

Introduction—The Idea of a Catholic College: Charism, Curricula, and Community

Pope John XXIII's opening address of the Second Vatican Council, on October 11, 1962, rings with a startling frankness:

It often happens that, in the daily exercise of our apostolic ministry, we come across and have to listen to, not without offense to our ears, the voices of some who, though burning with religious zeal, do not consider matters with a like discretion and prudent judgment. In the present conditions of human society, they are able to discern nothing but ruins and calamities. They repeatedly say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is progressively becoming worse; and so they behave as though they have learned nothing from history, which is the teacher of life.... But it seems clear to us that we must disagree with these prophets of gloom, who are always predicting decay, as if the destruction of all things were at hand.¹

And so Pope John did disagree, proclaiming instead the need for trust in the hidden intentions of Divine Providence, leading us beyond our own expectations, failings, and flaws into, he suggested, a “new order” of things.²

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¹ Pope John XXIII, “Address on the Occasion of the Solemn Opening of the Most Holy Council,” §4.2-3, available in Italian, Latin, Portuguese, and Spanish at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/speeches/1962/index_en.htm. The address was presented in Latin, from which the translation in the body of this text was made: “Saepe quidem accidit, quemadmodum in cotidiano obeundo apostolico ministerio comperimus, ut non sine aurium Nostrarum offensione quorundam voces ad Nos perferantur, qui, licet religionis studio incensi, non satis tamen aequa aestimatione prudentique iudicio res perpendunt. Hi enim, in praesentibus humanae societatis condicionibus, non nisi ruinas calamitatesque cernere valent; dictitant nostra tempora, si cum elapsis saeculis comparentur, prorsus in peius abiisse; atque adeo ita se habent, quasi ex historia, quae vitae magistra est, nihil habeant quod discant.... At Nobis plane dissentendum esse videtur ab his rerum adversarum vaticinatoribus, qui deteriora semper praenuntiant, quasi rerum exitum instet.”

² Ibid., §4.4: “In praesenti humanorum eventuum cursu, quo hominum societas novum rerum ordinem ingredi videtur, potius arcana Divinae Providentiae consilia agnoscenda sunt, quae per tempora succedentia, hominum opera, ac plerumque praeter eorum expectationem, suum exitum consequuntur, atque omnia, adversos etiam humanos casus, in Ecclesiae bonum sapienter disponunt.”

The watchwords of the Council were *ressourcement*—back to the sources!—and *aggiornamento*—to the day! That they together bespoke the spirit of the Council is a reminder that, in more clichéd terms, the Council had no interest in throwing out the baby with the bathwater. To the contrary, the Council sought to open the Church—the whole people of God—to the workings of the Spirit: more precisely, to cooperate with the Spirit in its work of making the Church young again.³ The old Church was to be renewed and enabled to speak and minister effectively to the day by returning to the founts of its life: at bottom, the astonishing gift of new life realized by encounter with the crucified and risen Christ.

This issue of the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* includes six papers presented at the fall 2014 conference “The Idea of a Catholic College,” organized and hosted by King’s College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.⁴ Readers of this journal will know that, in the extensive literature of the last forty years on the nature and mission of Catholic colleges and universities, one not infrequently finds a note of lamentation that, in the aftermath of the Council, baby did go out with bathwater, or in any event is very likely on the way out soon.⁵ Consider, for example, merely the subtitle of the impressive study by Melanie Morey and John Piderit, SJ, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis*, published in 2006.⁶ As the title of the King’s conference indicates, it too was

³ See *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), §4, promulgated November 21, 1964, available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁴ Further papers from the conference will appear in the journal’s summer issue.

⁵ Other relevant events include the 1967 Land O’Lakes statement, asserting the autonomy of Catholic universities “in the face of authority of whatever kind” and the incorporation of most American Catholic colleges and universities under the leadership of boards of trustees independent of the institutions’ sponsoring religious orders. See “The Land O’Lakes Statement: The Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University,” §1, available at <http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf1/cu8.pdf>, insightfully discussed by David J. O’Brien, “The Land O’Lakes Statement,” <http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf1/cu7.pdf>.

⁶ Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, SJ, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). According to the authors, the “optimism and enthusiasm” that senior administrators of Catholic institutions often expressed in interviews appear, in a word, “unfounded” (347). Similarly, George Marsden has claimed that a “good case can be made that Catholic universities today are about where their Protestant American counterparts were between the two world wars,” which is to say in transition—and perhaps inexorably so—from having meaningful religious identities to being not much more than historically, vestigially Christian; see his paper “What Can Catholic Universities Learn from Protestant Examples?” in *The Challenge and Promise*

focused on what is essential to Catholic higher education. But the conference further aimed to bring together, on the one hand, Pope Saint John XXIII's trust in an emerging "new order" with, on the other, Pope Saint John Paul II's attention to institution building, as evident in his apostolic constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, promulgated in 1990.⁷ In other words, the conference hoped to push the arguments of the last forty years a bit further along, at once acknowledging serious challenges,⁸ yet trusting that the Spirit might provide aplenty—to return to the watchwords of the Council, that *ressourcement* might yet lead to *aggiornamento*.

Not least of the insights from the last forty years is one that has been but faintly heard. In the words of Naomi Meara, "Maybe it is more productive to think about all the diverse elements that are included in the very untidy construct of a church-related" institution of higher

of a Catholic University, ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 187-198, at 187. See further John McGreevy's study "Catholics, Catholicism, and the Humanities since World War II," in *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion since World War II*, ed. David A. Hollinger (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 189-216. McGreevy remarks, toward his study's end, that "forming a new generation of Catholic scholars now seems an especially daunting challenge" (206).

⁷ Controversy over this document centered, as is likely all too well known, on its stipulation that "those who teach theological disciplines in any institute of higher studies have a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority." However, other stipulations—like that "the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority within the Institution"—also generated some heat if not always light. *Ex corde*, it was worried, did not so much promise a revitalized academic culture as threaten loss of academic freedom and unduly restrictive hiring practices. Commentators generally agreed with Pope John Paul's claims that the Catholic university is born "from the heart of the Church" and that Catholic colleges and universities participate *in* the Church, but no few disagreed with the conclusion that the institutional Church, which is to say the magisterium, ought then to have a role in these institutions' governance. See Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (*Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities*), pt. 2, article 4, §3, n. 50, citing canon 812; pt. 2, article 4, §4; and pt. 1A, §27, available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html. Compare Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Some Theological Reflections on *Ex corde Ecclesiae*," in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, 117-125, and George Dennis O'Brien, *The Idea of a Catholic University* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 152-163.

⁸ See, for a succinct statement of these challenges, Alice B. Hayes's 2007 address at a meeting of Jesuit advancement officers, "Trends in Catholic Higher Education," available at http://www.sl.u.edu/jaa/conference_2007/presentations_2007/Trends_in_Catholic_Higher_Education_Hayes.doc. Hayes was president of the University of San Diego from 1996 to 2003.

education than it is to focus on what is *central* to such an institution.⁹ For, as she also wrote, it may be that to “focus on what is central misses the point and perhaps derails us into conversations of importance or self-importance rather than leads us to the substance of our potential contributions.”¹⁰

Accordingly, the King’s conference was focused less on the ideal type (if such exists) of a Catholic college than it was on the *ideas* that have animated and animate to this day Catholic colleges and universities. The focus fell on Catholic colleges, rather than universities as is more often the case in the literature, for several reasons. First and most pragmatically, King’s College is focused primarily on undergraduate education, and the organizers hoped for the conference to contribute toward that institution’s mission. Second, the majority of the two hundred-plus Catholic institutions in the United States are undergraduate-focused colleges rather than research-focused universities, whatever these institutions call themselves. Third and finally, even the most developed and accomplished of the genuine dozen or so Catholic universities, like King’s College’s sister school, the University of Notre Dame (both sponsored by the Congregation of Holy Cross), devote considerable resources to undergraduate education, in particular in the liberal arts and sciences.

One example of an idea that has animated Catholic colleges is that faith and reason are complementary, not opposed or merely extrinsically related. In other words, it is not the case that nature—the province of reason—and grace—the province of faith—are altogether independent orders. Instead, according to the Catholic tradition at least, the claims of faith call forth and challenge our natural desire to know and to understand, while the dynamism of the reasoning mind inevitably brings it—unless ideology, sloth, or the myriad distractions of consumer culture disrupt its path—to the questions of meaning and import that constitute the horizon of faith.¹¹ This idea explains another that we find in Catholic institutions: namely, that undergraduates do well to have courses in both theology and philosophy. Traditionally, these disciplines have been understood as “sapiential” and “architectonic,” transcending

⁹ Naomi M. Meara, “Diversity and Change: A View from the Margin,” in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, 199-208, at 199.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹¹ Compare Michael J. Buckley, SJ, *The Catholic University as Project and Promise: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 15-16. It should be noted that *just how far* reason can take us is subject to disagreement not only within Christianity (for example, between Catholicism and the Reform tradition), but within Catholicism as well.

and integrating the many disciplines, with theology as apex, completing all knowledge; and philosophy as foundational, disclosing its presuppositions and driving to ever-deepening inquiry.¹²

Obvious questions to ask in this regard include: (1) whether philosophy and theology are nowadays up to these charges, or whether they have become merely two disciplines among others and ought to be considered accordingly; and (2) if philosophy and theology in fact can meet or move toward meeting these charges, how courses in core or general education curricula should be conceived and structured. To put these questions more positively, what do philosophy and theology now have to offer to undergraduates in our Catholic colleges? What great works can these disciplines strive to accomplish?

Arguably (to revert again to a less positive tone), since the collapse of Neoscholasticism in the 1960s, Catholic colleges and universities “have manifested rather poorly the unity and integration of knowledge” that they like to proclaim.¹³ Moreover, as Morey and Piderit write, whereas until the mid-1960s “it was in philosophy, rather than theology or religion, that students became acquainted with principles that embodied a Catholic worldview,” nowadays, these authors report, “the role of philosophy in communicating [the Catholic intellectual] tradition is hazy in the minds of many senior administrators,” and this burden seems to fall more heavily on theology.¹⁴ Yet whether today’s theology departments are capable of bearing this burden likewise can be doubted, “if only,” as the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has remarked, “because they commonly suffer from the same ills of specialization and fragmentation as other departments.”¹⁵ Yet MacIntyre does not give pessimism the last word. In his estimation, not only does the extent

¹² See Hesburgh, “The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University,” in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, 1-12, at 6-7, and Buckley, *The Catholic University as Project and Promise*, 151-182. Compare, more recently, John C. Cavadini, “Why Study God? The Role of Theology at a Catholic University,” *Commonweal*, October 11, 2013, 12-18, especially 14-16. “The very point of theology,” Cavadini writes, “is to engage the truths of faith in a ‘dialogue with reason’—that is, with all the other disciplines that arise from the questioning human spirit and our observation of the world” (14). On this account, “Philosophy is a partner to theology in the integration of the intellectual life, since it, too, asks questions that transcend the disciplines”—questions, for example, about being, intelligibility, knowledge, and value (15).

¹³ Wilson D. Miscamble, CSC, “Meeting the Challenge and Fulfilling the Promise: Mission and Method in Constructing a Great Catholic University,” in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, 209-223, at 216.

¹⁴ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 129, 106, 107.

¹⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, “The End of Education: The Fragmentation of the American University,” *Commonweal*, October 20, 2006, 10-14, at 14.

of these ills vary greatly from institution to institution, but “[i]t 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.” According to MacIntyre, many Catholic institutions “do possess the intellectual resources” to make this kind of education possible. “What we lack,” he claims, 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.”¹⁶

Another idea that has animated Catholic colleges, deeply related to that of the complementarity of faith and reason, is that all reality is suffused with the presence of God, such that God may be found in all things, including the “book” of nature.¹⁷ If all things are potentially sacramental (disclosive of God), then education is never merely secular; it has a religious dimension no matter the discipline. Along these same lines, as the theologian Michael Himes has observed, an implication of God’s incarnation in Jesus is that the way to become more like God is to be as fully human as we can.¹⁸ Inasmuch as liberal education has as its concern and responsibility the humane growth of students, it is then a work of sanctification—Basil Moreau, the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, claimed even resurrection¹⁹—which explains why the Church has long supported educational institutions rather than restricting itself to catechetics.²⁰

Here again, however, obvious questions arise. (1) Do these ideas find resonance and expression in our curricula? Traditionally, philosophy and theology have been cast as “central” to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Other disciplines like biology, history, and literature have been included in Catholic colleges’ cores, but on the grounds that they are themselves “central” to liberal education—as if liberal education

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Compare Lawrence S. Cunningham, “Perspectives in Catholic Theology,” in *Teaching the Tradition: Catholic Themes in Academic Disciplines*, ed. John J. Piderit, SJ, and Melanie Morey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 47-63, at 47.

¹⁸ Michael J. Himes, “Finding God in All Things’: A Sacramental Worldview and Its Effects,” in *As Leaven in the World: Catholic Perspectives on Faith, Vocation, and the Intellectual Life*, ed. Thomas M. Landy (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2001), 91-103, at 101.

¹⁹ Basil Anthony Moreau, *Christian Education: For Use by the Educators of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, 16, available online, in a translation by many hands, at http://www.holycrossinstitute.org/sites/default/files/u11/christian_education.pdf. “Hurry then,” Moreau writes in the conclusion of this text, “take up this work of resurrection, never forgetting that the special end of your institute is, before all, to sanctify youth.”

²⁰ Himes, “Finding God in All Things,” in *As Leaven in the Word*, 102.

were an extra good that Catholic colleges could deliver, apart from whatever it is that they are really focused on. An implication of this perspective is that there are then more or less mission-free zones of the curriculum, as in fact one will sometimes hear. It is much rarer to find an argument for the importance of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences on the grounds that all these disciplines, too, serve and express the basic mission of Catholic higher education.²¹ But let us say that they were understood in these terms. At least two further questions then arise. (2) Would this understanding make a difference for either the conception or content of the biology, history, and literature courses—to stay with the same examples—in the general education curriculum?²² And (3) what about the conception, content, or structure of the general education curriculum itself (which is to say, how these courses fit together)?

Similar questions apply with equal if not greater force to the many professional programs offered at Catholic colleges, like athletic training, business, criminal justice, education, engineering, nursing, and others. (King's has a strong physician assistant program and growing interests in engineering.) (1) How, one might well wonder, does the idea that reality is suffused with the presence of God, or the idea that the way to become more like God is to be as fully human as we can, find expression in *these* programs, which often attract many non-Catholic students to Catholic colleges? Further questions to consider in this regard include (2) whether the various professional programs have a distinctive vocation within the context of Catholic higher education and (3) how these programs might best be articulated with the colleges' core curricula. Some Catholic business schools—sometimes following the lead, interestingly, of Catholic healthcare organizations—have begun to think creatively about how to communicate core values not only through the curriculum (through what faculty and administrators *say* to students), but through the schools' operations and structures (that is, by attending to the values that the schools in fact embody).²³

Finally, Morey and Piderit note that “all too frequently, campus ministry is expected to be almost the sole bearer and purveyor of the Catholic tradition at Catholic colleges and universities”—a fact that, they go on to say, “simply has to change” if these institutions aspire to

²¹ But see Buckley, *The Catholic University as Project and Promise*, 121-128.

²² Compare here Morey and Piderit's edited volume (cited above) *Teaching the Tradition: Catholic Themes in Academic Disciplines*.

²³ See Kenneth E. Goodpaster and T. Dean Maines, “The Distinctive Vocation of Business Education in Catholic Universities,” *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 31(2) (2012): 193-212.

participate in and advance the Catholic *Intellectual* Tradition and so to develop students in both mind and heart.²⁴ Let us say that this change does come to pass: that all the disciplines, even the professional programs, and not only philosophy and theology, can articulate how they serve and express the mission of the college. The questions then arise, (1) What roles do campus ministry, service centers, learning communities, and the like have to play? (2) More precisely, how can they be (as they often are already), not extracurricular, but co-curricular, contributing to the educational mission of the college? Service learning courses; social justice activities coordinated with rigorous reflection upon the Gospel, the social teachings of the Church, economics, sociology, and history; and study-abroad opportunities in the so-called developing or two-thirds world—among what Pope Francis has called “the young Catholic churches”²⁵—all these initiatives and others hold the potential of allowing students to come to know the world’s problems “from the inside,” as Pope Francis has recently implored. Francis’s concern here is that Christianity not become a “lab faith,” talking about the world’s problems only from afar.²⁶

Catholic colleges and universities often speak of seeking to transform minds and hearts. For example, Holy Cross institutions quote Father Moreau’s injunction, in one of his circular letters, that “[w]e shall always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart.”²⁷ Yet one could wonder just what the mandate is for an institution of higher learning to trifle, as one might provocatively put it, with people’s hearts, all the more when increasing religious diversity among both students and faculty is a fact at many Catholic institutions.²⁸ Perhaps a suggestion is to be found in Pascal’s celebrated claim that “the heart has reasons that reason does not know.”²⁹ If so, the challenge for Catholic colleges is first to clarify

²⁴ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 197.

²⁵ See the interview of Pope Francis conducted by Antonio Spadaro, SJ, published under the title “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America*, September 30, 2013, 15-38, at 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁷ Basil Anthony Moreau, Circular Letter 36 (1849), quoted in William D. Dorwart, CSC, “Union of Hope,” in *The Foundation of Freedom: Teaching, Faith, and Service*, ed. William Hund, CSC, and Margaret Monahan Hogan (Portland, OR: The University of Portland Press, 2006), 49-55, at 50.

²⁸ See for a striking example Ian Lovett, “Abortion Vote Exposes Rift at a Catholic University,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2013, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/07/us/abortion-vote-exposes-rift-at-catholic-university.html>. The university in question is Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles.

²⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Léon Brunschvicg (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1976), 277-423, p. 127: “Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point....”

this claim, and then to find ways to bring mind and heart together so that each might be illumined.

The papers in this issue speak to these many questions. The papers by John I. Jenkins, CSC, Patricia Killen, and Mark W. Roche focus on what makes Catholic higher education distinctive, with special attention to the core curriculum; the papers by Gregory Bassham and Daniel O. Dahlstrom focus on the role of philosophy; and finally the paper by Christine DeVinne, OSU, reflects on the potential of co-curricular events to frame an institution's many activities in terms of its basic mission.

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