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Jesuit, Catholic Higher Education: Some Tentative Theses

Michael J. Buckley, S.J.

Father Buckley gave this as a paper at the annual meeting of Jesuit academic vice-presidents in 1982. This year Father Buckley is Bannan Scholar in Residence at the University of Santa Clara, on leave from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley.

Introuction

In the pages that follow, I have tried to suggest certain reflections around the general and troubled topic of the Jesuit, Catholic university. I do so because I suspect that a central problem for many administrators of such institutions lies within the vagueness or even chaotic understanding of this governing issue: *what it is that they are administering*. What do you mean by a “Jesuit university”? Is it basically the same sort of thing that any Catholic university is—something clear enough in purpose, however imperfect in realization; but at the same time something variant, in that the Jesuit university is staffed in part by a different religious coterie and marked by a particular historical tradition, so that one speaks primarily about “Jesuit presence” when one talks about these institutions?

Or are we talking about something that is radically different when we talk about a Jesuit university? Are we talking about a university with a cultural orientation and a peculiar set of emphases that make it profoundly different from other Catholic universities, granted any number of similarities among them all—differences and similarities which the administrator should be at pains to foster?

Or is there something in between?

When one assumes administration of such an institution, it is not unreasonable for such questions to be asked. Especially in a university, there is a unique value in *knowing* what you are doing!

Appropriate as such a set of questions is, however, it presupposes too much. It presupposes that the content of "Catholic university" is itself already determined—a "cluster concept," at least, which all can recognize, agree upon, and discuss within.

I think, though, that this presupposition is false. I think that "Catholic university" is as much of an ambiguity as "Jesuit university," and that many of the problems in understanding the latter stem from an incoherence in this more fundamental premise.

Since that is my conviction, I have structured the theses of this article accordingly. I have first set down a series of statements which I think are true about Catholic universities in general, and then I have stated how I think these either have been or could be realized in the Jesuit university.

The normal difficulties of such a task of description or definition are increased enormously for American Jesuits by a second fact, one which also touches the presuppositions for a series of questions on the nature of Jesuit higher education: American Jesuits are almost universally unaware of, or indifferent to some central foundational documents in their tradition. A striking example of this was provided by a remark of Father George Ganss¹ on the initial options posed by *Project One*:²

The second feature of *Project One* (Volume 4) which strikes this writer is the virtually total lack of references to or use of Part IV of Ignatius' *Constitutions*, the locus where he most succinctly, clearly and authoritatively enshrined his educational theory or rationale. That theory is his own application of the dynamic and apostolic world view towards which God led him. . . . In Part IV of the *Constitutions*, he applied it to the formation of Christian persons in the secondary schools and universities which he founded and administered.³

In a subsequent discussion with Father Ganss, a prominent Jesuit educator remarked that the Fourth Part of the *Constitutions* was not only absent from the written reports of *Project One*, but from almost all of its discussions as well. It would be instructive, perhaps, to discover how many Jesuits have some knowledge of the characteristic elements which Ignatius placed in the Fourth Part of the *Constitutions*, as distinct from those which subsequent Jesuit educators specified in the *Ratio studiorum*.⁴

If Jesuits do not know the unique genius of their own origin in education, they cannot define a present stand for themselves in education by "dialoguing with their tradition." They are left to follow in their adaptations: (a) usages within their own memories and (b) the patterns and directions they find in American secular education. Perhaps the reason for the repeated failures of commissions, conferences and programs for Jesuit higher education is that these have represented individual or collective initiatives at particular periods, but initiatives without continuity with the organic development of the Society. Isolated from this continually evolving tradition, these initiatives lived briefly and died.

Whatever be the accuracy of this reading of our present awareness of our

historical meaning, I have tried to formulate the theses of this article with one such central foundational document in mind—the most important document, in my opinion: the Fourth Part of the Jesuit *Constitutions*. I do so, not because I think that American Jesuits of the twentieth century can or should copy or repeat these individual provisions, but because these spell out in the concrete Ignatius' view of higher education. Perhaps by looking at what might seem, at first blush, quaint or antiquated, the contemporary Society could sketch more perceptively an outline of what it is about today and enrich its self-understanding by drawing from its tradition some of its unrealized possibilities.

The difficulty of any definitional inquiry is that its language must be prescriptive as well as descriptive, i.e. it must say something about what this thing is to become as well as describe what it *de facto* is. Consequently, any discussion of the idea of a university will always suffer from the accusation of irreality. But the value of such prescriptive discourse is that it can present something of a vision of what the institution might become and a goal towards which human beings might marshal their efforts.

Finally, these theses are insistently entitled *tentative*. They are my first attempt to do something along these lines, and I am anxious to obtain modifications, corrections, and suggestions of alternatives. The value of the Renaissance "thesis method" was that positions were laid down which reflected a serious judgment and were stated with a precision and in a common language which made discussion and disagreement possible.

The liability of the thesis method was that it tended towards defensiveness, polemics, and inflexibility. Let me attempt to allow for these deficiencies by positing these theses as "exploratory," as being a number of statements that I think are true and which are stated as directly as possible in order to invite the reflections of the reader. Hence, to speak again from the customs of an earlier time: "*salvo meliore iudicio. . .*"

I. The Nature of a Catholic University

Thesis 1: The problem of the Catholic university is falsely stated if it is framed as if this university and the Church were two distinct, though interconnected institutions.

Counterposition: Father Timothy Healy, S.J., in "Belief and Teaching," *Georgetown Magazine* (January-February, 1982), p. 3:

How does the Church live within a university? How do the two institutions interact on common ground? . . . The Church also lives here [in a Catholic university] in two distinct ways: first, it leads its own life on our grounds; secondly, the Church joins in, shares and influences the life and the work of the university itself.

Comment: Such an understanding does not do justice either to the historical nature of the Catholic university or to its intrinsic uniqueness. Father Healy's "two distinct ways" could describe the presence of the Church within any major secular society, such as the City of New York. Catholic universities, in

contrast, are institutions founded by the Church, supported by the Church, and oriented to a unique service of the Church. Such a university is "Catholic" in a way that no city or state could be.

Thesis 2: The Catholic university cannot be defined simply as a university where there is a strong Catholic presence.

Counterposition: Father Ladislav M. Orsy, S.J., "A Catholic Presence," *America*, (5 April 1969), p. 397:

A human institution is not transformed into a supernatural one; it simply offers an opportunity to persons with religious belief to share the life and the work of a university community—in freedom and sympathy that supports them. . . . The quality and intensity of their presence will make its mark on the university. . . . To have a Catholic university, then, means to have a Catholic presence at the university.

Comment: The same criticism could be offered of this understanding as of the first, with the added remark that it is actually a description of a secular university with an active and influential Newman or Catholic Faculty Club. Both this and the previous descriptions attempt to determine the Catholic university as being a university in which the Church is one important element.

Thesis 3: The Catholic university cannot be described as Catholic simply through the activities of campus ministry, the presence of religious and Catholic lay faculty, and a requirement in religious studies.

Counterposition: "Goals and Guidelines of the University of Santa Clara," January, 1979:

If we are to honor our heritage, we must assure that Santa Clara remains a Catholic and Jesuit university in more than name only. We do this now in many ways: the activities of the Campus Ministry Office; the involvement of Jesuits and campus lay people in all areas of campus life; the presence of spiritual counselors in the dormitories; the commitment of men and women in the Christian Life Community to service of God and mankind; the exposure of all undergraduate students to courses in the Department of Religious Studies; and the role of the Mission Church as both the symbol of Santa Clara's heritage and a dynamic focus of Christian activity.

Comment: In this understanding, the purpose in the Church which the University of Santa Clara is to serve is not articulated. Most of the presence of the Church is assigned to campus ministry and segregated off from the formally academic integration of the university and its more general intellectual life. The university exists for mental culture, but, aside from religious studies, Catholic reflection and theology are allotted no pervasive place within the development of such a culture.

Thesis 4: The Catholic university is one form of the Church, one of the communities which are integral to the universal Church, as much a Catholic community as is the parish, the monastery, the family, a secular institute, a comunidad de base, and a diocese. These differ radically among themselves, each having its own members, constitution, government, origins and purpose.

Comment: "Such an ecclesial origin of the university cannot have been fortuitous. Rather it seems to express something more profound. But why does the Church need the university? . . . The reason for this need should be sought in the very mission of the Church. In fact, the faith which the Church announces is a *fides quaerens intellectum*: a faith that demands to penetrate human intelligence, to be thought out by the intellect of the human person. Not by placing it alongside what intelligence can know by its own natural light, but by permeating from within this same knowledge" (Pope John Paul II, "The Church Needs the University," March 8, 1982, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition [3 May, 1982], p. 6). In the same address, the pope refers to these institutions as a necessity for the Church.

Thesis 5: The Catholic university is that Catholic community in which the Church "strives to relate all human culture to the gospel of salvation" (Gravissimum Educationis, no. 8). This relationship is concretely to be realized both in the development of its students and in the advancement of this integral knowledge by its faculty.

Another way of making this claim: "Secondly, the university is Catholic in its deliberate determination to render the Church this unique service: to be a forum where in utter academic freedom the variant lines of Catholic tradition and thought can intersect with the most complex challenges, contradictions and reinforcements of contemporary thought, moving towards a unity of world and Word, that all things be assimilated into the Christ. No other institution within human culture can render this critically important contribution to the Christian community (as a whole), and without it the commitments of faith disintegrate into sectarian polemics whose only strength lies in their isolation from contradicting contact" (Michael J. Buckley, S.J., "The Catholic University as Pluralistic Forum," *Thought* 46:181 [June, 1971], p. 208).

Comment: The Catholic university, then, essentially includes within itself the presence and the unique contribution of non-Catholics as well as the academic freedom which makes open discussion possible. Without the presence of variant tradition it would be impossible that the Church could sponsor this relation of the Gospel with "all human culture." Both Catholic and non-Catholic faculty have an appropriate contribution to make to the advancement of the life of the Catholic university, and what is asked from faculty and students is not a particular credal affiliation, but that they be willing to enter into the conversations about those questions which constitute the formal academic character of the Catholic university (theses 11 and 12 below). This integration of the Gospel with culture demands especially the presence and contribution of non-Catholic Christians whose perspectives push the radical questions about what Christianity really is, and what it really means, in the contemporary world.

This means that the Catholic university is not the Church nor a microcosm of the Church nor even a community composed only of believers. Such a

university is, however, rather one modality or form which the Church internally develops in order to reach its full stature, in order to become what it must be. It is an assimilative sub-community of the Church, i.e. one that assimilates into the reflection consequently upon the Gospel the vast pluralism of persons and persuasions representative of "all human culture," a community whose institutional determination is to render to the Church universal this unique service. The autonomy of the Catholic university from controls that would be properly exercised over a diocese or a parish is essential. This academic freedom from external controls is essential not only for its authenticity as a university, but for that comprehensive, free discourse which alone can offer the Church serious, disinterested, and uninhibited inquiry.

Thesis 6: Hence, the Catholic university as a unique Catholic community is, like any Christian community, essentially sacramental, i.e. that community which, with historical continuity and tangible perceptibility, makes present for all human beings now the reality of Christ drawing all human culture to himself.

Another way of making this claim: It is in and through the Catholic university that the mission of Christ to draw all human culture to himself is given historical continuity and visibility in the twentieth century.

Comment: The Catholic university is not a university in which the Church has a strong presence. The Catholic university is itself, and as a whole, a presence of the Church.

Thesis 7: The manner in which this understanding of the university is manifested in the Jesuit Constitutions is by (1) stipulating that the entire college/university is a residence of the Society, i.e., the entire college/university is a Christian, religious community (Formula of the Institute (5), (8); Const. 289); (2) orienting both the schools of humane letters and of natural science to their integration with theology (446-452); (3) insisting upon the Christian service for which these studies are undertaken, often concretized as future teaching, and generalized as "the glory of God and the good of souls" (Const. 440; 289-290; 351; 446; 622).

Comment: This orientation towards service received striking expression by Ignatius on December 1, 1551:

From among those who are now merely students, some in time will depart to play diverse roles—one to preach and carry on the care of souls, another to government of the land and the administration of justice, and others to other occupations. Finally, since young boys become grown men, their good education in life and doctrine will be beneficial to many others, with the results expanding more widely every day (*Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, Epp. Ign. IV, p. 9*).

II. The Administration of a Catholic University

Thesis 8: The academic leadership or administration within a Catholic uni-

versity is essentially a religious ministry.

By “religious ministry” is meant something quite specific, namely that it is the responsibility of the administration that the sacramental finality of the Catholic university be realized: the integration of human culture and the Gospel. This ministry is intellectual leadership, but that does not make it less religious. It bears directly upon the intellectual service of God, a pervasive *ministerium verbi* (Ministry of the Word), in which the Word is translated into varying cultures, in which a more accurate understanding is gained by its encounter with and advancement of these cultures and in which a new synthesis is obtained between faith and all forms of knowledge. This *ministerium verbi* is the first ministry which the *Formula of the Institute* lists in its enumeration of Jesuit apostolic commitments. The universities have a unique function in this ministry: to advance and to synthesize the Gospel and all forms of human culture.

Comment: Thus the president, the academic vice-president, the deans, the provost—whoever *de facto* preside over the life of the university have a profoundly synthetic religious leadership as their primary task. Their leadership is not “religious” as opposed to “academic” or intellectual—that is precisely the dichotomy that the university is to deny. But it must be stated that if the leader of *any* Christian community—be it a Catholic university or parish or family or monastery or hospital—is not persuaded of the appropriately religious character of his or her leadership, then the community drifts into secularization.

Thesis 9: The manner in which this understanding of university/college administration is manifested in the Jesuit Constitutions is by the insistence upon the personal religious character of its rector (423) and upon the religious quality of his leadership, with learning and Christian life placed as a single finality (424, 490).

Comment: There are no grounds for asserting that separate incorporation removes the essentially religious nature of Jesuit university leadership. It is not the case that the division of functions between rector and president meant that one was religious and the other secular:

The rector of the community is the religious leader of the Jesuit community, and his function is to govern it in such a way that it is Jesuit in its life and supports this apostolate to which it is committed.

The president of the Jesuit university is the religious leader of the university, and his function is to administer it in such a way that its life promotes that intellectual and moral integration of all human culture with the Gospel which is *its* purpose. See Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “The Image of the Jesuit University President,” (August 8, 1975) *Documentation* 27/2.

III. The Formal, Academic Catholic Character of the Catholic University

Thesis 10: The formal character of any university is not constituted by the

elimination or by the presence of any particular discipline.

Comment: A university, to be a university, should include whatever passes as serious and disciplined knowledge. The exclusion of theology from a particular university does not mean in itself that it has excluded religious commitment; *per se* it means that it has fallen that short of being a university. On the other hand, the presence of Catholic theology on a university campus does not necessarily indicate that the university is Catholic; it indicates that it is just that much more a university.

Thesis 11: The formal, academic character of any university is constituted by the order of the questions which are entertained and by the kind of knowledge which is considered most worth having.

Comment: One would not expect restrictions upon discourse and study at the University of California at Davis, or at MIT, or at the University of Santa Clara. But the priorities in the issues to be investigated or the knowledge considered either fundamental or most important will be different in these different institutions. This trait will constitute the difference among them.

Thesis 12: The Catholic academic character of a university will be constituted by the quality and the influence of its theology, i.e. by the depth, rigor, and thoroughness with which theological inquiry is conducted and by the integrating influence of theology upon all of the other disciplines taught in the university. A Catholic university is one in which Catholic theology acts as an architectonic wisdom, one which draws the arts and the sciences and the engagements of the professional schools into an ongoing conversation about pre-suppositions, consequences, and common themes.

Thesis 13: The Constitutions exhibit this understanding of the Catholic academic character of the university primarily in the principal emphasis which they give to theology (446). Literature, natural sciences and philosophy are oriented to this theological wisdom: their study prepares the students for the serious engagement in theology; theology unifies knowledge into a single understanding of the world, into a wisdom; the orientation of all learning tends to the same end ultimately as theology (447-451).

Comment: The place of theology given by the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* is really quite different from that allotted to it by, say, Newman's *Idea of a University*. In Newman, theology would be one element among others in a circle of knowledge which forms the "philosophical habit of mind." In Ignatius, theology is the principal and governing discipline in which the humane letters and sciences reach their natural completion (446, 450).

Thesis 14: The formal academic curriculum of a Catholic university must be sustained by the surrounding presence of a more general Catholic culture that makes the daily life of the university itself.

Comment: Examples of this “more general Catholic culture” would be found in the quality and seriousness of its worship, the character of its collective morality and social concerns, the pastoral care of one member for another, the seminars and general lectures which it fosters, the atmosphere of intellectual and religious interests, and so forth (see *Const.* 481-489).

IV. Agents of Integration of Faith with Culture

Thesis 15: *Granted this integrating function as the primary work of the administration, the principal administrator must be aided in his responsibility by subordinate officials whose ministry it is to see that this integration permeates the intellectual life (the Academic Vice-President), the social life (Vice-President for Student Affairs), and the religious life of the university (the University Chaplain).*

Thesis 16: *Such an integral view of the Catholic university can never be realized if “campus ministry” is only or principally composed of those who are not part of the academic community and who confine themselves to the obviously liturgical and pastoral engagements of the university, i.e. if campus ministry confines itself to a “sacristy” or even to an “activist” function.*

Thesis 17: *“Campus ministry” should be that interdepartmental committee whose function it is to assist the president in some aspects of his religious ministry to the Catholic university, i.e. the integration of faith with culture/life. Such a staff or committee is necessary because too many of the possibilities for such an integration cannot be realized in the present departmental divisions: members of the various departments should be invited to become members of this interdepartmental staff, composed of the University Chaplain and members of the university faculty, and full-time staff members.*

These are some implications and possibilities envisaged by this thesis:

1. The head of “campus ministry” should be the University Chaplain of the school, with the rank of vice-president to assist the president in his general religious ministry of the integration of faith and culture.
2. The majority of the members of the “campus ministry” committee or staff would also be members of other departments and schools.
3. Areas of religious integration which are open to such a “campus ministry” would be for example:
 - a. Sponsorship of a religious/academic bookstore which would be a center of regular discussions, lectures, and seminars on the integration of faith and culture.
 - b. Introduction into the campus of the great range of prophetic and intellectual movements within the Church, such as the Catholic Workers, Charismatics, liturgical groups, Pax Christi, Rural Life Conference, Christian Family Life, Jesuit Volunteers—for the possibilities both of critique and of assimila-

tion into the life of the university.

c. Sponsorship of prolonged engagements in Christian service which would be planned, supervised and reflected upon for their Christian elements and which would be of such an academic quality that the theology department could recognize them as legitimate courses.

d. Through the presence of campus ministry on various academic committees, planning groups, and other representative bodies, a continual source of the questions about the integration between these plans or programs and the purpose of the university.

e. Through their presence within placement offices, career planning and counseling centers, a challenge to the university community, that the teachers would understand their lives and the students plan their futures as *vocations* rather than simply *careers*, i.e. as a way of life and service within the world which is a response to the call of God in their lives, rather than a positive evaluation of obvious and secularly justifiable options.

f. Organization of a rich and full liturgical life, which embodies such possibilities as the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church, a eucharistic liturgy which follows the variations and harmony of the liturgical year, a series of "university sermons," etc., and which so integrates the university as a whole at certain solemn occasions that it is the university, as *this* form of the Church, which is at prayer.

Thesis 18: To act as an architectonic wisdom, Catholic theology must be restored as an integral discipline, distinct both from the more general "religious studies" and from an eclectic amalgam of disparate courses in Scripture or ethics or spirituality. "Theology" is here understood as an inquiry into the nature, influence and claims of God as revealed in Christ, and "religious studies" as an investigation of the nature and varieties of religions or confessions which have emerged in human history.

Comment: As the architectonic discipline which integrates and marks a Catholic university, theology should be in constant interchange with the other sciences and arts, with the other schools, studies, and activities of the university. Theology gains in content and in method in its encounters with other disciplines; the other disciplines are drawn beyond themselves into a general academic unity by their discussions with theology. What kind of presence or curriculum-order is necessary to obtain such a dialogue can only be determined by experience, but it should be of such a character as (a) to maintain theology as a serious and systematic study and (b) to constitute it in a synthetic unity with all the other aspects of the university.

Thesis 19: Thus both theology and "campus ministry" have an integrating function within the university. Everything within the university is the object of the theological faculty as it attempts to move towards a synthetic vision which is a Christian wisdom, and of "campus

ministry" as it attempts to introduce that vision into practice and expand it in areas not under the purview of various departments.

Thesis 20: The manifestation of the sacramental nature of the Catholic university, i.e., of the historical presence of Christ drawing all human culture to himself, is to be found in every aspect of the university: in the priorities among the questions investigated and in the knowledge thought essential; in the quality of the intellectual, moral, and religious life on campus; in the criteria by which decisions are reached and investments made; in the kind of recruitment information, of students admitted, and of faculty hired, and so forth.

Thesis 21: The Jesuit community is that local community of Jesuits who both collectively and individually minister to this kind of university. How it does so would be the subject of another twenty theses!

NOTES

¹The Reverend George E. Ganss, S.J. is the distinguished translator and editor of the English version of the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*.

²*Project One* was an attempt of the American Jesuits, initiated in 1973 and extending over the next four or five years, to identify and evaluate their goals and efforts in the apostolate of education.

³*Project One*, Volume #5, pp. 194-195.

⁴The *Ratio Studiorum* is the successively revised Jesuit plan of studies, an organization of curricula and of instructional methods rather than an exposition of educational theory.