic essay toward his *magnum opus*, van Beeck summed up its guiding vision of renewal in theology and pastoral practice in these words: "This renewal, if it is to be authentically Christian, must go back to the original and abiding realization that Christ is alive and present in the Spirit, a realization found everywhere in the New Testament and one that remains the original source of all Christian faith and identity experience."⁴

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Stewards of the Tradition

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With regard to the distinctive vocation of Catholic colleges and universities, this “abiding realization,” that the living Christ is the heart of the Catholic wisdom tradition, must inspire and direct more than our theological offerings and ministerial programs, important as these undoubtedly are. It also holds implications for mission statements and curriculum decisions; for environment and art; for class size, administrative policies, and, yes, for hiring.⁵ Passing from a merely notional apprehension to a real apprehension of these matters (to use Cardinal Newman’s categories) will require imaginative and discerning leadership and commitment. But so has every authentic renewal in the Church.

For Newman, the mind’s passage from the notional to the real is mediated by the imagination that allows the mind to engage and energize the heart. And poetry is a prime vehicle for this heart-felt enfleshment of the word. Another sign of hope, then, arises from the recent study by Peggy Rosenthal, *The Poets’ Jesus*. Reminiscent of my earlier cautions regarding “incarnationalism without Incarnation,” Rosenthal writes, “Even for many practicing Christians, the late-twentieth century’s strong spirituality of incarnational presence was linked only weakly to the and person of Jesus.”⁶ But in the last chapter of her work, entitled “Jesus Present,” she discusses a number of contemporary American poets, like Andrew Hudgins, Scott Cairns, Denise Levertov, and Vassar Miller. Her analysis of their common ground is noteworthy: “They seem, at the end of two millennia in which this central figure of Christianity [Jesus Christ] has been reshaped and reconfigured, very comfortable with the orthodox configurations yet energized by what they mean for human life at this moment.”⁷ Indeed, Denise Levertov’s persuasion is particularly radical: “The miracle of God assuming flesh in the Incarna-

tion, and continuing to become the ‘bread of life’ in the Eucharist, informs her faith in the very possibility and meaning of metaphor.”⁸ Only Real Presence is able to ground and guarantee real presences.

One final sign of Christological hope bears mentioning. Over the past ten years, a number of graduate students in theology seem to be moving beyond the shop-worn labels of “liberal” or “conservative” to a new engagement with the tradition. Often they sense that they were deprived, through faulty religious education, of life-giving roots. Hence they undertake an in-depth study of the patristic or scholastic traditions for their doctoral dissertations. This is resourcement, return to the sources, not for the sake of nostalgia, but for the sake of authentic aggiornamento that is more than mere cultural accommodation. They are captivated by Christ, the Traditus; and hence they diligently search the tradita for signs of the Beloved to whom we must bear witness in the present, the “today” of faith.

I quote one young Catholic theologian who speaks for many: Let us leave liberal/conservative behind us. And let us leave behind us, too, that Catholicism which had allowed its distinctive colors to bleed into beige. “Let us embrace the spicy, troublesome, fascinating, and culture-transforming person of Jesus Christ and let him shape our experience and our world.”⁹

Then, I am convinced, we shall discover anew that *ex corde ecclesiae* is ever *ex corde Christi*.¹⁰

Endnotes

1 At a rather more elevated theological level, I suggest that concern about the spread of this “unitarianism of the Spirit” underlies the controversial Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*.

2 Pedro Arrupe, S.J., *Justice with Faith Today* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), 124.

3 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 7, Chapter 9.

4 Frans Jozef van Beeck, *Catholic Identity after Vatican II* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 55.

5 See Brian Daley, S.J., “Christ and the Catholic University,” *America*, 169, no. 5 (September 11, 1993). Monika Hellwig also offers helpful reflections in her article, “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Catholic University,” in Cernera and Morgan, *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, especially 10-18.

6 Peggy Rosenthal, *The Poets’ Jesus: Representations at the End of a Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153.

7 Rosenthal, *The Poets’ Jesus*, 166.

8 Rosenthal, *The Poets’ Jesus*, 165.

9 Robert Barren, “Beyond Beige Catholicism,” *Church*, 16, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 10.

10 See the profound pastoral-theological reflection of Pope John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (Boston: Pauline Books, 2001), especially Part 3, “Starting Afresh from Christ.”

Robert P. Imbelli is a priest of the Archdiocese of New York and Associate Professor of Theology at Boston College.

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JOHN HENRY NEWMAN:

Truth is the object of Knowledge of whatever kind; and when we inquire what is meant by Truth, I suppose it is right to answer that Truth means facts and their relations, which stand toward each other pretty much as subjects and predicates in logic. All that exists, as contemplated by the human mind, forms one large system or complex fact, and this of course resolves itself into an indefinite number of particular facts, which, as being portions of a whole, have countless relations of every kind, one toward another. Knowledge is the apprehension of these facts, whether in themselves, or in their mutual positions and bearings. And, as all taken together form one integral subject for contemplation, so there are no natural or real limits between part and part; one is ever running into another; all, as viewed by the mind, are combined together, and possess a correlative character one with another, from the internal mysteries of the Divine Essence down to our own sensations and consciousness, from the most solemn appointments of the Lord of all down to what may be called the accident of the hour, from the most glorious seraph down to the vilest and most noxious of reptiles.

The Idea of a University, Discourse 3, 2

What Is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?

The first Christians—drawn together by their faith in the significance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—were members of Jewish communities embedded in a Roman political system and in a linguistic and intellectual culture that was largely Greek in origin. As the Christian “way” moved beyond these Jewish communities, attracted Gentile converts, and spread, a Christian intellectual tradition or, better, a constellation of traditions developed in the diverse regions where Christian faith took root—theologies, philosophies, artistic currents, systems of legal thought and political theory, which were the product of a continuous dialogue between faith and cultures. With the fragmentation of the Christian churches, especially in the 15th and

16th centuries, the Catholic intellectual tradition in the West developed its own characteristics. Since the medieval period, one of its principal venues has been the university. This dialogue between faith and culture reflects two essential characteristics of the Christian, and especially the Catholic, understanding of human experience: that faith necessarily seeks understanding, and that all intellectual inquiry leads eventually to questions of ultimacy that invite faith responses. The Catholic view sees no conflict between faith and knowledge; it looks to how they illuminate each other.

Boston College as a Catholic and Jesuit University, Boston College assessment and planning report, July 2006.

CATHERINE OF SIENA:

Then, dearest son, open the eye of thine intellect in the light of most holy faith, and behold how much thou art beloved of God.

Letter to Neri Di Landoccio Dei Pagliaresi

From Tolerance to Engagement in Catholic Higher Education

BY JOHN C. HAUGHEY, S.J.

On February 3, Woodstock fellow John Haughey, S.J., received the second annual Monika K. Hellwig Award from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities for “outstanding contributions to Catholic intellectual life.” He delivered the following remarks to the presidents of Catholic colleges and universities, gathered for that occasion.

The 220 Catholic higher education institutions in this country are doing an extraordinary thing. But I wonder whether their leaders have thought about the potential their work has for the future self-understanding of Roman Catholicism itself. These institutions host a bewildering number of pluralisms—academic, ethnic, religious, racial, economic—and do so in a way that has made a home for many voices and values and traditions and bodies of knowledge. But the hospitality accorded by these institutions has not been sufficiently attentive to their uniqueness or opportunistic about this pluralism. It is not that they have been indifferent to or fallen short of fidelity to the Church’s teachings, it seems to me. It is, rather, in not engaging these pluralisms. A hospitality that simply makes room for otherness is not the same as a hospitality that engages and enables it in all its forms to be self-critical. But an engaged hospitality could also equip the Catholic faith, the faith that sponsors your institutions, to learn to be critical of itself. Roman Catholicism is as credible as a teaching church as it shows itself a learning church.

A hospitality which makes room for the other, and which houses and credentials the other, and does not engage that otherness is a deficient host. A deficient hospitality, which I would call a hospitality of tolerance, shortchanges the students, the school, and all the cultures your personnel come from, but most of all the Church. A hospitality of tolerance, in a word, avoids, and is shrewd in doing so. It “lets sleeping dogs lie”; it lets “a thousand flowers bloom”; it lets the whole weight of taking responsibility for the Catholicism of the campus come to rest on the campus ministry. The fruit of this

avoidance is a campus that loses touch with its roots in the Catholic intellectual tradition. That tradition, then, becomes a “was” as modernism, postmodernism, and post-postmodernism, and every-here-today-gone-tomorrow “tradition” becomes the new “is.”

But I want to be even more surgically clear about what I am saying. When the disciplines are engaged by the Catholic intellectual tradition, they have much to teach their interlocutors and much to learn from that tradition. Disengagement impoverishes both the discipline and the Catholic intellectual tradition. How so? Because a valid body of knowledge is intrinsic to the universe of being and its linkage to the Creator of being connects it more easily to further bodies of knowledge. An academic discipline and this tradition should not seem like two sumo wrestlers trying to best one another since they are in a constitutive relationship to one another. Further, one might recall Paul’s claim that “knowledge will pass away” (I Corinthians 13:8) unless faith, hope, and love give it a place in eternity.

Engaging otherness is not something abstract in my mind. It is the way Jesus of Nazareth operated in his life. The complaint that eventually got him eliminated was that he didn’t associate with the right people, with those who were in the know. He evidently preferred to have table fellowship with the tax collectors and the sinners, i.e., with those who were marginal to being right, righteous, one of us! It would be worth noting that the Gospel often appears to come out of his conversations with the otherness of these unrighteous types. He learned from the vulnerable, from those who were judged marginal at best. Look at the Beatitudes and ask yourself whether the insights they convey might have originated in conversations with those who hungered and thirsted for justice. “Blessed are the lowly, for they shall inherit the earth.” Yes, he taught; but yes, he learned too; that is the point of having an intellectual tradition that is as much a “will be” as a “used to be.”

But if a Catholic educational institution moves from being a place of hospi-

talities that simply houses pluralisms to one that engages them in their many forms, the major beneficiary will be the Church. It has much to learn from the day-to-day praxis of the American network of Catholic higher education institutions insofar as they have engaged their own plural voices. “Catholic” must not settle into being a mark of the Church. It was meant instead to be a challenge, to send a signal to the whole world of the good news of the inclusion of all humanity with its God. We live in hope of a catholicity, an eschatological fullness with the Church in all its institutions assisting in midwifing that fullness in the course of its history.

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I am really saying there is a poverty in our doctrine about the meaning of Catholic. So far we have understood a mere sliver of what that doctrine must become and is more likely to become if you engage the world’s pluralisms locally. At times our church seems to exhibit a hospitality redolent of the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner in order to take the measure of his orthodoxy. Jesus was a faithful Jew who learned to become a syncretist because of the virtue of hospitality that he accorded the seemingly heterodox. His orthodoxy became as capacious as the heart of his Father.

What difference will it make in this world of realpolitik if this opportunity for the engagement of pluralism is neglected? The praxis of the hospitality of engagement will not develop into a doctrine of catholicity. And without such a doctrine, the world will not

know the heart of God or the host that God commissioned to engage its pluralisms. A campus that aims at being a place that is merely agreeable, that has learned a tolerance, that shirks the task of seeking truth together, has lost an opportunity to show that human unity “belongs to the innermost nature of the Church.” (Vatican II)

But, you ask, do we have on our campuses the competence necessary to engage the disciplines with a knowledge of the Catholic intellectual tradition? Yes and no. You may not have savants who are explicitly knowledgeable about this tradition. But having conducted twelve workshops this year with faculty members around the country and listened to the good each is about and the wholes they are trying to birth through their disciplines, it is easy to see God at work in their strivings. Why say this? Because those in each discipline whose questions are really theirs and whose hunt for answers is open to wherever the data lead them—these qualify for the accolade of being hospitable since they are engaging otherness from within their area of competence and are being stretched by it. And since God is the author of the Catholic intellectual tradition then there isn’t any shark-infested moat to cross for the necessary engagements to take place. Pope Benedict XVI asked this week at the noon blessing on the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, “Why should faith and reason be afraid of each other, if they can express themselves better by meeting and engaging one another?” So ask yourself, Is the hospitality on my campus sufficiently in evidence that the Church at large can learn from it? We sorely need a development of our doctrine of catholicity in order to better host the world’s pluralisms.

John C. Haughey, S.J., is a Senior Research Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University.

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Yeast: A Parable for Catholic Higher Education

BY WALTER ONG, S.J.

It is common knowledge that the problem of pluralism today increasingly haunts Catholic institutions of higher education, that is, colleges and universities founded under specifically Catholic auspices and now having to redesign themselves in our present educational world. We think particularly of such institutions in the United States, where they have existed in far higher proportion than in any other part of the world. But the problem is worldwide.

In the forefront are such matters as faculties that include many members who are not Catholic, student bodies equally diversified in their religious commitments or lack thereof, questions of academic freedom, and, to cap it all, the clear desire of Catholic institutions of higher education to open themselves to persons and points of view other than exclusively Catholic while maintaining a genuine Catholic identity. To this should be added a new awareness of the flexibility of Catholic teachings that many had earlier said were inflexible.

This awareness of flexibility developed widely over the past hundred years or so with the massive growth of knowledge in all fields, scientific and humanistic, creating new sensitivity to the fact that Jesus lived in a historical world and founded his church in a describable historical context. He thereby necessarily designed it for some kind of continuing development through history in the various and developing cultures across the world so as for it to realize its catholicity. Thus “inculturation,” in the sense of the rooting of the church in the distinctive features of real value in a given culture, is a significantly established and operational term today.

There is no easy answer to problems raised by our necessary pluralism. Solutions have to be worked out as we come to understand better the Catholic Church and the forces the Church is called on to work with. Many models have been proposed for thinking about the Church and, by implication, about the Catholic identity of Catholic universities and colleges. I should like

simply to advance for consideration a way of thinking about this identity that, to the best of my knowledge, has not heretofore been made use of. It is not a cure-all, but may be a help. It consists in a more thorough examination of the concept of “catholic” itself and of reflection on a Gospel parable in connection with the Catholic institutions of higher learning.

“Catholic” is commonly said to mean “universal,” a term from the Latin *universalis*. The equation is not quite exact. If “universal” is the adequate meaning of “catholic,” why did the Latin Church, which in its vernacular language had the word *universalis*, not use this word but rather borrowed from Greek the term *katholikos* instead, speaking of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church” (to put it into English) instead of the “one, holy, universal, and apostolic church”? The etymological history of *universalis* is not in every detail clear, but it certainly involves the concepts of *unum*, “one,” and *vertere*, “turn.” It suggests using a compass to make a circle around a central point. It is an inclusive concept in the sense that the circle includes everything within it. But by the same token it also excludes everything outside it. *Universalis* contains a subtle note of negativity. *Katholikos* does not. It is more unequivocally positive. It means simply “through-the-whole” or “throughout-the-whole”—*kata* or *kath*, through or throughout; *bolos*, whole, from the same Indo-European root as our English “whole.”

Perhaps *katholikos* was favored by the Latin (as well as by the Greek) church because it resonated so well with Jesus’ parable in Mt. 13:33 (echoed in Lk. 13:21): “The reign of God is like yeast which a woman took and kneaded into three measures of flour. Eventually the whole mass of dough began to rise.” Yeast is a plant, a fungus, something that grows with no particular limits to its borders. If the mass of dough is added to, the yeast grows into the added portion. Understood as catholic in terms of this parable, the Kingdom or the Church is a limitless, growing reality, destined ultimately to be present everywhere and to affect everything, though by no means

to convert everything into itself. Yeast acts on dough, but it does not convert all the dough into yeast, nor is it able to do so.

Living yeast corresponds to what the Catholic Church has really been, for the Catholic Church has in fact never been at all definitively “universal” in the sense that it has actually included all parts of the human race or even anywhere near the greater part of the human race. But if it has never been by any means “universal” in such a sense, it is certainly “catholic” in the sense that it has always been in one place or another growing, spreading into new dough, in accord with the parable of the yeast. Of recent years, it has become more widespread than ever before, geographically and culturally. It is, in fact, more through-the-whole of humanity across the face of the globe today than in any earlier age of history. The variety of the faces representing the Church at the Second Vatican Council made this evident. No longer is it possible to say, as Hilaire Belloc once did, “The Church is Europe, Europe is the Church.” This is inclusivist-exclusivist universalism with a vengeance, a statement that, it appears to me, is de facto un-Christian, although I am sure not with any conscious intent.

Many of Jesus’ parables—just as, quite commonly, other parables—are multiple in signification. There are complex meanings implied here in this one, although the commentaries that I have examined often develop any implications of the parable at best only minimally. In his *Models of the Church*, Avery Dulles gives it more attention than most commentators, classing it briefly with other “botanical models” of the Church that show, for example, the Church’s “capacity of rapid expansion,” as this parable surely does. For his purposes, he had no occasion for pushing analysis of the parable of the yeast further.

But here I am concerned with pushing it further for an admittedly specialized reason—because of the particular value the parable seems to have in bringing out the usefulness of the concept of “catholic,” more exhaustively

understood, in treating problems of pluralism in Catholic institutions of higher education today. The applicants that suggest themselves here do not apply perfectly—Father Dulles notes, quite appositely, that parables all have obvious applicational limits—but this particular parable can apparently give us some better conceptual hold on certain elements in the problems of pluralism that we face in Catholic institutions of higher education. Admittedly, in emerging only now, this fuller relevance of the parable shows itself belatedly, but certain relevancies in Jesus’ saying can make themselves known only in ages later than Jesus’ own age. The word of God has fertility for the future as well as for the time in which it is first uttered.

The parable of the yeast can show more than the Church’s capacity for natural expansion. Yeast not only grows quickly but also nourishes itself on the dough in which it grows. This suggests that the Church should build into itself the cultures or mixtures of cultures in which it finds itself. A Catholic higher educational institution should build into its tradition what those who happen not to be Catholic have to offer that fits its tradition and what it might otherwise not know at all. The Church does not have from the start everything it will later become, any more than the yeast does, other than the Church’s own principle of life, which is no less than Jesus Christ himself, who lived as a visible human being in a culture or mixture of cultures quite other than any in the world today and whose Mystical Body, the Church, must be inculturated now in today’s world and in the world of the future, nourished on today’s and tomorrow’s kinds of food.

If, however, yeast nourishes itself on the dough in which it is placed, it does not do so in such a way as to spoil the dough—not from the Human point of view, certainly. It makes the dough more usable, more nourishing. It not only grows in what it feeds on, but it also improves what it feeds on and makes it possible for others to feed on it as well as on itself, the yeast. The Catholic Church is not out to confront and destroy the cultures it is set in or

due to encounter, but to interpenetrate these cultures, and not only on its own terms, but interactively. Yeast grows in different sorts of dough—white, whole wheat, rye, and so on, not converting one sort of these doughs into any of the others. Moreover, any dough with yeast growing in it can be added to a completely different batch of dough, and the yeast will act on the new batch in accord with the way the new batch is constituted (white dough, whole wheat, rye, whatever): The Church transplanted from any given culture to a new culture can live in a way that fits that particular new culture without losing its own identity, just as in doing its work of leavening, yeast does not sacrifice its own identity but remains growing yeast.

In every case, in accordance with Jesus' parable, the dough gains value from the yeast (the Kingdom, the Catholic Church) and, at the same time, the yeast (the Kingdom, the Catholic Church) gains. It nourishes itself on the dough, comes to a realization of new potentialities (which include a better understanding of itself), and in all cases, at least we can hope, both yeast and dough work for the good of human beings.

What are some of the ways in which the parable of the yeast might help in conceiving of religious pluralism in Catholic institutions of higher education today? We can consider here only a few sample applications.

1) *The faith and academic subjects.* In a Catholic college or university, the yeast—the Kingdom in the sense of the Catholic faith—is constantly being brought into contact with new materials. These include materials in philosophy, the other humanities, the sciences and all the rest of developing human knowledge, as well as in its own special ways, theology itself.

Here, there is no question of indoctrinating disciplines that are themselves separate from the faith, but of interacting with them as each requires—in patterns that have to be worked out over time, as the interacting takes place. The ferment of the yeast, the Kingdom in the sense of the Church and the Church's faith, will work in different ways, not all of which are by any means predictable now. At times it may have no immediate grounds for interacting at all. At times, new grounds will arise: Modern high technology has made

ecology a new massive Catholic theological and practical pastoral problem, as it hardly was before.

From its beginning, Catholic teaching has learned by contact with what is not itself and even what is opposed to itself. For example, St. Augustine and many others learned from pagan rhetoric, the most pervasive of all branches of learning in the West as well as in the Middle East over centuries. St. Thomas Aquinas learned from the pagan Aristotle—and met massive resistance for his use of this pagan author, who, moreover, was mediated to the Latin West through Muslims, Arabs, and others. In our own day, Catholic teaching has learned from certain kinds of existentialism and especially from personalist philosophy. One of personalism's most ardent proponents was Jewish, Martin Buber, whose book *I and Thou* is a cardinal personalist text. Personalism has had its effects on Catholic teaching—notably in the writings and talks of Pope John Paul II. The yeast of the Kingdom has been expanding through vast new batches of dough over the centuries and will continue to do so even more radically in our computer and information age and in other ages to come.

2) *The relationship of the faith and the faculty, Catholic and other.* With regard to the faculty as individual persons, we could hope that the action of the faith, seen as Catholic in the sense we have been employing here, would grow within the lives of individual faculty members, in whatever way and at whatever rate the individual finds herself or himself adapted to such growth. Presumably, having aligned herself or himself with an openly Catholic university, a person who is not Catholic is willing to live somehow in contact with the yeast of faith. But this does not of itself mean commitment to letting the faith permeate and transform her or his whole life, as it would, or should, the life of a professed Catholic. In cases of individual non-Catholics, the action of the yeast might mean ultimately such total commitment. Whether it does or not is an entirely personal matter under divine grace. Catholic institutions of higher learning have had hundreds and more utterly loyal faculty members of other faiths or of no faith at all who have lived comfortably and happily in the Catholic context for most or all of their academic careers, not feeling imposed on. The Catholic faith wants to be interactive where interac-

tion is feasible and called for, not where it is unwelcome.

3) *The relationship of the faith and the students.* Today, the college or university is no longer felt, as it used to be several generations ago, in Catholic or other religious circles or in secular circles, as an institution functioning *in loco parentum*, as set up so as to act in the place of the students' parents in relation to the students themselves (many of whom today are in fact adults, married with children and, even occasionally, grandchildren). The Catholic college or university retains many responsibilities to its students, some of them even enlarged responsibilities, religious and moral as well as intellectual, although they are framed rather differently now. Catholic colleges and Catholic theology, incorporating and commenting on the Church's teaching, and courses on the teachings of other religions, are to be available in Catholic universities and colleges. In core curricula, a certain number of such courses will be required normally of all students, if only to avoid ignorance of the massive religious dimensions of human life throughout history. Students not professing the Catholic faith need not elect specifically Catholic theology courses.

4) *Cosmology.* If the Catholic faith is viewed as yeast, as something designed to grow through human consciousness under grace into more and more of God's creation, Catholic institutions of higher education are desperately in need of every sort of knowledge available to fulfill their Catholic mission. One of the points at which this need, and the question of pluralism at present haunting Catholic education, can be examined fruitfully regards cosmology. "In the beginning...God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Catholic teaching is ineradicably involved with cosmology, with study of the universe that God has created, for everything that exists, save for God himself, is the creation of God, something of his. Today, we know inestimably more about what this creation was than the human authors of Genesis or any of their contemporaries could know. The dough in which the yeast of the Kingdom is planted is an immeasurably greater mass of immeasurably greater age than we used to think. Does this knowledge that we now have show practically in Catholic life—that is, in such things as our pastoral,

homiletic, and devotional life?

When we think of God as creator of the world or universe, at least in our pastoral (including liturgical), homiletic, and devotional life, it appears that we are still most likely to think of the world pretty much in archaic terms. What we see around us is accommodated directly to the ordinary human senses and imagination, that is, the visible earth and what surrounds it, the sun and moon and planets and stars as they appear to the unaided eye, a world full of beauty and wonder, but constituting not one billionth of what everyone now knows the universe that God created really is (though we do not know all of it perfectly, for our knowledge is still growing). It is a universe some 14 billion years old, with billions of galaxies each containing billions of stars more or less the size of our sun, a universe that has had to undergo massive evolution to reach the point where the existence of human beings was even possible. It took billions of years for God's material creation to organize itself and in places cool down enough for DNA to exist so that life could be possible, for DNA furnishes building blocks of living organisms. Humanity is not DNA, but without DNA there could be no human life, involving nonmaterial human consciousness. Although responsible calculations still vary somewhat, humanity, ourselves, *homo sapiens*, is quite possibly some 350,000 years old. Since the appearance of *homo sapiens* and the consciousness with which humanity is endowed, God's creation has matured painstakingly but with growing acceleration through the invention of writing, print, computers, and the changes in thought processes and thought management that these technologies of the word have involved. The changes have resulted in our vast humanistic studies, enriched today immeasurably beyond such studies in earlier ages.

God's creation has matured in our vast information culture with its concomitant interpretation culture, in which the interrelationships of everything—intellectual, sociological, political, scientific, philosophical, religious, psychological, and so on without end—are investigated, if not always successfully, certainly with an intricate sophistication and depth impossible in earlier generations. When we think of God's creation in the ordinary context of faith,

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Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Public Square

BY ALAN WOLFE

Non-Catholics routinely find in Catholicism something missing in their own religious or intellectual traditions. For those unhappy with the direction the modern world has taken, especially in the years since the cultural revolution of the 1960s, Catholicism stands as a mighty alternative. As Peter Berger wrote in 1967, “Catholicism, for reasons intrinsic to its tradition, has tried hardest in maintaining a staunchly resistant stance in the face of secularization and pluralism, and indeed has tried down to our own century to engage in vigorous counterattacks designed to re-establish something like Christendom at least within limited territories.” Or, as the theologian Stanley Hauerwas, a Methodist, puts it more recently (and more succinctly), “Catholics, more than any other people, must resist the presumption of modernity.” Reading comments like these, I am reminded of the work of a first-rate journalist named Alan Ehrenhalt, whose book, *The Lost City*, evokes Chicago-style Catholicism of the 1950s, with its emphasis on hierarchy and obedience, as a preferable moral system to the anarchy that followed in its wake. Catholicism, for these writers, plays the role of the road not taken, the secret history of the twentieth century which, if only we knew better, we would have lived out.

That road is not my road. (Indeed, I think there is something extraordinarily presumptuous of non-Catholics asking Catholics to forgo the benefits of modernity that they themselves enjoy.) There were indeed antimodernist tendencies in both the official teachers of the Catholic Church and in the way ordinary Catholics led their lives. I have no interest in revisiting them. Berger and Hauerwas may see in the Catholic intellectual tradition a principled intellectual opposition to contemporary relativism and hedonism; I am more likely to see a church that was far too soft on anti-Semitism (especially, I have to add, when it counted), took a certain pride in banning great books, and produced a Syllabus of

Errors and attacks on liberalism that bet on the wrong horses as far as the future was concerned. Had those aspects of Catholicism perpetuated themselves unchanged into the start of the twenty-first century, America’s Catholic colleges and universities would continue to be on the defensive, for the burden of proof would be on them to demonstrate their proper place in a liberal and pluralistic democracy.

Fortunately, however, the Catholic tradition is better than that. It furnished a John Courtney Murray. It kept alive an important strain of natural law teaching. It experienced Vatican II. And it produced a generation of highly educated middle-class suburban professionals anxious to give their children the best education a university can provide. It would be difficult for anyone except for the most intransigent of conservatives to believe that the Church, at least in the United States, is not better off because of their existence.

At a time when the only thing we can know is that we cannot know anything, the claims of natural law suggest to us not that the world is unknowable, but that we have simply stopped, for whatever reason, trying to know it.

Let me, then, turn directly to aspects of the Catholic tradition that have a more positive role to play, not only in higher education, but in American public life more generally. Certainly the most important of them is the natural law tradition. I will not address here—or, for that matter, anywhere—the question of whether God is the origin of our natural rights and duties, for I have little taste for philosophical and theological analysis.

The important point to make is that a natural law tradition leaves one predisposed to believe that there are certain truths in the world that remain true irrespective of whether the laws and conventions of any particular society adhere to them. At its worst, belief in natural law can lead to ideological rigidity and inflexible inhumanity. But at its best, respect for natural law gives one the self-confidence that makes possible the passion and curiosity that fuels intellectual inquiry.

No one could have predicted, thirty or so years ago, that such self-confidence would ever be necessary in American higher education. At the height of the cold war, American universities produced those called by David Halberstam “the best and the brightest,” and humility was not exactly one of their personality traits. But in remarkably short time, the culture of American academia shifted from the hubristic arrogance of those who believed that they could bend a foreign country to their will

to those currently ensconced in the university who doubt the possibility of will, truth, morality, beauty, or any other category that strikes them as ready for deconstruction. At a time when the only thing we can know is that we cannot know anything, the claims of natural law suggest to us not that the world is unknowable, but that we have simply stopped, for whatever reason, trying to know it.

Natural law, in short, inoculates us against postmodernism. Some of you may know an article I wrote a year or two ago recounting my visits to colleges and universities shaped by the tradition of American evangelical Protestantism. There I recall my surprise at discovering how strong intellectually many of these institutions had become. But I also expressed astonishment to learn that Stanley Fish is something of a hero to those who teach in the English Department at Wheaton College or that postmodern philosophy is all the rage at the Fuller Theological Seminary. While there are no doubt exceptions of which I am unaware, I have yet to come across quite that much enthusiasm for postmodernism at the Catholic colleges and universities with which I am familiar. The postmodern evangelicals with whom I talk believe that one can be skeptical of all truths while maintaining the truth of God’s existence. Catholics are more likely to hold that the truth of God’s existence must mean the truth of man’s reason, art’s beauty, or universal morality. No wonder, then, that at Boston College one will never hear cries of “Hey Hey Ho Ho, Western Civ’s Gotta Go.” Take away all those dead white males, and you have pretty much eliminated the Catholic tradition from the face of the earth. I have nothing but respect for those Catholic colleges and universities that continued to defend the humanities through the entire, but now seemingly past, age of suspicion against them.

Two other side-effects of Catholicism’s sympathy for natural law are also worth noting because, once again, both of them came as a surprise—at least to me. The first of these is the sympathy that emerged on America’s Catholic colleges and universities for liberalism. By this I do not mean the everyday use of the word liberalism that refers to the Democratic Party and its support for social reform, although it remains true that most Catholics, and most Catholic academics, remain liberal in that sense. The more important affinity in this case is the one between Catholic respect for natural law and liberal conceptions of fundamental human rights. It was, many

of you will recall, John Courtney Murray who pointed out that the great enlightenment thinkers who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, Protestant and deist though they may have been, were nonetheless articulating natural law principles in asserting freedom of speech, press, and religion. It is worth keeping his point in mind when we ponder why evangelical Protestant literary theorists love Stanley Fish. For if there is one theme that runs throughout all of Fish's writings—or, for that matter, those of his former colleague Stanley Hauerwas—it is a deep hatred of liberalism. How ironic, then, that of the three intellectual traditions I have been discussing—Catholicism, evangelical Protestantism, and post-modernism—the only one that finds something of value in liberalism is the one whose Pope made such a determined nineteenth century attack upon it.

It is certainly not an obligation of defenders of Catholic education as it used to be to consider the situation facing non-Catholics. But just as Catholic colleges and universities have become enriched throughout contact with the non-Catholic world, non-Catholics have benefited from their contact with the Catholic world. I know that I have. What upsets me the most about the views of writers like Burtchaell and Neuhaus is their lack of recognition that a Catholic education can be as valuable for those outside the tradition as those inside. If you have something that you believe makes sense, you ought to want to share it. If you restrict it, you cheapen it.

Of course it is true that shared things change by being shared. Catholics should not treat their educational institutions the way some evangelical Protestants treat their joy in Jesus—here it is, take it whether you want it or not, question your own faith but don't ask me to question mine. If that is what a Catholic education is meant to be, Catholic educators would be better off staying in their own academic subculture. Nor should Catholic colleges and universities simply copy the institutions of mainstream America. As David Riesman and Christopher Jencks wisely wrote in 1968, "The important question...is not whether a few Catholic universities prove capable of competing with Harvard or Berkeley on the latter's terms, but whether Catholicism can provide an

ideology and/or personnel for developing alter-natives to the Harvard-Berkeley model of excellence." I believe that the passage of time since they wrote these words has answered their question. Catholic colleges and universities that emphasize the Western tradition, pay serious attention to the needs of undergraduates, have the confidence not to make enemies of liberalism and science, and appreciate the human side of human beings have developed precisely such an alternative. That is why I teach at one of them.

To be sure, Boston College, like other Catholic institutions, is not what it was when it was all male, nearly all Irish, and overwhelmingly Catholic in the composition of its faculty. There are, I admit, too few priests on campus even for my comfort. But it remains recognizably Catholic, perhaps more recognizably Catholic for those who are not Catholic than for those who are. If that sounds like a paradox, perhaps my appreciation for the Catholic intellectual tradition has taught me the importance of paradoxical thinking.

Alan Wolfe is a professor of Political Science and the Director of the Boisi Center for Religion in American Public Life at Boston College.

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What Is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?

BY T. FRANK KENNEDY, S.J.

In 1982 after doctoral studies in music history at the University of California, I began teaching at a Jesuit college. In preparing my classes I quickly realized something that I had never noticed as a grad student. One could teach the history of western civilization through the history of western, sacred music, if one wanted to do so. I suppose that this was the first time I confronted part of the breadth of what we refer to as the "Catholic Intellectual Tradition." The first thought that I gleaned from this insight was something about this wideness that encompasses

Yeast: A Parable

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do we effectively advert to this creation that has as part of itself depth psychology, robots, space shuttles, trips to the moon?

There have been some beginnings in relating the faith to the known fullness of God's creation. One thinks of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose work was pioneering and remains invaluable, but who is now no longer entirely up-to-date. Ecology has become a theological issue, as we become increasingly aware of human beings' growing responsibility for God's creation around us. Anthropocentric thinking has made us consider how the universe we know from science appears somehow constituted from the beginning—the "big bang" that many postulate—to build up a world able to sustain humanity. But most of this work and other related work has not affected our devotional, liturgical, homiletic, and pastoral way of life, where the archaic visions of creation seem to linger. Paul tells us (Rom. 1:20) that we learn of God's grandeur from "the things He has made." But now that we have found out so much more about what these things really are, in our actual living of the faith we have yet to learn from them. We need to bring present knowledge of the actual universe to bear on such things as our thinking of God's creative act, of the life and life expectancy of the Church, of eschatological time, of the Incarnation and the Second Coming, and so much else.

The yeast that is the Kingdom has a great deal to engage itself with here.

And on what terrain more promising than that of Catholic institutions of higher education? The urgency that they be continued and strengthened is greater than ever before.

Moreover, this undertaking to engage the faith in God's real world would seem to demand pluralism. We cannot expect to draw from purely Catholic sources the knowledge we need for this vast enterprise. If the Catholic faith, the yeast, is to penetrate all of God's creation, we need the collaboration of all the knowledgeable people we can relate to. In a universe some 14 billion years old, the Church is very, very young. We need to look back to the real perspectives of the past to see how young we really are. Our work of understanding the relationship of the faith to the world is possibly the major devotional and pastoral and homiletic task of the years ahead, as well as a major task in other areas of theology. Fortunately, our faith is future-oriented. We have never felt called to get back to the Garden of Eden but to look to the future coming of Christ. The Catholic intellectual life that lies ahead is one we can welcome.

Walter Ong, S.J. (1912-2003) was a Professor of Humanities at Saint Louis University for 30 years, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. The very breadth of the tradition led me to consider the relativity of in-sights coming from a myriad of intellectual pursuits and sources that inform and form us. These sources all speak about human identity, and are often held in tension in the same way that the world and society are experienced in tension—a creative tension, dialogic in nature, always respecting the person, that finally says there are many truths that hold sway over us in our human complexities, and we are far from completely plumbing the depths of these mysterious truths. For instance, as a musicologist, I have often asked myself, Why is it that at times of great spiritual renewal

in the Church, the artistic expressions of that faith attempting to renew itself are often at a lesser level of beauty or complexity than other times? Shouldn't it be the opposite? How and why is it necessary for us to respect our consciences, but also respect the voice of the community attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit? These tensions that we experience are the wonders of our faith—the signs yet again in our times that the Spirit is alive as our faith seeks Wisdom.

T. Frank Kennedy S.J., is The Peter Canisius Chair, Director of the Jesuit Institute, and Chairperson of the Music Department at Boston College.

Living Conversations

Higher Education in a Catholic Context

BY MICHAEL HIMES

On one of the many occasions when he was asked why he had become a Catholic, Chesterton replied that he became Catholic because Catholicism is a community with a deep and rich sense of tradition. And, he said, belonging to a community with such a sense of tradition is extremely important because only then can one be freed from the most degrading of all forms of servitude—of being merely a child of one’s time. That is, I think, immensely wise. Being part of a tradition means that you do not have to speak with North Americans alone; you can speak with South Americans and Africans and Europeans and Asians and Australians. It also means that you are not confined to speaking only with late twentieth-century people; you can converse with Plato and Emily Dickinson and Mozart and Teresa of Avila. You can speak with Dante and Madame Curie, with Newton and Euclid and Jane Austen. You can talk with all sorts of people who are not of your own age and clime. You are freed from being merely a child of your time and place. In the Catholic tradition, we call this the communion of saints. That communion or conversation has been going on for a very long time—and you and I are invited to participate in it.

One of the richest elements in the Catholic intellectual tradition is its notion of the communion of saints, and within the Jesuit educational tradition one of the richest elements is the insistence on engaging in a transtemporal as well as a transspatial conversation. Our students desperately need such traditions so that they are not limited to their own contemporaries for companionship. This is a very important issue for those of us who teach in those traditions to consider: How do we introduce people into a living tradition, whether within the sciences or the humanities (and, I hope, both)?

I am inclined to think that one of the wisest principles of education that I have ever come across is what William James used to tell his students at Har-

vard at the beginning of this century. He called it “the pragmatic principle.” As James summed it up, the pragmatic principle is “if it’s true, it makes a difference; if it makes no difference, it’s not true.” Every term I urge my students to make that the measuring rod of everything I say, they say, or we read together in the courses I teach. If, for example, you can’t possibly imagine what difference it makes that God is triune; that is, it makes no difference to anyone, anywhere, anywhen (as James liked to put it), then effectively it is not true. One has to be able to see or, at least, to imagine, what difference any statement makes in order to declare

that statement true. This pragmatic principle, I suggest, is bred into Americans. We get it with our mother’s milk. And therefore it must be taken with great seriousness in the Catholic intellectual tradition as that tradition is lived out in this country. Thus, we cannot allow the formation of future intellectuals (and whom else are we teaching?) within the Catholic tradition to remain simply theoretical. For what we say to be seen as true, our students must see the concrete difference that our statements make. They must test out what we teach them. What we say to them about the value and dignity of human life must be experienced by them as making a difference in fact to someone, somewhere, somewhen. And it is certainly not enough for us to say, “Oh, well, there is the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and there are various summer service projects in which the students can go off and do all sorts of swell things for others.” We cannot allow that divorce between the lecture hall and their concrete experience. When students return to our campuses, they must find opportuni-

ties—and not in a few isolated courses—to reflect critically and, if at all possible, in a multidisciplinary way on their experiences in service and in other cultures. We cannot permit ourselves or them the mistake of thinking that “out there you do, in here we think.” Here we think about what is done there. We must lead them into critical thinking about their experience. And we should do all in our power to make certain that engagement in service for social justice is not limited to a few students or simply to those who choose to involve themselves. Indeed, those who do not choose it are most often precisely those who need it most.

Direct engagement in social justice and service to others is crucial to our students and to our task as their teachers.

Why is it so important? There are many reasons, but let me offer one that matters especially to a theologian. It has to do with what, with all due respect to Saint Anselm and Saint Thomas Aquinas, is the only effective proof for the existence of God that I know. There are many proofs for an “Unmoved Mover” or an “Uncaused Cause,” but that has nothing to do with the God who is least wrongly understood as pure and perfect self-gift. The proof of which I am thinking is found in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamozov*. Fairly early in the novel, Dostoevsky presents us with a series of conversations with Father Zosima, the wise and holy monk whose words continue to echo in the book long after he has died. The last of these conversations is with “a woman without faith.” An obviously distraught woman approaches Zosima to request his assistance with a problem that she says is destroying her. We quickly find out that she is in good health, prosperous, and seemingly untroubled in any obvious way. But she insists that something horrible

has happened to her and that her whole life is being drained of meaning and purpose. She goes so far as to tell the monk that if he cannot help her, she thinks she will kill herself. She explains that, at some point—she doesn’t know how, for there was no great crisis—she ceased to believe in God. It happened bit by bit, and she herself was shocked to realize that she no longer believed. Now everything is colorless, tasteless, to her. Everything has become ashes. She says, quoting Pushkin, nothing is real save the weeds that grow on her grave. Zosima tells her that what she is experiencing is the worst thing that can happen to a human being, and that he thinks he can help her. She must go home and every day, without fail, in the most concrete and practical way possible, she must love the people around her. If she does that, Zosima says, then bit by bit she will come to the point at which she cannot but believe in God. “This way,” he says, “has been tried; this way is certain.”

The whole of the novel is a commentary on this scene, a huge debate about Zosima’s tried and certain way. I think that Dostoevsky is right: the only workable proof for the existence of God is an experience, and that experience arises out of daily concrete and practical love for those around us.

After all, long ago, we were told by the author of the First Letter of John that anyone claiming to love God, whom he cannot see, while not loving the brother or sister whom he does see is a liar (I John 4:20). Not a liar in the sense of one who deliberately and knowingly tells an untruth, but rather one who speaks falsely because he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He cannot know what the word “God” means because God is *agape*, pure and perfect self-giving love. If that is the least wrong way to think about God, then one cannot know who God is—and therefore that God is—if one never knows agapic love. After all, to compare absolute Mystery to self-giving love isn’t very helpful if one has no clue what self-giving love is. Comparing

The End of Education

The Fragmentation of the American University

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

What should be the distinctive calling of the American Catholic university or college here and now? It should be to challenge its secular counterparts by recovering both for them and for itself a less fragmented conception of what an education beyond high school should be, by identifying what has gone badly wrong with even the best of secular universities. From a Catholic point of view, the contemporary secular university is not at fault because it is not Catholic. It is at fault insofar as it is not a university.

Yet the major Catholic universities seem unlikely to accept this calling, if only because their administrative leaders are for the most part hell-bent on imitating their prestigious secular counterparts, which already imitate one another. So we find Notre Dame glancing nervously at Duke, only to catch Duke in the act of glancing nervously at Princeton. What is it that makes this attitude so corrupting? What has gone wrong with the secular university?

Begin with some well-known and prosaic truths. Since the nineteenth century, the number of disciplines studied in American universities and colleges has steadily multiplied. To philosophy there were added psychology and political economy, soon to be transformed into economics, to which

were later added political science and sociology and anthropology. To mathematics and physics were added chemistry and biology. And within each of these particular disciplines, subdisciplines and later sub-subdisciplines multiplied. So it has been too with the study of Greek and Latin languages and literature to which were added first English, then French, German, and Italian, then Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi and.... So too it has been with the multiplication of historical studies, American, European, Asian, African, ancient, medieval, modern, political, social, economic.... And in all these areas there is a growing array of subdisciplines and sub-subdisciplines, not to speak of the introduction of creative writing, of theater arts, and...and...and....

The history of this multiplication of disciplines is, of course, also a history of increasing specialization by scholars, and of the transformation of university or college teachers into professionalized, narrowly focused researchers who also happen to teach; specialists whose professional success and standing depend in large part on the degree of their identification with some particular subdiscipline or subsubdiscipline. Each part of the curriculum is someone's responsibility, but no one has a responsibility for making the connections between the parts. To whom should this matter?

It should matter to anyone who thinks it important what conception of human nature and the human condition students have arrived at by the time they enter the adult workplace and therefore to any Catholic. For each of the academic disciplines teaches us something significant about some aspect of human nature and the human condition. Physics tells us which particles and forces compose the body as a material object, while chemistry and biochemistry examine it as the site of various exchanges and reactions. What the functioning structures of complex living organisms, such as ourselves, are and how they have evolved we learn from biology, while sociology, anthropology, economics, and history make human beings intelligible in and through their changing cultural and social relationships. Philosophy—together with the history of inquiry—shows us how and why we are able to move toward a more and more adequate understanding of ourselves and our environments, from time to time transcending the limitations of previous modes of understanding. That human beings are also in key part what they imagine themselves to be, and how, without works of imagination, human life is diminished, we can only learn from literary and other aesthetic studies. Yet, when we have learned what all these different types of disciplines have to teach—and the catalogue is far from complete—we confront questions that have so far gone unasked, just because they are not questions answerable from within any one discipline.

Ours is a culture in which there is the sharpest of contrasts between the rigor and integrity with which issues of detail are discussed within each specialized discipline and the self-indulgent shoddiness of so much of public debate on large and general issues of great import (compare Lawrence Summers on economics with Lawrence Summers on gender issues, Cardinal Schönborn on theology with Cardinal Schönborn on evolution). One reason for this contrast is the absence of a large educated public, a public with shared standards of argument and inquiry and some shared conception of the central questions that we need to address. Such a public

the Unknown to the unknown isn't very helpful. One must have the concrete experience of *agape* to understand who God is and, more importantly, to experience that God is. And if belief in the existence of God—which is, among other things, affirmation of purpose, and meaning in life—is central to one's existence as a fully human being (and I cannot imagine how the question whether there is purpose and meaning in life is not), and if education is not merely vocational training but the development of a fully human being, and further, if the tried and certain way to belief in God is concrete and practical love of others, then direct engagement in social justice and service to others is crucial to our students and to our task as their teachers. Not just an important auxiliary—crucial. We cannot introduce others into the Catholic intellectual tradition without it.

Michael Himes is a priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Professor of Theology at Boston College.

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What Is the Catholic Intellectual Tradition?

BY FRED LAWRENCE

At its best, Rome (taken symbolically) epitomized the vision of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition by its reception of both Jerusalem (seat of Abrahamic religion) and Athens (seat of philosophy and science). This creative receptivity entails living out of the tension between reason and faith with intellectual honesty. This is exemplified in Thomas Aquinas' respect for heretics and adversaries because they help us to discover truth we have

not yet understood; and in Ignatius Loyola's insistence "that every good Christian ought to be more willing to give a good interpretation to the statement of another than to condemn it as false."

Alongside the two greatest works on education—Plato's *Republic* and Rousseau's *Emile*—stands Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, which warns that the Bible is not a book of science and encourages Christians to learn all they can about nature in order to understand it. Further, the medieval

distinction between nature and super-nature, between reason and faith, issued an invitation to reason to claim its proper field of inquiry, to work out its own methods, to operate on the basis of autonomous principles. It was no accident that universities began in a Catholic context, because Love bestows the fullness of life on human intelligence.

Fred Lawrence is an Associate Professor of Theology at Boston College.

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The End of Education

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would be a good deal less willing to allow issues that need to be debated to be defined by those who are so wedded in advance to their own particular partisan answers that they have never found out what the questions are. And it would be unwilling to tolerate the straitjacketing of debate, so characteristic of television, within two-to-five-minute periods, during which each participant interrupts and talks down the others.

The adoption of such a curriculum would serve both universities and the wider society well. But it would be of particular significance for a Catholic university and for the Catholic community. Newman argued that it is theology that is the integrative and unifying discipline needed by any university, secular, Protestant, or Catholic. And it is in the light afforded by the Catholic faith and more especially by Catholic doctrines concerning human nature and the human condition that theologians have a unique contribution to make in addressing the questions that ought to be central to an otherwise secular curriculum. It is not just that Catholic theology has its own distinctive answers to those questions, but that we can learn from it a way of addressing those questions, not just as theoretical inquiries, but as questions with practical import for our lives, asked by those who are open to God's self-revelation. Theology can become an education in how to ask such questions.

On this point, it may be said that theology departments are unlikely to achieve this goal, if only because they commonly suffer from the same ills of specialization and fragmentation as other departments. Yet of course the degree to which this is so varies a great deal from university to university. It is also true that everything or almost everything that must be taught in a reformed curriculum is already taught somewhere in most universities, yet not at present in a way that allows

students to bring together the various things that they learn, so that they can understand what is at stake in answering the key questions. We do possess the intellectual resources to bring about the kind of change I propose. What we lack, in Catholic and in secular universities, is the will to change, and that absence of will is a symptom of a quite unwarranted complacency concerning our present state and our present direction.

"What then about specialized training for research?" someone will ask. Ours, they may say, is a knowledge-based economy and we cannot do without specialized researchers. The type of curriculum that I am proposing may teach students to ask questions in a disciplined way, something that is certainly a valuable preliminary to instruction in genuine research techniques, but it does not begin to supply the apprenticeship that researchers at the cutting edge need. Indeed it does not. It is liberal education, not job training. But the lesson is to get rid of the confusions generated by our predecessors' admiration for the German research university and to supply both a liberal education in the arts and sciences and, for those who aspire to it, a professional, specialized training in research in the natural or the human sciences. The curriculum I am proposing, including theology, could perhaps be taught in three well-structured and strenuous years. A fourth year would thereby become available for research or professional training. We do not have to sacrifice training in research in order to provide our students with a liberal education, just as we do not have to fragment and deform so much of our students' education, as we do now.

Alasdair A. McIntyre is the Rev. John A. O'Brien Senior Research Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame.

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The Holy See and the Challenges of Catholic Higher Education in the United States

BY + J. MICHAEL MILLER, CSB

When they are true to the mission expected of them, Catholic universities propose a particular vision that animates their intellectual life and engages their scholars in a common project. Such a vision is all embracing, since it entails a distinctively Catholic way of apprehending reality that inspires a university's teaching, scholarship, and service. A Catholic university lives from, breathes, and seeks to transmit—through its curriculum, research, and professors—a *Weltanschauung* grounded in a great tradition.

This means more than a presentation of the Catholic intellectual tradition in the university's curriculum and lip service to that tradition in the faculty's scholarly activities. A Catholic vision can be relished, deepened, and communicated only by giving it more than equal time in a marketplace of competing opinions. One could expect as much—though this does not, admittedly, always occur—from a university faithful to the liberal tradition of openness to all points of view. For its part, a Catholic university is the responsible bearer of a vision and tradition that can enrich the wider academic and social communities, which look to it to be distinctive.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the rise of a new spirit of international cooperation promoted the internationalization of higher education. As the need to establish worldwide contacts and a global perspective became increasingly apparent, student and faculty exchanges, research collaboration, foreign language, and area study programs expanded rapidly.¹

The first steps of overcoming a deep-rooted American academic isolationism—always out of step with a Church that treasures universality—have already been taken in many universities. This is good news. But a fresh challenge still lies ahead. How can Catholic colleges and universities in the United States practically foster not just academic inter-nationalization but a cul-

ture of global educational solidarity?

The current situation is complex. On the one hand, globalization enables faculty and students to work and study anywhere and, through technology, to bring some measure of equal access to information by all institutions. On the other hand, in many ways the process of globalization also reinforces existing educational inequality.² The universities that are reaping the lions share of the benefits of an information-based economy are those from developed countries. They have the resources to invest in costly information networks and, through their centers of research, to create new knowledge, over which they enjoy a near monopoly.

The other universities, including most of those in developing countries, although they benefit from this communications revolution, remain consumers of the new technology.³ In many ways, then, the process of globalization is serving to widen the gap between “have” and “have not” academic institutions. This process has become an instrument for “a new version of colonialism.”⁴

The Catholic university, with its vision founded on the Gospel, offers a way to close the gap. Take, for example, the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) and apply it to the Catholic Academy in the United States. This parable leaves no doubt, writes Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est*, that “anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbor. The concept of ‘neighbor’ is now universalized, yet it remains concrete.”⁵ Concern for our neighbor—and here every Catholic university should think specifically of its academic neighbors—“transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world.”⁶

While the Holy Father refrains from drawing any concrete implications for the world of higher education, he opens the door for us to ask: Where is my neighbor university? How do educational institutions at the service of the whole Church and committed to the

Gospel, give practical expression to being Good Academic Samaritans? What can American Catholic universities do to mitigate the chronic discrepancies in the quality of higher education that mar the universal Church? For the Vatican, the unevenness of the resources available to Church-sponsored institutions in the one Body remains a matter of the gravest concern.

In a joint statement recently issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, the Holy See called for an increased exchange of educational resources by institutions of the first world with those from developing regions: “In the light of the mission of the university to serve, this educational divide can be an opportunity and an avenue where this mandate for service can be realized.”⁷ The global educational gap in Catholic institutions, evident sometimes even among universities sponsored by the same religious institute, can be overcome only by heightened cooperative efforts.

In the United States, there is enormous pressure for universities to be recognized as first-class institutions, ranked according to criteria which allot no points for initiatives on behalf of educational solidarity. Given this situation, what imaginative and courageous steps can be taken to create partnerships with institutions in the emerging nations? In those countries, especially in Africa, the need for Catholic higher education has never been more evident. In truth, Church-related colleges and universities are key to these countries' future integral human, economic, and cultural development.

Certainly no silver-bullet solutions are available. Nonetheless, a true mark of a university's catholicity is the extent to which it takes to heart the need to tithe its own academic and financial resources so as to help build up systems of Catholic higher education in the local churches of developing countries. Collaboration is a concrete expression of educational solidarity and ecclesial communion.

Such cooperation should become a distinguishing trait of all Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. What they must bring to others is an educational vision inspired by a courageous and unwavering fidelity to the principles and practices proposed by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. To begin the laborious task of closing the educational divide, the Holy See calls for effective solidarity, an exchange of academic gifts and resources, between wealthy and successful institutions and those still on the road to development.

Endnotes

1 Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, *Globalization and Catholic Higher Education: Working Document* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2004), Part One, II, 13.

2 Cf. Philip G. Altbach, “Globalization and the University: Myths and Realities in an Unequal World,” *Seminarium* 42:3-4 (2002), 811-813.

3 Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, *Globalization and Catholic Higher Education: Working Document* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2004), Part One, II, 13-14.

4 John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (27 April 2001), 4; *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 18 (2 May 2001), 7.

5 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 15.

6 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 30.

7 Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, *Globalization and Catholic Higher Education: Working Document* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2004), 19. See the major publications of the conference, held from 2-6 December 2002 in Rome, in the special volume dedicated to this theme in the Congregation for Catholic Education's journal, *Seminarium*, 42:3-4 (2002).

Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB, is the Secretary of Catholic Education (for Seminaries and Institutes of Study) of the Holy See.

This excerpt is from an address given at Boston College on September 11, 2006. Reprinted with permission of the author.

A Vocation for Catholic Higher Education?

BY STEPHEN POPE

Tuition, room, and board for many Catholic universities runs on average between \$40,000 and \$45,000 per year. The cost of tuition continues to rise faster than both income and inflation. Add transportation, books, fees, and other miscellaneous expenses, and the total cost of a four-year bachelor's degree often tops the \$180,000 mark at the most prestigious schools. About 60 percent of students at all private four-year institutions receive some form of financial aid, and about half of all students are forced to borrow to meet expenses. The steep debt incurred over the course of four years typically requires many times that number of years of repayment. Given this expense, many fear that in the years to come only the most affluent may be able to afford a Catholic college education.

This cost should be placed in the context of the growing income inequality between the rich and poor in our society. On June 19, 1996, the United States Census Bureau reported that since 1968 the average income of households in the bottom 20 percent of earners rose a mere 0.8 percent (from \$7,702 to \$7,762), while the average income of the top 20 percent of earners rose a staggering 44 percent (from \$73,754 to \$105,945). The economic value of a college degree continues to rise as the widening income gap between those with and those without a degree demonstrates. College, more than ever, is a long-term financial investment that, on average, pays substantial economic dividends. But the rising cost of this education, coupled with the economic benefits that it yields, raises questions about the relation of Catholic universities to the poor and less affluent.

Add to this combination of the escalating costs of education and the rising income inequality in our society the danger of increasingly isolating college students from the poor and making them less sensitive to poor people's proper worth and rightful claims. Catholic higher education should not become simply one more familiar route for the recycling of the

upper middle class, in essence no different from other private universities. Catholic universities cannot simply be places where well-to-do students receive a good education in order to assume their place in the next generation of corporate and professional elites. How does education of the relatively affluent (and sometimes the absolutely rich) relate to concern for those on the other end of the social and economic spectrum?

Two theologians, Jon Sobrino and John Henry Newman, have something to say about the inevitable tensions underlying this question. According to

world. Sobrino believes that speaking the truth is the best remedy for social injustice. Above all, knowledge must be put at the service of the poor. Only in this way is the Catholic university's true catholicity affirmed—that is, its openness to the worth of all people and not just the economic elite.

The Catholic university cannot therefore be understood in Sobrino's analysis as the scene of "value-free," politically neutral intellectual activity. It should be conceived Christocentrically—in light of the Cross and as an expression of Jesus' uncompromising love for the poor. Sobrino poses to the

Institutions of higher education that are at once true universities and genuinely Catholic must be characterized in terms of both an "enlargement of heart" and an "enlargement of mind."

Jon Sobrino of San Salvador's Central American University, compassion must have the central place in the life of the Catholic university. College students and universities themselves must learn to embrace the "preferential option for the poor." Sobrino argues that if the Catholic university is to exist in a world of massive suffering and not function simply as an "ivory tower," it must be committed to the poor. Far from paternalistic philanthropy, the preferential option entails solidarity—identifying with the poor, being converted by them, and participating in movements for their empowerment. If the Catholic university does not actively side with the poor in appropriate ways, it will tacitly side with the status quo and reinforce present structures of injustice, oppression, and exclusion.

The university is a place where students and faculty search for the truth, make discoveries, and communicate findings and insights to the wider

Catholic university the question: "What can we do to take the crucified people down from their crosses?" Whereas knowledge has all too frequently been used to support oppression, it ought now to be put at the service of the poor and for the eradication of their suffering. Not only theology and philosophy, but also political science, sociology, and other disciplines can be taught in a way that gives centrality to the needs of the poor.

Perhaps the strongest challenge to Sobrino's position is found in John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*. In his fifth discourse, Newman examined the question of the utility value of a college education (something a lot of undergraduates wonder about during final exams week). Human beings naturally desire to know and the principal virtue of the university lies in its service of this need rather than any other. In contrast to even the most learned and intellectually demanding

training in the professions and business, liberal education in the true sense of the term is not intended to serve what is beyond itself. This is not to say that it is a good thing for college graduates to be driving cabs or bartending, only that the most important feature of college is how it expands the mind, not the wallet. It is both true and good that higher education and knowledge also provide career opportunities and financial advantages, but these benefits are not the primary objectives of education.

But what about compassion? Newman regarded knowledge as valuable in itself whether or not its discovery is either justified directly by utility or, by implication, motivated by compassion. "Knowledge is one thing, virtue is another; good sense is not conscience, refinement is not humility, nor is largess and justness of view faith. Liberal education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman." By "gentleman," Newman meant not a polite person with refined sensibilities, but rather one who has a "philosophic habit of mind" and "a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life...the connatural qualities of a large knowledge." This "enlargement of mind" continues to be a powerful antidote to bigotry, apathy, and social myopia.

Though a creature of his time, Newman provides a helpful corrective to the danger of an exclusive focus on what Sobrino sees as central, compassion. Insisting that the search for knowledge be motivated primarily by compassion amounts to a drastic elimination of one of the most fundamental features of what makes us human. The university ought to be a place where students come to greater understanding of things, worth knowing for their own sakes, a place where the love of learning is not supplanted by other objectives, however legitimate in themselves, and where knowledge is not instrumentalized to other values.

Yet, upholding the intrinsic value of the "enlargement of mind" need not be at odds with acknowledging the place of compassion in the life of an educated

Catholic Influences on the Human Rights Project

BY MARY ANN GLENDON

If you are like most Americans, and like me before I got interested in the Universal Declaration, you probably do not stay up nights thinking about the United Nations and its various pronouncements. So let me begin with a little background on the Universal Declaration, and why it seemed to me to be worth studying. During World War II, the idea began to percolate that there should be some kind of international bill of rights—a common standard to which all nations could aspire—and by which they could measure their own and each other's progress.

One of the first suggestions came from Pope Pius XII, who called in a June 1941 radio address for an international bill recognizing the rights that flowed from the dignity of the person.¹ Another came from the British writer H.G. Wells in a little pamphlet subtitled “What Are We Fighting For?”² But in practical terms, the most consequential support came from several Latin American countries, who comprised twenty-one of the original fifty-five member nations of the UN when it was founded in 1945.

It was largely due to the insistence of the Latin Americans, joined by other small nations, that the UN established a Human Rights Commission, composed of members from eighteen different countries. It was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, who was just then making a new life for herself after the death of her husband.

When the Human Rights Commission set to work in early 1947, its first major task was to draft a “bill of rights” to which persons of all nations and cultures could subscribe. But that assignment rested upon a couple of problematic assumptions: no one really knew whether there were any such common principles, or what they might be. So UNESCO asked a group of philosophers—some well known in the West, like Jacques Maritain, and others from Confucian, Hindu, and Muslim countries—to examine the question. These philoso-

phers sent a questionnaire to still more leading thinkers all over the world, from Mahatma Gandhi to Teilhard de Chardin, and in due course they reported that, somewhat to their surprise, they had found that there were a few common standards of decency that were widely shared, though not always formulated in the language of rights. Their conclusion was that this practical consensus was enough to enable the project to go forward.

The judgment of the philosophers was borne out by the experience of the delegates on the Human Rights Commission. This group, too, was highly diverse, but they had few disagreements over the content of the Declaration. Their disputes were chiefly political, and chiefly involved the Soviet Union and the United States hurling accusations of hypocrisy against each other.

On December 10, 1948, the document was adopted by the UN General Assembly as a “common standard of achievement.” There were no dissenting votes, although the Soviet bloc, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa recorded abstentions. The Declaration quickly became the principal inspiration of the postwar international human rights movement; the model for the majority of rights instruments in the world—over ninety in all—and it serves today as the single most important reference point for discussions of human rights in international settings.

But the more the human rights idea caught on, the fiercer became the contests over the meanings of the provisions of the Declaration. So, after returning from the Beijing Women's Conference, I decided to read up a bit on the original understanding of the Declaration. I expected to just go to the library and check out a book or two. But to my surprise, there were no histories of the framing at that time, apart from three doctoral theses, all done at European universities. So I began to read the primary sources myself.

It did not take long to realize that the framers of the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), like

legal drafters everywhere, had done a good deal of copying. They drew many provisions from existing constitutions and rights instruments that the staff of the UN Human Rights Division had collected from all over the world. They relied most heavily of all on two draft proposals for international bills that were themselves based on extensive cross-national research. One of these proposals was prepared under the auspices of the American Law Institute, and the other was a Latin American document that became the 1948 Bogotá Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man.

The final draft produced by Mrs. Roosevelt's commission was a synthesis drawn from many sources—and thus a document that differed in many ways from our familiar Anglo-American rights instruments—most noticeably in its inclusion of social and economic rights, and in its express acknowledgment that rights are subject to duties and limitations. It also differed from socialist charters, notably with its strong emphasis on political and civil liberties.

Several features of the Declaration set it apart from both Anglo-American and Soviet bloc documents. Consider the following: its pervasive emphasis on the “inherent dignity” and “worth of the human person”; the affirmation that the human person is “endowed with reason and conscience”; the right to form trade unions; the worker's right to just remuneration for himself and his family; the recognition of the family as the “natural and fundamental group unit of society,” entitled as such to “protection by society and the state”; the prior right of parents to choose the education of their children; and a provision that motherhood and childhood are entitled to “special care and assistance.”³

Where did those ideas come from? The immediate source was the twentieth-century constitutions of many Latin American and continental European countries. But where did the Latin Americans and continental Europeans get them? The proximate answer to that question is: mainly from the programs of political parties,

Catholic. Catholic higher education includes not only intellectual development, but also the further cultivation of those traits that are characteristically Catholic and Christian, including love of God and love of neighbor. If this is true, then we need to recognize that the well-spoken and prosperous professional who makes substantial financial contributions to university development funds but is utterly indifferent to the suffering of the poor should not be taken as a model graduate of a Catholic university. Catholic universities have certainly generated those who fit this image, but we ought to recognize this for what it is—a university's success in financial and social terms but not an exemplar of its core ideals. Sobrino is fundamentally correct on this score. The credibility of the Catholic university lies neither in its endowment, nor in its graduation rate, nor in the power and status of its alumni, but in whether its graduates are genuinely concerned about “taking the crucified people down from their crosses.”

Most people will agree that to graduate from a Catholic university and somehow not to have significantly enhanced one's ability to think more deeply about the world, one's nature, and one's identity is to have “missed the point” of college. We should regard compassion in an analogous way, recognizing that to graduate from a Catholic college without a more developed awareness of the needs of the poor and one's own social responsibility to them is also really to have “missed the point.” Institutions of higher education that are at once true universities and genuinely Catholic must be characterized in terms of both an “enlargement of heart” and an “enlargement of mind.”

Stephen Pope is a Professor of Theology at Boston College.

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Catholic Influences on the Human Rights Project

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parties of a type that did not exist in the United States, Britain, or the Soviet bloc, namely, Christian Democratic and Christian Social parties.

But where did the politicians get their ideas about the family, work, civil society, and the dignity of the person? The answer to that is: mainly from the social encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). And where did the Church get them? The short answer is that those encyclicals were part of the process through which the Church had begun to reflect on the Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century revolutions, socialism, and the labor question in the light of Scripture, tradition, and her own experience as an “expert in humanity.”⁴

The most articulate advocate of this whole complex of ideas on the Human Rights Commission was a Lebanese Arab of the Orthodox faith, Charles Malik. In reading the old UN transcripts, was struck by Malik’s frequent use of terms like the “intermediate associations” of civil society, and by his emphatic preference for the term “person” rather than “individual.” When I had the opportunity to meet Charles Malik’s son, Dr. Habib Malik, I asked Dr. Malik if he knew where his father had acquired that vocabulary. The answer was: from the heavily underlined copies of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* which Malik kept among the books he most frequently consulted. Charles Malik thus seems to have been one of the first of an impressive line of non-Catholic intellectuals who found a treasure-trove of ideas in Catholic social teaching.

The most zealous promoters of social and economic rights, contrary to what is now widely supposed, were not the Soviet bloc representatives, but delegates from the Latin American countries. Except for the Mexican delegates, most of these people were inspired not by Marx and Engels but by Leo XIII and Pius XI. Their focus was not on the exploitation of man by man, but on the dignity of workers and the preferential option for the poor.

I think I have said enough to show

that the contributions of Catholic social thought to the Universal Declaration were far from insignificant. But to avoid any misunderstanding, let me emphasize again that this was just one of many sources of influence on that impressively multicultural document.

Now I would like to turn to a consideration of some of the ways in which that influence was reciprocated.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS IDEA ON CATHOLICISM

Here the trail is harder to follow, but I believe it begins in Paris in 1948 when the Human Rights Commissioners were trying to round up support from as many nations as possible for the final vote on the Declaration in the UN General Assembly. A key figure in that lobbying process was the French member of the Commission, René Cassin. Cassin was a distinguished French lawyer who described himself as a secular Jew. He had lost twenty-nine relatives in concentration camps, and was later to win the Nobel Peace Prize for his human rights activities. There is an intriguing sentence in Cassin’s memoirs where he says that in the fall of 1948 he was aided on several occasions by the “discreet personal encouragements” of the Papal Nuncio in Paris.⁵ That Nuncio was none other than Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII.

Roncalli’s subsequent actions suggest that events in the UN that fall must have made a great impression on him. It also seems clear that he must have agreed with Maritain and other Catholic thinkers that there was value in discussing certain human goods as rights, even though the biblical tradition uses the language of obligation. In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII referred to the Universal Declaration by name and called it “an act of the highest importance.”⁶

Many Catholics were surprised, and some were even shocked, at the extent to which the documents of Vatican II, and John XXIII’s encyclicals *Pacem in Terris* and *Mater et Magistra*, seemed to reflect a shift from natural law to human rights.⁷ Some writers regard this shift as mainly rhetorical, an effort

on the part of the Church to make her teachings intelligible to “all men and women of good will.”⁸

But I believe it was more than that. I would say it was also part of the Church’s shift from nature to history, as well as her increasing openness to learning from other traditions. The Church has always taught, with St. Paul, that our knowledge of truth in this life is imperfect; that “now we see only as in a mirror dimly.” But she has not always been so forceful as John Paul II was in *Centesimus Annus* when he insisted that Christian believers are obliged to remain open to discover “every fragment of truth...in the life experience and in the culture of individuals and nations.”⁹ A hallmark of the thought of John Paul II has been his sense of being in partnership with all of humanity in a shared quest for a better apprehension of truth.

With hindsight, we can see that Vatican II only marked the beginning of the Church’s appropriation of modern rights discourse.¹⁰ As one of the younger Council Fathers, Bishop Karol Wojtyła from Krakow shared John XXIII’s appreciation of the postwar human rights project. John Paul II repeatedly praised the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, calling it “one of the highest expressions of the human conscience of our time” and “a real milestone on the path of the moral progress of humanity.”¹¹

Needless to say, the Church’s adoption of rights language entailed the need to be very clear about the fact that she does not always use that terminology in the same way it is used in secular circles. Those who think the Church should never have gone down that road at all often fail to notice two important facts about the Church’s use of rights language. First, the rights tradition into which the Church has tapped is the biblically informed, continental, dignitarian tradition which she herself had already done so much to shape. “The Catholic doctrine of human rights,” Avery Dulles points out, “is not based on Locke, an empiricism, or individualism. It has a more ancient and distinguished pedigree.”¹²

Second, the Church did not even

uncritically adopt the dignitarian vision. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council Fathers say that the movement to respect human rights “must be imbued with the spirit of the Gospel and be protected from all appearance of mistaken autonomy. We are tempted to consider our personal rights as fully protected only when we are free from every norm of divine law; but following this road leads to the destruction rather than to the maintenance of the dignity of the human person.”¹³ In the same vein, John XXIII noted in *Pacem in Terris* that everything the Church says about human rights is conditioned by their foundation in the dignity that attaches to the person made in the image and likeness of God, and everything is oriented to the end of the common good. And when John Paul II sent his good wishes to the UN on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration in 1998, he challenged the assembly with these words: “Inspired by the example of all those who have taken the risk of freedom, can we not recommit ourselves also to taking the risk of solidarity—and thus the risk of peace?”¹⁴

Some of the most striking interactions between Catholic social thought and human rights have occurred in the field of international advocacy. With over 300,000 educational, health care, and relief agencies serving mainly the world’s poorest inhabitants, the Church has become an outspoken advocate of social justice in international settings. But it is a hard sell. Challenging passages like this one from the 1997 World Day of Peace message do not sit particularly well with affluent nations and first-world interest groups:

Living out [the] demanding commitment [to solidarity] requires a total reversal of the alleged values which make people seek only their own good: power, pleasure, the unscrupulous accumulation of wealth ...A society of genuine solidarity can be built only if the well-off, in helping the poor, do not stop at giving from what they do not need. Those living in poverty can wait no longer. They need help now, and so have a *right* to receive immediately what they

need [emphasis supplied].

At first glance, words like “a right to receive what one needs” sound uncomfortably like simplistic, secular social advocacy. But the Church’s use of rights language in this context cannot be equated with crude mandates for state-run social engineering programs. For one thing, the Church has always refrained from proposing specific models: her gift to political science has been, rather, the principle of subsidiarity—which is steadily attracting interest in the secular world.

Moreover, the Church teaches solidarity not as a policy, but as a Virtue—a virtue which inclines us to overcome sources of division within ourselves and within society. Like any other virtue, solidarity requires constant practice; it is inseparable from personal reform.

The Church’s advocacy for the preferential option for the poor has led her to become a staunch defender of the Universal Declaration as an integrated whole. While most nations take a selective approach to human rights, the Holy See consistently lifts up the original vision of the Declaration—a vision in which political and civil rights are indispensable for social and economic justice, and vice versa. At a time when affluent nations seem increasingly to be washing their hands of poor countries and peoples, it is often the Holy See, and only the Holy See, that keeps striving to bring together the two halves of the divided soul of the human rights project—its resounding affirmation of freedom and its insistence on one human family for which all bear a common responsibility.

As for the future, I believe the dialogue between Catholicism and the human rights tradition will continue, and that it will be beneficial to both. One may even imagine that the resources of the Catholic tradition may be helpful in resolving several thorny dilemmas that have bedeviled the human rights project from its outset, especially the dilemmas arising from challenges to its universality and its truth claims. A fuller exposition of that point would require another lecture, but let me briefly sketch some ways in which Catholic thinkers might be helpful with regard to these problems.

Take for example the dilemma of how there can be universal rights in

view of the diversity among cultures which has recently resurfaced with a vengeance. A number of Asian and Islamic leaders (unlike the Asian and Islamic representatives on the original Human Rights Commission) take the position that all rights are culturally relative. They claim that so-called universal rights are really just instruments of Western cultural imperialism.

The long Catholic experience in the dialectic between the core teachings of the faith and the various cultural settings in which the faith has been received helps us to see that to accept universal principles does not mean accepting that they must be brought to life in the same way everywhere. The experience of Catholicism, with the enculturation of its basic teachings, shows that universality need not entail homogeneity. In fact, the whole Church has been enriched by the variety of ways in which the faith has been expressed around the world.

The framers of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had similar expectations for the relatively short list of rights that they deemed fundamental. Their writings reveal that they contemplated a legitimate pluralism in forms of freedom, a variety of means of protecting basic rights, and different ways of resolving the tensions among rights, provided that no rights were completely subordinated to others. As Jacques Maritain put it, there can be many different kinds of music played on the Declaration’s thirty strings.

It seems unfortunate that that pluralist understanding has been almost completely forgotten, even by friends of the human rights project. For the more that Western groups promote a top-down, homogenizing vision of human rights, the more credibility they add to the charge of Western cultural imperialism.

Another dilemma for the human rights project is the challenge of historicism and relativism. If there are no common truths to which all men and women can appeal, then there are no human rights, and there is little hope that reason and choice can prevail over force and accident in the realm of human affairs. It is one thing to acknowledge that the human mind can glimpse truth only as through a glass darkly, and quite another to deny the existence of truth altogether.

Hannah Arendt has warned that “The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction... and the distinction between true and false...no longer exist.”¹⁵

At a time when much of the post-modern secular academy seems to have given up on reason and the search for truth, it is heartening to read the spirited defense of reason in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. The “reason” that the Church defends is not the calculating reason of Hobbes, in the service of the passions, nor is it narrow scientific rationalism. It is the dynamic, recurrent, and potentially self-correcting process of experiencing, understanding, and judging that has animated her best theologians from Thomas Aquinas to Bernard Lonergan.

Endnotes

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Mary Ann Glendon is the Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard University.

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Infinite Wonder of the Divine

How Creationist Notions of Intelligent Design Diminish God

BY GEORGE COYNE, S.J.

Will the universe ever end? Can we rely on it to continue on and on? The most recent measurements of the velocities of recession of very distant objects in the universe, supernovae, which can serve as standard “light beacons” at distances of about 10 to 12 billion light years from us, indicate that the universe is not only still expanding but that it is accelerating in its expansion and will, unless we discover a braking mechanism, expand forever—an empirically infinite universe.

Several important issues need to be explained here. To measure such large distances, we must use probes that are so distant that we cannot experiment upon them. We can only observe them and, in fact, we are limited very much by what we can observe. An astronomer is like the poor old fellow who, while making his way home in the dark and a bit tipsy, loses his watch. While he is searching for it under a lamppost, a gallant policeman comes along and inquires about his activity. He explains that he is looking for his watch. “Well,” says the cop, “did you lose it here?” “Oh no,” says he, “but it’s so dark all around that this is the only place with light enough that I could possibly find it.” As you will see, to measure the age of the universe, astronomers must cleverly, and hopefully more soberly than the gentleman searching for his watch, probe where there is light and even then, since light travels with a finite velocity, we are seeing the universe only as it was, not as it is. “Light beacons” are celestial objects that have the same intrinsic brightness wherever they are in the universe and can, therefore, serve as distance indicators.

Do a simple experiment. Measure the brightness of the lamp sitting on your desk. Now go to the next room, four times farther away from the lamp, and measure its brightness. It will be one-sixteenth as bright (diminished by the inverse square of the distance). Now reverse the experiment. You know the intrinsic brightness of the lamp, as cosmologists do that of supernovae, and you know how bright it appears to you

from the next room, as cosmologists do by measuring the apparent brightness of supernovae. You can, therefore, deduce the distance.

So, if we measure the distance and brightness of objects at increasingly larger distances in the universe, we can establish the curve of expansion of the universe and thereby deduce its age. Let me explain. What we are measuring is how fast all objects, outside our sun-centered system, are moving away from one another at various epochs in the

clusters of galaxies of all types, quasars, and supernovae. It is so universally true that we intuitively surmise that it is saying something fundamental about the universe itself. And it is. It is telling us that the universe is expanding uniformly. But there is even more to the story.

There are several kinds of supernovae. Astronomers have found that the type about which I am speaking can serve as a light beacon despite its very strange and unstable energy source. These supernovae are binary

expanding infinitely.

To appreciate the current age of the universe and its temporal infinitude, we must compare it to the times at which other events, such as the appearance of life, have occurred. To do this, I suggest that the actual age of the universe, 13.7 billion years, for which we have no sensation, be reduced in our imagination to one Earth year, one rotation of the Earth about the sun. The following calendar results:

1 January: The Big Bang
7 February: The Milky Way is born
14 August: The Earth is born
4 September: First life on the Earth
15 December: The Cambrian explosion
25 December: The dinosaurs appear
30 December: Extinction of the dinosaurs
31 December
19.00.00: First human ancestors
23.58.00: First humans
23.59.30: Age of Agriculture
23.59.47: The pyramids
23.59.58: Jesus Christ is born
23.59.59: Galileo is born
24.00.00: Today

We see that the dinosaurs, although having the good fortune to have been born on Christmas Day, only lived for five days. It took 60 percent of the age of the universe for the first life to appear on the Earth, but once the Earth was formed, it took only 21 days or about 6 percent of the age of the universe for life to appear, but then it took about 3 months for the first humans. However, the last day of the year provides startling news. Jesus Christ was born only two seconds before the end of the year and Galileo one second. We now have some idea of where we humans stand with respect to the age of the universe.

In the course of the aging of the universe, the human person has come to be through the process of physical, chemical, and biological evolution. As to the evolutionary process, I offer the following brief considerations.

Why did it take 60 percent of the age of the universe for life to begin?

*The universe is not God
and it cannot exist independently of God.
God is working with the universe.*

history of the universe. At one time, not long after the Big Bang, all of these objects were “together.” So we can extrapolate backwards to the time when they began to separate and, thereby, measure the age of the universe, 13.7 billion years.

This is a simple calculation like the following analogous one. Suppose I run a marathon at a constant rate of 4 miles per hour. You are standing at the 20-mile marker with clock in hand. It is easy for you, knowing my rate and that you are at 20 miles from the beginning, to calculate when I began.

Using this simple calculation, in 1929 Edwin Hubble discovered the observational relationship that bears his name, “the Hubble Law,” and made the first calculation of the age of the universe from its expansion. He found for 24 galaxies that their velocities of recession were directly proportional to their distances. He later extended the measurements to more galaxies at larger distances. A modern version of these pioneering observations confirms the Hubble Law but with much greater accuracy. In the entire history of observational astronomy this is a remarkable correlation. It holds true for all extragalactic objects: galaxies of all types,

stars in which a white dwarf, a dead star whose mass is very compact so that it has a very large gravity field, sucks matter from its companion giant star. It becomes suddenly millions of times brighter by starting a thermonuclear furnace in its atmosphere from the matter accumulated. This is obviously a very unstable event and lasts for only hundreds of days (the stars involved are about 10 billion years old). Nonetheless, we have found that the maximum brightness that it attains can be an excellent light beacon and indicator of distance as I have explained above. By measuring these distances and the velocity of these supernovae, we find that the universe is accelerating in its expansion. This result causes a great deal of head scratching among cosmologists because it defies the law of gravity. Matter in the universe should be constantly drawing the universe in and braking its expansion. What is pushing the universe out, so to speak, against the force of gravity so that it is accelerating? Despite such problems as this, we now know that, since it is accelerating, the universe will expand forever and eventually reach the temperature of absolute zero so that everything in the universe will be dead. There will be no energy. The universe will in this sense be dead but

How did we humans come to be in this evolving universe? It is quite clear that we do not know everything about this process. But it would be scientifically absurd to deny that the human brain is a result of a chemical complexification in an evolving universe. After the universe became rich in certain basic chemicals through the birth and death of stars, those chemicals got together in successive steps to make ever more complex molecules. Finally, in some extraordinary chemical process, the human brain came to be the most complicated machine that we know.

Did all of this happen by chance or by necessity in this evolving universe? Was it destined to happen? The first thing to be said is that the problem is not formulated correctly. It is not just a question of chance or necessity because, first of all, it is both. Furthermore, there is a third element here that is very important. It is what I call “fertility.” What this means is that the universe is so prolific in offering the opportunity for the success of both chance and necessary

processes that such character of the universe must be included in the discussion. The universe is 13.7 billion years old, it contains about 100 trillion galaxies, each of which contains 100 billion stars of an immense variety. Thus, it is the combination of chance and necessary processes in a fertile universe that best explains the universe as seen by science. When we combine these three elements—chance, necessity, and the fertility of the universe—we see clearly that evolution, as many hold, is not simply a random, blind process. It has a direction and an intrinsic destiny. By intrinsic, I mean that science need not, and in fact cannot methodologically, invoke a designer as those arguing for intelligent design attempt to do.

How are we to interpret this scientific picture of life’s origins in terms of religious belief? Do we need God to explain this? Very succinctly, my answer is no. In fact, to need God would be a very denial of God. God is not the response to a need. One gets the impression from certain religious believers

that they fondly hope for the durability of certain gaps in our scientific knowledge of evolution, so that they can fill them with God. This is the exact opposite of what human intelligence is all about. We should be seeking for the fullness of God in creation. We should not need God, we should accept him when he comes to us.

But the personal God I have described is also God, creator of the universe. It is unfortunate that, especially in America, creationism has come to mean some fundamentalistic, literal, scientific interpretation of Genesis. Judaic-Christian faith is radically creationist, but in a totally different sense. It is rooted in a belief that everything depends upon God, or better, all is a gift from God. The universe is not God and it cannot exist independently of God. Neither pantheism nor naturalism is true. God is working with the universe. The universe has a certain vitality of its own like a child does. It has the ability to respond to words of endearment and encouragement. You disci-

pline a child but you try to preserve and enrich the individual character of the child and its own passion for life. A parent must allow the child to grow into adulthood, to come to make its own choices, to go on its own way in life. Words that give life are richer than mere commands or information. In such wise ways does God deal with the universe—the infinite, ever-expanding universe. That is why, it seems to me, that the Intelligent Design Movement, a largely American phenomenon, diminishes God, makes him a designer rather than a lover.

George Coyne, S.J., served for many years as the Director of the Vatican Observatory.

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American Catholics and the State

BY GREGORY A. KALSCHUR

As John Courtney Murray recognized in 1960, the American mind “has never been clear about the relation between morals and law.” Murray’s critical contribution to our current need for more nuanced thinking lies in his efforts to bring clarity to our understanding of that essential relationship. He explained that our confusion about the relation between law and morality often stems from our failure to understand that legal prohibitions are not capable of dealing with every sort of moral evil.

Invoking traditional rules of jurisprudence, Murray explained that the lawmaker must engage in a “subtle discipline, at once a science and an art, that mediates between the imperatives of the moral order and the commands or prohibitions of the civil law.” The “subtle discipline” of jurisprudence reminds us that there is a difference between sin and crime.

Morality (which governs all of human conduct) and law (which gov-

erns the public order of society) are not coextensive in their functions. Legal prohibitions can have only a limited effect on shaping moral character. Accordingly, Murray argued that people can “be coerced only to a minimal amount of moral action.” Indeed, “the moral aspirations of the law are minimal.”

If society wishes to elevate and maintain moral standards above the minimal level required for the healthy functioning of the social order, it must look to institutions other than the law. The state and law, therefore, have a necessary—but a necessarily limited—role to play in society’s work of establishing and maintaining the common good.

Murray insisted that law and morality are essentially related, but necessarily differentiated. Because the coercive force of the state ultimately lies behind the law, the law must not moralize excessively. If it does so, “it tends to defeat even its own modest aims, by bringing itself into contempt.”

The law, therefore, should not be

used to prohibit a given moral evil unless that prohibition can be shown to be something that the law is capable of addressing prudently. John Courtney Murray, following St. Thomas Aquinas, argued that human law must be framed with a view to the level of virtue that it is actually possible to expect from the people required to comply with the law. Accordingly, Murray suggested a series of questions that the legislator must consider in assessing the prudence of a proposed law: Will the prohibition be obeyed, at least by most people? Is it enforceable against the disobedient? Is it prudent to enforce this ban, given the possibility of harmful effects in other areas of social life? Is the instrumentality of a coercive law a good means for the eradication of the targeted social evil? And since a law that usually fails is not a good means, what are the lessons of experience with this sort of legal prohibition? If legislation is to be properly crafted—from a moral point of view and with the goal of promoting the common good of society—“these are the questions that

jurisprudence must answer.”

In light of all these considerations, society should not expect a great deal of moral improvement from legal prohibitions. Instead, the limited effectiveness of legal coercion compelling obedience through fear of punishment as a vehicle toward genuine moral reform means that the legal prohibitions must be used with caution in a free society. As Murray explained:

[A] human society is inhumanly ruled when it is ruled only, or mostly, by fear. Good laws are obeyed by the generality because they are good laws; they merit and receive the consent of the community, as valid legal expressions of the community’s own convictions as to what is just or unjust, good or evil. In the absence of this consent, law either withers away or becomes tyrannical.

Accordingly, for the law truly to serve the common good, some level of consensus as to the goodness of the law is essential. And, in the face of widespread moral disagreement on an

Continued on Page 24

issue, the public conscience may need to be clarified through nonlegal educative efforts in an atmosphere of reasoned dialogue and factual argument before the law can effectively promote the common good. In the absence of a basic moral consensus, any attempt to change the law will be unenforceable, ineffective, and resented as unduly restrictive of freedom.

Murray's thought helps us to recognize that efforts to translate moral principles directly into legal prohibitions may sometimes damage the common good. An official who fully accepts the Church's teaching on abortion as a grave moral evil still must make a judgment in conscience as to how the law can most effectively deal with that particular evil within the wider context of concern for the common good. What sort of political-legal response will actually reduce the number of abortions in the United States in the face of current constitutional and social realities?

In evaluating whether or not a public official's policy positions are consistent with a desire to protect life, we

need to pursue an inquiry that considers abortion within the context of a wider range of legal-political questions. Other areas of the law can and must contribute to nurturing the virtues necessary to supporting a culture of life.

What sort of a society are we becoming through the entire range of legal policies we advocate and enact? Who are we becoming as a society when we regularly invoke the death penalty? What sort of a society do we become if we overzealously restrict civil liberties in response to terrorism, or if our immigration law and border control policies undervalue the dignity of the lives of immigrants? Have we listened to the voices of women who have felt compelled to make the choice for abortion, and are we working to establish a set of social policies that might provide women with the support needed to make the decision to carry their babies to term? In short, are we working to build a legal system that as a whole supports and promotes the virtues necessary to protect human dignity and sustain a culture of life?

John Courtney Murray's work

reflected his deep concern to promote genuine dialogue at the heart of common life in a pluralistic society—a genuine dialogue often sadly lacking in contemporary public life. If the public discourse leading to the enactment of a law fails to include genuine attempts to help people understand why the moral vision underlying the law promotes the common good, a disjunction will continue to exist between law and morality.

As a result, the style of public discourse about law is crucial. A proposed law's moral rationale must be communicated in ways that people can accept and understand. One's partners in dialogue must be treated with respect. In order to promote greater clarity in the public conscience, the Church must engage Catholic public officials and American society more generally in a genuine conversation about how best to promote the common good. For that conversation to be effective, the participants cannot be locked in positions of immovable dogmatic certitude. Instead, the conversation must go forward in a spirit of shared pursuit of the truth, fostering a genuine dialogue of mutual listening and speaking,

where all sides are willing to learn as well as teach.

What does it mean to be an American Catholic in public life in today's pluralistic, democratic society? It means one is called to moral integrity and undivided conscience; to be a person striving to base his or her political views "on his or her particular understanding of the human person and the common good." It is to be a person engaged in the "subtle discipline" of trying to build a social, political, and legal order that reflects the imperatives of the moral order, without confusing law and morality. And in the midst of pluralism and deep moral disagreement, it is to be a member of a church willing to engage in the nuanced reflection and genuine dialogue that are essential if we are to form hearts and minds committed to a culture of life.

Gregory A. Kalscheur, S.J., is an Assistant Professor at the Boston College Law School.

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