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# Catholic Higher Education At the Crossroads: Prospects and Projects - 1995

David O'Brien

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# The Santa Clara Lectures



## “Catholic Higher Education At the Crossroads: Prospects and Projects”

**David O'Brien**

Loyola Professor of Roman Catholic Studies and  
Director of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program  
College of the Holy Cross

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In 1994, through the generosity of the Bannan Foundation, the Department of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University has inaugurated the Santa Clara Lectures. The series is bringing to campus leading scholars in Christian theology, who offer the University community and the general public an ongoing exposure to debate on the most significant issues of our times. Santa Clara University will publish these lectures and distribute them throughout the United States and internationally.

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Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

Monday, Jan. 22, 1996

7:30 p.m., Mayer Theatre

“What’s Wrong with Being Right?”

Mary Jo Weaver

Monday, April 15, 1996

7:30 p.m., Mayer Theatre

Dear Readers:

This lecture is printed in black ink to facilitate duplication for personal or classroom use.

## The Future of Catholic Higher Education

By David O’Brien

The story is told of two University of Chicago professors crossing the street. One said to the other, “My new book just came out.” His colleague responded instantly: “What did you call it this time?”

With apologies to Pope John Paul II, I called my book on Catholic higher education *Ex Corde Ecclesiae Americanae: From the Heart of the American Church*.<sup>1</sup> After all, whatever else we may want to say about Catholic higher education in the United States, we can at least say this: Schools like your Santa Clara and my Holy Cross have come from the very heart of our American church.

All Catholic communities in the United States have blended anxiety and hope: anxiety about the loss of traditional culture, hope about the possibilities opened by migration. Nothing better reflected that combination of Old World loyalties and New World dreams than the colleges and universities. In its earliest stages, Catholic higher education in the United States helped the church survive by recruiting priests and religious and securing the loyalty of potentially successful laypeople. In its second, more dynamic stage, the schools assisted Catholics to move up the social and economic ladder. The models for the first stage were priests and sisters helping their people build a church and root themselves in America and its local communities. During the second, expansive stage, we continued to celebrate our clergy and religious, but there were new models: the talented, tough, ambitious veterans of the World War, becoming doctors and lawyers and businessmen, marrying young women formed in Catholic Action and the lay apostolate, together carving out for themselves and their people a place at the center of American life: Abigail McCarthy and Eugene, from St. Catherine’s and St. John’s in Minnesota; Edward Bennett Williams, a symbol for Holy Cross; Democrat Bruce Babbitt and Republican John Sears, my Notre Dame classmates in the Kennedy year, 1960. A dozen men and women will come to mind for veteran professors and staff here at Santa Clara.

Today, in our work together, in church and on campus, we are defining a third stage in the history of Catholic higher education. Its outlines are far from clear. In stage one our migrating Catholic forebears built an amazing array of institutions to keep memories alive and bring a heritage to life in this always new world. Then they moved out of ethnic neighborhoods and up the social ladder, mixing with others and getting mixed up in the process until they looked around and wondered, after all, who they were. That is where we find ourselves, an American location, fluid, open, diverse, filled with multiple possibilities, leaving us uncertain about identity and struggling with sometimes conflicting responsibilities.

I wish I knew how to sort things out in such a way that we could make our



institution's Catholic affiliation something more than a nagging problem about how to deal with the local bishop or make students go to Mass and behave. Instead, the Catholic heritage and the faith that some of us proclaim should help all of us find meaning in our vocations and do the things we love to do better than we ever thought we could.

I most assuredly cannot do even a little of that. What I will try to do is offer a few thoughts about the dialogue we need to begin if we are to make the contribution we should to American society, to higher education, and to the church.

May I begin with two personal references. Two years ago, just before Easter, on the eve of a meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association at Holy Cross, I asked a colleague if he might be dropping by. He wasn't sure. "The group puzzles me," he said. "Is it composed of Catholics who are historians, or historians interested in the history of Catholicism?" I almost began to tell him about the organization's long discussion of that question, but I bit my tongue and simply said, "Both."

Now this same professor is always posing problems for me. He once compared our college to a very good "family firm." After many years at Holy Cross he felt respected as a person and supported in his work, but there was that occasional sense that he was an outsider, not really a member of the family. That phrase, *family firm*, stayed with me as we developed a mission statement for the College. I thought it reflected well the experience of many of my non-Catholic colleagues, and now his question about the association nagged at me as well.

But it was, as I've said, Easter season. A few days after my friend asked his question, my wife and I were driving to the western part of the state to spend Easter with her mother. On the way, Joanne opened the day's mail, beginning with a card from our friends, Chris and Jackie Doucot-Allen. I suspect all professors have certain students who exemplify for them what their work is all about. For me, Chris is one of those students, one of three I have been privileged to know who now help run Catholic Worker houses—in Chris and Jackie's case, the then brand-new Martin de Porres House in Hartford. Their card had a short printed message and some closely written notes about the house and their young son Micah, whose picture was enclosed. At the very bottom of one note was Chris' signature, following the words "Practice Resurrection."

Easter, Chris was telling me, is supposed to make things, in fact make everything, different. For two millennia people shaped by Resurrection faith formed Christian churches and institutions and movements, among them the American Catholic historical association and the College of the Holy Cross. Christian faith, Easter faith, is grounded in memory, and Christians are people who, among other things, keep that memory alive. But Easter means that Christians are shaped by hope as well as memory. God's promises were fulfilled, and are being fulfilled even now, and there is more to come. The story isn't finished, and

the storytellers are also characters in the drama; its outcome is in God's hands, and in ours. History isn't over, and we are making it, in part by telling the story as best we can, locating memory in a setting of hope and responsibility.

Now if I said all that to my Holy Cross friend in order to explain the Catholic historical association, he would listen respectfully, and acknowledge in a friendly way the importance of these matters to me and to the people I spend a lot of time with. If I spoke of Easter matters closer to home, to explain me and Holy Cross, my friend would get nervous, and understandably so. For Easter means Christians and Christians mean churches and churches mean the Church with a capital C, and the College of the Holy Cross defined in Catholic terms seems always to draw circles that leave him out. Nice person, good teacher, wonderful friend, loyal to Holy Cross, but Holy Cross remains a Jesuit and Catholic college, and some who work there are part of the family and some are not. So those that are not get nervous when these matters come up. But the strange thing is these days that I get nervous, too, and so do most of the academic Catholics I know. For one thing, a lot of us have been quick, perhaps too quick, to adopt a live-and-let-live approach, soft tolerance. We Catholics are Americans, after all, and are as inclined as anyone else to leave religion a personal matter and content ourselves with neutral language for public business.

And all of us, Catholics or not, are professionals. Mark Schwehn's book, *Exiles in Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation*,<sup>2</sup> begins with a discussion of the phrase *my own work*, as in "I have to correct some blue books and hold office hours before I can get to my own work." The balance of cultural power, Schwehn argues, has long resided in making knowledge, with research, specialized, systematic, usually empirical, demanding single-minded dedication. In that atmosphere, it is hard for us to talk about religion, almost impossible to talk about our own religious faith.

I emphasize that *we* means almost all of us. Some Catholics think the silence about religion on campus is somebody else's fault: The family in the family firm has hired too many non-Catholics, or too many weak Catholics. But the truth is that we Catholics have little desire to talk with others about Easter, at least at work. Most of us, I suspect, are not sure we want to have that conversation, and, if we do, we are not sure what to say, especially here, in an intellectual community. John XXIII had it right 30 years ago in his great encyclical *Pacem in Terris*: "Indeed it often happens that in many quarters and too often there is no proportion between scientific training and religious instruction: the former continues and advances until it reaches higher degrees, while the latter remains at an elementary level."<sup>3</sup> Ph.D.s at work settle for pablum and platitudes at church. So, outside the theology department and a few diehards, we Catholics get as nervous as everyone else when the word *Catholic* comes up on the academic end of the campus. So, most of the time, we don't ask, and we don't tell.<sup>4</sup>

But the Catholics among us need to do better than that. As a step toward



speaking frankly about faith and work in Catholic higher education, let me offer several propositions.

### **1. Catholicism is a good thing.**

Several convictions inform any serious discussion of Catholic higher education in the United States. The first and most important, I think, is that Catholicism, the Catholic Church, is a good thing for the human community. I state it that way deliberately: The standard is the good of the human family. I also make that statement as an historian, fully aware of the bad choices churches and churchmen have made, including in our recent history. I state that Catholicism is a good thing, also, as a participant in the life of the contemporary church. To be a participant is to feel compelled to explain how it is that I remain, by heritage but also by choice, so connected to this church that I cannot imagine myself apart from it. And I say Catholicism *and* Catholic Church: What we are talking about are ideas about God and humanity and salvation and Jesus Christ, but also about an organization, for which we who affirm Catholic as good must accept responsibility.

So this is no small matter, this statement that Catholicism is a good thing for the human family. But I cannot imagine a constructive conversation about Catholic mission and identity at any institution that did not include at least some people who believe that. So I make that affirmation, without apology, and hope it will be an invitation to further conversation.

### **2. Catholic colleges and universities stand at the far end of a revolution which moved once-confessional institutions shaped by the Catholic subculture into the mainstream of American higher education and American culture. In that sense they reflected the journey of many of our families.**

Between 1967 and 1972, Catholic colleges and universities reformed their governing structures to separate the institutions from the religious orders which had founded and controlled them. The newly independent trustees worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and research, to protect academic freedom, modernize administration, and carry out a variety of public responsibilities in exchange for direct and indirect forms of public support. Several points about this altogether remarkable story are worth dwelling on.

a) The new arrangements posed a whole set of puzzling questions. Father Theodore M. Hesburgh once told a group of parents worried about the threatened closing of their parochial school that they should simply ask the bishop to give them the school. "You take on total responsibility for financing and operating it," he told them, "but assure him that it will remain a completely Catholic school." This was the route taken by Catholic higher education, Hesburgh explained.<sup>5</sup> This description leaves many ambiguities. How can an institution under lay control and independent of institutional church authorities be

"completely Catholic?" What sort of ecclesiology is involved in stating that intention and profession are enough to merit the designation Catholic? How does an institution "guard" its "Catholic character" while at the same time pursuing academic excellence, honoring academic freedom, and building structures of academic self-government? In answering these questions, Catholic higher education has exemplified a new, more flexible and ambiguous church practice in the United States.

b) This American practice of Catholic higher education resembles that of health and social services more than elementary and secondary education. Historically, after extended and regrettably forgotten debate, Catholic parochial schools developed along a separatist pattern. Charities, however, developed in a complicated web of private sector cooperation—for example, Community Chest and United Way—and private-public partnership, with governments providing financial support for services sometimes delivered by ethnic and religious organizations. After World War II the G.I. Bill brought higher education into line with that practice, an option repeated regularly since. That pattern, so different from other educational sectors, poses difficulties for government and for church-related institutions, but may also offer unique opportunities which need to be better appreciated.

c) Catholic colleges and universities, then, like Catholic hospitals, relate to three distinct publics, not two; they acknowledge three specific lines of responsibility and cannot ignore any one of them. One is professional, to the academic community, a set of relationships that include accrediting associations and the many professional organizations which set standards and provide credentials for participants in the life of our institutions. A second set of relationships deals with the general public, especially with governments, which charter the schools and, through student-aid programs, provide a major portion of their income. While government officials are external to the institution's decision-making structures, there is no question each institution is accountable for carrying out a variety of public responsibilities. Then there is the church, whose institutional leaders may similarly be excluded from internal governance without in any way reducing the claim that the college or university has responsibilities in and for the community of faith. This trinitarian setting of the institution mirrors the experience of contemporary theology, which addresses the academy, the church, and the public. Indeed it stands as an accurate metaphor of the lay Catholic, balancing as best he or she can, professional, social, and ecclesial responsibilities. It is therefore a good place to locate any discussion of contemporary American Catholicism.

### **3. From the start, Rome had difficulty understanding this American arrangement.**

The Vatican has had at least two problems. First, the logic of separate incorpo-



ration, in the absence of reserved powers for religious communities and with the exception of a small number of diocesan-sponsored institutions, made ecclesiastical authorities, Rome and the local bishops, external to the governance of the colleges and universities. Many church leaders deny that an institution can be Catholic if it is not in some way accountable to the hierarchy; the bishop must be something more than another potted plant at graduation. Academic leaders explain that in the United States a university of its nature must exclude any external authority from a role in its internal affairs. American academics, and later university leaders from around the world, offered careful arguments for a new, less formal but still vital relationship between the church and its colleges and universities, but Rome has never been persuaded.

The second problem has to do with Catholic theologians, as the recurring conflicts from 1966 to 1986 over the status of Charles Curran indicated. The most recent expression of this problem is the demand that teachers of Catholic theology receive a mandate from competent ecclesiastical authority, a demand that brought extended discussion of the implementation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* to a somewhat bitter deadlock. After considerable behind-the-scenes maneuvering, church officials have at least temporarily decided not to press the issue but depend on the continuing dialogue long institutionalized in the so-called bishops and presidents committee.

Rome's stubborn refusal to accept dialogue as a permanent answer has had at least two effects, one arguably positive, the other clearly negative. Positively, recurring questions from Rome have served as a counterweight to the powerful tendency to accommodate uncritically to American academic practice. The sharp debate over *Ex Corde* has sparked open debate about Catholic mission and identity on almost all of the nation's 228 Catholic college and university campuses. Roman pressure and continuing academic acknowledgment of some form of ecclesiastical accountability is one, but only one, factor which distinguishes recent Catholic experience from the earlier Protestant experience documented so well in George Marsden's excellent history, *The Soul of the American University*, a book which has become something of a club in the hands of critics of Catholic higher education.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Rome's often heavy-handed interventions, especially when the Vatican bypasses the national episcopal conference, unnecessarily threaten to arouse public and judicial suspicion, potentially opening the door to costly litigation or even more costly disentanglement. Cases like that of Charles Curran also short-circuit efforts to gain a hearing for Catholic ideas. They further marginalize theology and indeed all Catholic scholarship, in the end increasing the very secularization those interventions are intended to combat. Until now friendly bishops and presidents from sponsoring religious orders have done heroic damage control, but trends in church and academic politics would not leave one hopeful about the future.

One way to improve prospects would be to take the new move toward local dialogue seriously. Theologians need to help both sides reconsider their positions from the point of view of the whole body of Christ. After all, bishops, theologians, and university presidents are all in the church; none are the church. Bishops do need to think harder, with our help, about their pastoral responsibilities in regard to Catholic higher education. And we Catholic academics have to enter the debate with a bit less attention to self-interest, a bit more to the concrete problems facing the church. Semicynical shoulder shrugs, insistence on the priority of professional agendas, and patient waiting on the Holy Spirit are equally inappropriate responses to the terrible problems besetting the American church.

In particular we need to avoid undue abstraction and slippery formulas which have long characterized these discussions. They breed cynicism and trivialize the important issues at stake. We need to seek out projects which will exemplify Catholic commitments and turn Catholic mission and identity from a nagging set of questions into an enriching element of the community's life. If some of these projects relate to the life and work of the contemporary church, we might begin to move from a situation where Catholic identity is mainly a matter of control to one where it involves a set of mutually supportive relationships.

#### **4. The history of the last 30 years is not adequately captured by the word *secularization*.**

Separate incorporation broke the link of juridical accountability through religious orders to the church hierarchy. Academic professionalization brought with it prevailing American standards of academic freedom (though not always for theologians, especially in schools which retained juridical ties to the hierarchy). Less noticed, forms of academic government gave the increasingly lay and diverse faculty and professional staffs predominant jurisdiction over matters of academic personnel and curriculum.

Many contemporary critics, not normally thought of as conservative, from Jesuits Avery Dulles and Michael Buckley through James Burtchaell and New York Times writer Peter Steinfels, believe that this process has placed the schools on a "slippery path" to "complete secularization."<sup>7</sup> As they note so brilliantly, the changes which have taken place have brought with them the problems of modern American academic life, most notably the increasing power of departments and the emphasis on the disciplines, making general education, core curriculum, and interdisciplinary work of all kinds more and more difficult. Most assuredly, then, the combination of separate incorporation and faculty-staff professionalization make formulation of an integrally Catholic mission statement and development of integrated Catholic academic programs problematic.

On the other hand, these changes were not primarily the result of passive accommodation to prevailing culture resulting from a desire to be accepted by



secular elites or to gain government financial assistance. No, leaders of Catholic higher education made decisions to improve the quality of research and teaching by opening their institutions to contemporary culture and to the pluralisms which marked that culture, and increasingly marked the church as well. They took Vatican II's words on "The Church and the Modern World" seriously, and hoped that the church could become more intelligent, and the nation, through the work of the laity, a bit more just and even a bit more religious. It was a rather Americanist agenda, but one which most educated Catholics at the time thought a good one.

After all, what were, and are, the options? Critics see an integrity problem, so they want to restore (were things really better once?) a degree of truth in advertising; if the schools say they are Catholic, then they should be Catholic. But when you ask what that means, how are we to become "really Catholic" in our research and teaching, things get murky. Few want to take the route of the truly confessional schools, admirable as many of them may be. Almost no one mentions campus ministry, which in fact is well-supported and thriving on many campuses. In fact there is not much discussion about the faith of students, professors, or staff; there are some negative undercurrents about student moral behavior, but that is hardly new. Most of all, there is the usual yearning for integrated liberal arts education, and the usual sentimentalizing of the old days: Catholic professors teaching Catholic students about Catholic things. But as far as I can see, none of these recent writers offers any interesting ideas about how Catholic colleges might do better than others in overcoming the fragmentation of the disciplines and the understandable concern of many students, today as yesterday, with knowledge and skills that will lead to employment.

Even Catholic intellectual life gets little attention. Instead, if there is a consensus, it is that schools return to theology, in fact to *Catholic* theology, and de-emphasize experiments with religious studies and ecumenical theology. Non-Catholics and non-theologians studying religion might be kept around the department (whether it's called theology or religious studies or both) as dialogue partners, but from now on the priority should be really Catholic theology. Once that is in place, it seems, wonderful dialogues between these Catholic theologians and scholars in other schools and departments will begin, these conversations will reinvigorate the Catholic mission of the schools, and an integrated curriculum and graduates articulate about the Catholic tradition will not be far behind.

There is much to be said for reinvigorating Catholic theology, and I am as inclined as anyone to decry Catholic illiteracy. But for even a casual observer of contemporary Catholic theology, this entire argument seems like nothing more than an ideology for the kind of Catholic theologians whose highest dream is to be included as equal partners in the magisterium. To take it seriously as a program for restoring Catholicism in higher education requires one to ignore a

great many things: that it is precisely theology's encounter with other faiths and disciplines that has led some serious people to take it seriously; that academic theology is as prone to superspecialization and methodological obsession as any other discipline, and shows no greater affinity for general education and core curriculum than history or English, for example; that much academic theology has lost contact with the church's pastoral life.

Finally, as Father Donald Monan, president of Boston College, has pointed out, the charge that academic excellence and institutional modernization have come at the expense of Catholic integrity, and that the solution lies in explicitly Catholic theology, means that the good work that most of us do every day is something other than the central mission of the institution. That work finds its meaning only when connected to Catholic theology.<sup>8</sup> No wonder this discussion makes people think of a family firm.

No, the people who give their lives to these institutions will not and should not regard complaints about secularization and calls for Catholic restoration as serious proposals for renewal. Self-consciously Catholic theology, deeply versed in the Catholic tradition and alert to the life and work of the church, is indispensable, but it is not the heart of the matter.

### **5. We are the Catholic college or university.**

After Vatican II, Catholics quickly, perhaps too quickly, began to say, "We are the church." All of us who work in Catholic colleges and universities could say something similar: We are the college or university. Once upon a time the schools were identified primarily in terms of the sponsoring religious community: Trustees and benefactors wanted to help father or sister. Father and sister, in turn, occupied the key offices and brought in lay faculty and staff to help out. One Holy Cross Jesuit, years ago, welcoming a new layman who had come to teach economics, told him with a smile that it was good to have a strong second team.

The story sounds like it comes from ancient times, not three decades ago, so dramatic has been the change. On the nation's Catholic campuses, there is at least one truism: There are now fewer priests and sisters, they are much older, and laypeople are everywhere. So, in the university as in the parish, it is necessary to think hard about the "we."

a) We are professional. We have long recognized that American academic culture is dominated by graduate schools, by disciplines and departments and research, not teaching, agendas. Academic life is also Balkanized: Research agendas dominate university departments; department priorities dominate undergraduate education.

As every dean knows, professionalization has a personal dimension. Success for many scholars is linked to publication within the discipline: That is what enables people to please respected mentors, maintain status among peers, and in



many cases preserve relationships to real academic communities. All of this poses enormous, though far from insurmountable, problems for institutional mission, whether the school is Catholic or not. It shapes a "culture of disbelief" and, for the religious professor or staff member, it involves the sharp separation of faith from work so common among other middle-class American professionals.

There is probably too much complacency about the departmental/disciplinary structure which dominates higher education. At my own school, high-quality interdisciplinary programs exist, but they must constantly struggle for resources. Almost all hiring is done within departments, and almost all departments regard publication in peer-reviewed professional journals as the measure of quality. And here, as elsewhere, even theology and religious studies generally agree. That system shortchanges general education, including education for effective citizenship. In religion it contributes to an a-intellectual pietism, in politics to a culture of complaint and irresponsibility. Yet within the academy it is almost unchallenged.

b) The "we" is religiously plural, far beyond the religious diversity envisioned in the ecumenical era a few years ago. The faculty and staff include many who are not Catholic, some not Christian, and in many places no one knows for sure because no one asks. Furthermore, even if they did, the answers might not help much. There has been a restructuring of American religion; independent churches and a variety of religious movements probably have more to do with religious identity than standard denominational labels. Even the obvious answer to this diversity—Hire more Catholics!—is problematic: What Andrew Greeley calls do-it-yourself Catholicism is as much a reality on campus as off.

c) There is also a structural dimension to the "we are the university" situation. A professional faculty expects that the school will meet standards of academic freedom: That is one reason why talk of ecclesiastical intervention makes professors so nervous. We speak less often about the other important aspect of faculty professionalization: academic governance. A modern faculty expects to bear primary responsibility for academic policy: curriculum, admissions, standards, and, most importantly, personnel. And they expect to share responsibility for other areas of institutional policy, from student life to athletics to budgets. Bishops may speak to trustees, and trustees may say what they like to presidents, but little will be done without the participation and cooperation of the faculty and professional staff. So, if the faculty and staff are professional, religiously and intellectually diverse, and thoroughly professional, then winning their support is far more a matter of persuasion and politics than mandates and mission statements.

## **6. We would have a more fruitful discussion of Catholic higher education if we centered our attention on the educated lay Catholic.**

Most Catholic colleges and universities have chosen a middle ground between

confessionalism and mere sponsorship. Only the Franciscan University of Steubenville and a handful of tiny colleges have chosen a thoroughly Catholic option, placing them in the honorable company of the nation's rich variety of explicitly confessional institutions. A few have come close to the other extreme, where religious connections have become very marginal to the institution's day-to-day work. This alternative involves retention of certain symbols of a Catholic affiliation, along with maintenance of pastoral ministry and some Catholic theology, but with little active effort to clarify Catholic mission and identity.

The third option, attempting to be both Catholic and academic, has its roots in the much-battered tradition of liberal Catholicism. It is a position that seeks to be responsibly Catholic, yet avoid the family firm, to be seriously academic, but avoid the trivialization of religion. It is a stance of both/and rather than either/or, and thus is doomed to ambiguity and ambivalence.

I think that this ambivalence reflects quite accurately the situation of American Catholicism today. The ambivalence of Catholic presence is best seen in the 1983 pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops on nuclear weapons. In a free and pluralistic society, the bishops hope to help Catholics witness to their faith as disciples and form their conscience as citizens. So the bishops participate in two forms of teaching. With Christians they speak the language of discipleship, with others the languages of citizenship; in one community they engage in Gospel reflection, in other communities in civil debate.

Walter Brueggemann calls for "bilingualism," a capacity to help form the church as a community of conscience loyal to the Gospel and able *at the same time* to share with others in shaping the public moral consensus which in the end governs the behavior of states, corporations, and other institutions.<sup>9</sup> Bilingualism involves moral commitment *and* professional competence, active discipleship alert to violations of God's creation *and* responsible citizenship ready to bear with others, all others, full responsibility for neighbor, nation, and world. There is a decisive division between the moral ideals of citizenship and discipleship, to be sure, so we need the church. But whatever their personal convictions, disciples can make their case as citizens "only in the discourse of secular warrants and public reason." That is one reason the church needs a vigorous intellectual life. Without it, the church drifts either toward sectarianism, speaking only to itself, or sentimentality, mouthing pablum and platitudes to a disdainful world.

This suggests that the university is, as Cardinal Newman said it should be, the home of the layperson, not the priest or religious. Here religion must not be confined to church, that is to campus ministry, or it will be so confined elsewhere. Nor can religious intelligence, insight, and imagination be confined to experts in theology, or the church will lose every fight it takes on beyond its gates. If Catholics want their faith to inform and enrich all that they do, then those of us on campus should probably worry less about pro-choice and gay-



rights groups and more about how we might better serve the laypeople who must be the agents of the church's ministerial presence in and for the world.

### **7. Vital Catholic intellectual life is the end, the Catholic college and university one means to pursue that end.**

This argument begins with three propositions: a) Catholicism is serious about artistic creation and intellectual inquiry. Faith has an intrinsic drive toward intelligibility, while intellectual inquiry has an intrinsic drive toward ultimacy, as Michael Buckley points out. b) American Christianity is long on piety, short on learning. American religion often becomes not so much anti-intellectual as a-intellectual, impatient both on democratic and scriptural grounds with the demands of theological and clerical elites. Archbishop Rembert Weakland and J. Bryan Hehir have noted a growing tendency to downplay intellectual life among American Catholics, a phenomenon I believe is associated with the spread of the more evangelical attitudes which seem to accompany middle-class arrival. c) The third proposition, then, is that Catholic intellectual life requires deliberate strategy; it won't just happen.

At a minimum the church needs places hospitable to Catholic scholarship. As evangelical scholar and Notre Dame vice president Nathan Hatch has written of his own community: "If evangelicals are to help preserve even the possibility of Christian thinking for their children and grandchildren, they must begin to nurture first-class Christian scholarship, first by identifying Christian scholars and enabling them to do their work."<sup>10</sup> The church also needs both graduate and undergraduate institutions which acknowledge a special responsibility to enable those who choose to do so to encounter the intellectual heritage of Roman Catholicism and participate in the life and work of the contemporary church.

### **8. The debate about Catholic higher education marks a moment in our civil religion.**

Critics of Catholic higher education reflect one of the most depressing aspects of American Catholic culture these days, the near-universal conviction that the church and its constituent elements have become too American and need to pull back, presumably to church. Whether ordinary Catholics have become too secular, like those professors supposedly trying to get approval from the big shots at Harvard, or too mindlessly religious, like those students attracted to evangelical-style piety or merely humanitarian service to poor people, they need to get back to church and get themselves properly instructed.

I think theologians William Shea and Robert Imbelli laid out the central problem of Catholic intellectual life in the United States a few years ago. Shea admitted that he learned of God from secular, even American, sources. Elsewhere he suggested that others, strangers, should be regarded as "God carriers,"

even teachers, not as outsiders in need of conversion and correction. He remains (and he worries about it, as I do) incurably Americanist. Responding, Imbelli drove home the obvious point: Christians, reborn in faith, are first of all people of the scriptures and the church. Shea could speak of dual loyalties, but Imbelli denied they were of equal value. "For among the loyalties of the Christian," he asked, "is there not a paramount, indeed identity-defining loyalty: to Christ and his gospel as proclaimed by and in the church?" Catholics, it seems, take their stand with their faith, and then listen and learn and love. It is, after all, a matter of integrity. Shea's, and my, attitude of ambivalence compromises such conviction, places Christian integrity in jeopardy, and draws theology, that is ecclesial self-consciousness, to ambivalence, giving away the game.<sup>11</sup>

Most Catholic discourse echoes Imbelli, worries about wishy-washy ambivalence, and suggests getting back to church, one way or another. Among intellectuals it takes the form of restoring real Catholic theology, as distinct from the more ecumenical or historical religious studies, or privileging Catholic theology, hiring more Catholics, or replacing the pabulum and platitudes of homilies and CCD with sterner stuff. At its best it is a matter of memory, how it is to be preserved and valued, and protected from the menace of trivializing toleration. At its less attractive it is a matter of boundary drawing, getting clear once again about who's in and who's out.

I suspect that most practicing, religiously oriented professors outside seminaries are with Shea, in practice if not in theory. But something is missing. Americanism's balancing act between three publics, ecclesiastical, political, and intellectual/cultural, seems uninspired, perhaps because its practitioners have lost the old confidence that America has a providential role to play in world history. Absent that conviction it becomes hard to justify the last generation's pursuit of excellence, its urge to be taken seriously in various public debates. If America is not a moral category, then the whole drive of immigrant children for economic security, political participation, and social acceptance must seem as our piety suggests, a pursuit of false gods.

Without at least a touch of civil faith, it is even harder to sustain a dialogue (requiring mutual respect, if not rough equality) among America's diverse "conspiracies" (Americanist John Courtney Murray's term for our faith communities, including secularists), or to prevent the tension between our own religious and secular experience from deteriorating into "a spiritually schizophrenic existence" (a phrase of the U.S. bishops). Take away Americanism, and the answer comes easy to that old question: Are we Americans who happen to be Catholics or Catholics who happen to be Americans? Of course as soon as we translate our easy Catholic answer into real choices, the illusion is obvious: Aside from Catholic Workers and a few traditionalists, few of us are opting for countercultural witness.



If we follow the usual arguments, Catholic theology makes the university Catholic, the Catholic public takes precedence over all others, and my colleague is right: non-Catholics, welcomed and valued as colleagues, are nevertheless outsiders in a community that can never be their own. If we follow Shea, whatever our limitations, neither the Catholic historical association nor the College of the Holy Cross nor the Society of Jesus, nor even the Catholic Church itself is supposed to be a family firm. There are no *permanent* barriers separating family members and others, insiders and outsiders, and those barriers that are there, including those separating men and women, are barriers we, not God, have made.

So the experiences of pluralism and secularization provide new opportunities to understand faith and its demands, within, not outside, the world we have helped to make. From this alternative perspective, it is the ambivalence, the very effort to be both Catholic and American, to take the secularity and pluralism of our world into ourselves, that constitutes the Catholic university and best serves the church, the academy, and the human family.

**9. The effort to be faithfully Catholic and honestly academic in a responsible way is the proper path for Catholic colleges and universities. The question is how to do it.**

The middle ground between confessionalism and mere sponsorship will not be an easy option, for there are not a lot of professionally qualified, apostolic, and theologically well informed graduate students and scholars out there. Catholic intellectual life has to be fostered, nurtured, and sustained by financial and personal investments, and that is work that the Catholics among us must take far more seriously than we have. We can support the Collegium program, which offers summer seminars on Catholic thought and spirituality for graduate students and beginning faculty, and we could organize mini-Collegiums for our own faculty, as Loyola of Chicago did last summer. We could persuade AJCU or ACCU to offer NEH-type summer seminars for scholars in particular disciplines to explore the religious meaning and ethical issues in their fields, gradually building a core group of scholar-teachers interested in Catholic intellectual life. Perhaps someday we could even develop a national research center to influence the research choices and intellectual interests of our faculties and graduate students, while offering public witness to the intellectual seriousness of contemporary Catholicism. There are plenty of ideas around; what is missing is not means but will.

I suggest we need to provide an institutional base and support for Catholic scholarship and teaching by establishing programs and institutes of Catholic studies. The goals of such programs would include 1) insuring that interested students and graduate students can learn about the Catholic tradition and the life of the contemporary church, 2) organizing constructive dialogue on

matters of significance to the larger academic community, in the process persuading colleagues that the institution's Catholic connection is an asset rather than a lingering problem, and 3) fostering research and teaching which serves the needs of the church and upholds the principle, so precarious in the setting of democratic pluralism, that the Christian religion has intellectual content.

Second, in expressing our responsibilities to American higher education, we should do what we can to reintroduce religion, or better consideration of fundamental religious and philosophical questions, into our teaching and research, reversing the marginalizing of religion in American academic life which began over a century ago. There are many signs that the times are ripe for such a move, and we have many resources in our tradition to help. On all our campuses people are making vigorous heroic efforts to encourage everyone to think about meaning and value: in weekend or evening conversations sponsored by the religious community, in the core curriculum, in first-year programs and honors programs and capstone courses, even in ethics-across-the-curriculum programs. I suggest we also need to attack the belly of the beast, graduate education, by initiating a small number of first-class graduate and professional programs in which religion and ethics are taken seriously.

I emphasize here that all of us who work in these places have an obligation to engage questions of meaning and value. The concern of some of us for Catholic intellectual life arises from the particular responsibilities associated with our history and our current commitment to be Catholic. Our responsibility to engage broader religious questions arises from our work as scholars and teachers. At my own school, our new mission statement, approved by all the faculty, professional staff, and trustees, Catholic or not, begins:

The College of the Holy Cross is, by tradition and choice, a Jesuit liberal arts college serving the Catholic community, American society and the wider world. To participate in the life of Holy Cross is to accept an invitation to join in dialogue about basic human questions: What is the moral character of learning and teaching? How do we find meaning in life and in history? What are our obligations to one another? What is our special obligation to the world's poor and powerless?

David Hollenbach in a recent paper affirms this approach as arising from our catholic vision of a single human family. What is required of us amid diverse understandings of the human good is something like John Paul II's virtue of solidarity: "a firm, persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say to the good of all and of each individual." That virtue, Hollenbach argues, allows neither the strategy of avoiding substantive differences, nor our usual soft toleration. Intellectual solidarity draws us to consider that our problems are everyone's problems. Intellectual solidarity takes pluralism to conversation, convinced that the most serious conversationalists are religious communities which uphold substantive notions of human good. The



religiously affiliated university is a place for that conversation to begin; it constitutes its public responsibility.

The Catholic tradition, and the Jesuit commitment to faith and justice, draw us to the mediating stance we have described above, a stance grounded in Christian humanism.

The challenge of Christian humanism remains central to the identity of Catholic universities. But today that humanism must be a social humanism, a humanism with a deep appreciation not only for the heights to which human culture can rise but also the depths of suffering to which societies can descend. There are strong currents in American life today that insulate both professors and students from experience of and reflection on these sufferings. A university that aspires both to be Catholic and to serve the common good must do more than include nods to the importance of social solidarity in its mission statement. It must translate this into teaching and research priorities, and actualize these priorities in day-to-day activities in classroom and library.<sup>12</sup>

Which brings us to:

#### **10. It is time for our discussion of the Catholic mission and identity of Catholic colleges and universities to become constructive, concrete, and collaborative.**

A few years ago, art critic Robert Hughes wrote a book about contemporary American culture. He called the book *A Culture of Complaint*.<sup>13</sup> Not long after the book appeared, a lay Catholic educator listened with growing irritation as a usually friendly bishop held forth on the problems of Catholic higher education. Looking my friend in the eye, the bishop told him, "You people are no longer producing committed, generous, and literate Catholics." Without hesitation my friend shot back, "Heck, Bishop, neither are you!"

Catholics, in higher education and elsewhere, are in danger of becoming another of our country's many cultures of complaint. We have grown so accustomed to mutual recrimination and self-protective blaming in all corners of our national life that we should not be surprised to find such things in the academy and in the church.

At least in higher education, the time is ripe to move in a new direction. After some low moments, the dialogue about Catholic responsibility between the bishops and college and university presidents has taken a new turn toward dialogue and cooperation. Both sides are now listening to one another; both are acknowledging a greater degree of shared responsibility for the life and work of the communion of faith we call the church. Instead of "neither are you, Bishop," the mood is now one of asking one another how Catholics in different ministries, with different responsibilities, can work together to help our church become more faithful, more generous, and, in our specific area of responsibility, more intelligent.

So the ongoing dialogue about *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* remains extremely impor-

tant. But it necessarily remains a discussion that is heavily theological and is usually conducted at a very abstract level. When the discussion does get specific, it tends to focus on Catholic theology and to a lesser extent on campus ministry, important areas but not the only ones. We learn that we should know more theology, and adopt a more evangelizing approach to our relationships with students and colleagues, but not much about the ecclesial meaning of our own special vocations. *Contending with Modernity*, historian Philip Gleason's remarkable history of American Catholic higher education, tells us that from 1900 to 1960, a great many people did *think* a lot about what Catholic higher education should *do*: It should create a Catholic culture. Unfortunately, save for an honors program here and there, they were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to do anything very significant, in curriculum or elsewhere, to create that culture. At the same time far more people were doing all kinds of good work as our colleges and universities grew and prospered, but much of the doing went on without over-much thinking, especially thinking about what it meant religiously, about its spiritual significance, about its connection to the life and mission of the church.

So it might be well to seek a less abstract, more specific focus for our discussion. A few key words:

First, *constructive*. By this time most of us know the problems: a perception that somehow Catholic colleges and universities are not Catholic enough, that there are too few priests and religious, that students show up religiously illiterate and may need remedial religion; you know the list. Instead of repeating or expanding that list, we might better find some examples of people and institutions addressing these problems and, if we can not find examples, ask ourselves how we might address them.

Another key word: *concrete*. If the word is *integration*, let's talk about curriculum. If the word is *faculty*, let's talk about hiring policy and graduate training and faculty development. If the word is *diversity*, let's talk about admissions and retention and class—that is, dollars. If the phrase is *religious illiteracy*, let's talk about youth ministry and catechetics and summer programs for high-school people and introductory courses in religion and culture. If the word is *justice*, let's talk about citizenship education and the political responsibility of professions and institutions. After all, how does a Christian act responsibly in today's world of work? Now there is an area where we need to get beyond the culture of complaint.

Another key word: *collaborative*. There are some things we in higher education need to do together, and some we could do well by working with other agencies and institutions, including some in the church. None of us alone could sponsor summer workshops for graduate students and young faculty offering an invitation to Catholic intellectual life. Fifty schools are able to offer just that in Collegium. Alone a course on Catholic social thought and welfare reform might seem interesting only to the initiated. A course like that with a snappier title,



offered in cooperation with local Catholic charities agencies and local community-development projects sponsored by the Campaign for Human Development, might take on a new seriousness. How about a summer institute with faculty from 20 schools working with Catholic charities staff and CHD organizers to plan such courses.

Constructive, concrete, collaborative. One more word, perhaps, *modesty*. Philip Gleason's history is filled with pronouncements and manifestos and high-sounding mission statements, but not many curricular or research initiatives and almost no collaborative projects among schools or between universities and church agencies or movements. Others have been here before us, but there are few huge success stories. So *modesty*: a willingness to admit that none of us are all that sure exactly how, here, today, on our campus, we know how to do Catholic higher education.

And so an answer to my friend's questions: Holy Cross, like other Catholic colleges and universities, is a place where serious people talk together about the meaning of their shared responsibilities as scholars and teachers, and about their differences, which are more important than our usual easy toleration allows. As American academics we share many common experiences and many of the same aspirations. But on some matters we do differ. I want to practice resurrection, as Chris Doucot and Jackie Allen tell me I should, and I believe I need them and my other brothers and sisters in the faith, but I also need my friend and others like him. You and I, all of us in Catholic higher education, have incredible opportunities to respond to important issues in the church, in American higher education, and in society. With the help of one another, we can make a difference and, together, perhaps all of us can find ways to "Practice Resurrection."

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Text is in *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* (Winter, 1992), 31–42, and Alice Gallin, O.S.U., ed., *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents, 1967–1990* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 413–438.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Schwehn, *Exiles in Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* in David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 155. The full text reads:

It is necessary that human beings, in the intimacy of their own consciences, should so live and act in their temporal lives as to create a synthesis between scientific, technical and professional elements on the one hand, and spiritual values on the other. It is no less clear that today, in traditionally Catholic

countries, secular institutions, although demonstrating a high degree of technical and scientific perfection, and efficiency in achieving their respective ends, are but slightly affected by Christian motivation or inspiration. It is beyond question that in the creation of those institutions many contributed and continue to contribute who consider themselves Christians; and without doubt, in part at least, they were and are. How does one explain this? It is our opinion that the explanation is to be found in an inconsistency in their minds between religious beliefs and their actions in the temporal sphere. . . . It is our opinion too that the above mentioned inconsistency between the religious faith of those who believe and their activities in the temporal sphere results, in great part, from a lack of a solid Christian education. Indeed it often happens that in many quarters and too often there is no proportion between scientific training and religious instruction: the former continues and advances until it reaches higher degrees, while the latter remains at an elementary level.

<sup>4</sup> The exclusion of religion is noted by Schwehn and is receiving wide attention with the publication of George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994). We will have occasion to discuss the exclusion of citizenship, but I cite one instance. In an address marking the 150th anniversary of the College of the Holy Cross, Sept. 17, 1993, Harvard's former president Derek Bok said: "Through my two decades of presiding over a university, I cannot recall a single serious faculty discussion of how undergraduate education could do a better job preparing students to be citizens." (Text available from Holy Cross Office of Public Affairs.)

<sup>5</sup> Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., "Catholic Education in America" in *America* (October 4, 1986), 160–163.

<sup>6</sup> George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> See *Ex Corde Ecclesiae Americanae: From the Heart of the American Church*, chapter 6.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Monan, S.J., "The Faculty and the Formative Educational Role" in *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* (Summer, 1992), 21–25.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic" in Nelle G. Slater, ed., *Education for Citizenship and Discipleship* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 3–34. See also John Coleman, S.J., "The Two Pedagogies: Discipleship and Citizenship" in the same volume, 35–78.

<sup>10</sup> Nathan Hatch, "Strengthening Protestant Evangelical Scholarship: Developing a Comprehensive Strategy; A Report to the Pew Charitable Trust" (October, 1988). Document made available by Professor Hatch.



<sup>11</sup> The Shea-Imbelli exchange appeared in *Commonweal* (Jan. 31, 1992, and April 24, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> David Hollenbach, S.J., "The Catholic University and the Common Good" in *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* (Summer, 1995), 3-16.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Hughes, *A Culture of Complaint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

