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# Monika K. Hellwig, LL.B., Ph.D.

## An Appreciation, Charles L. Currie, S.J.

Theologian Monika Hellwig, whose 20 books—for example, *Understanding Catholicism* and *What Are Theologians Saying*—were widely read in university theology classes, who taught at Georgetown for over 30 years, and who served as president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities for the last decade, died in Washington on September 30 following a stroke. She was 75. She is survived by her three grown adopted children and three grandchildren. In recent years she was particularly influential in guiding American Catholic universities during the controversy surrounding the implementation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Vatican document on Catholic universities.

Fr. Charles Currie, S.J., president of the AJCU, delivered the homily at her funeral. Several excerpts follow.



Monika K. Hellwig, LL.B., Ph.D.

The poet Yeats once described a person who was “blessed and had the power to bless.” Monika Hellwig was just such a person—blessed with gifts of keen intelligence, a master teacher’s ability to communicate, a deep and magnanimous faith—and blessing all of us with her generous and engaging presence and friendship, so often capable of transforming how we looked at things. Each of us has felt better about ourselves after spending time with Monika. As I sat in her hospital room with her lying still before me, I thought of so many of those times, thinking of how she had literally poured herself out in serving and indeed blessing others. Monika knew how to make all she did special and holy, whether it was writing books, teaching classes, giving lectures, participating in her Christian Life Community or her beloved parish, St. Rose of Lima, devoting herself to her family, or promoting the cause of Catholic higher education.

Monika, more than most of us, was “catholic” with both a large “C” and a small “c,” reminding us that “catholic” means “universal,” “all-embracing,” not something narrowly sectarian. As tirelessly and courageously as she labored to develop and foster the Catholic identity of her beloved Georgetown and all 230 Catholic colleges and universities, her vision also extended to the International Federation of Catholic Universities, and to the ecumenical International Forum of Christian Higher Education. She traveled the country and the world to promote a Catholic, an ecumenical, and an inter-religious vision all at once, and to work toward the “new heaven and new earth” that would embrace all peoples and all nations. There was nothing parochial about her.

It is striking how Monika, with all her publishing, traveling and administrative work was no less committed to com-

munity building in her Christian Life Community, her parish, St. Rose, and of course, her family. This incredible stretch took its toll. How often we saw Monika looking tired if not exhausted, but never willing to stop doing many things at once. It was not surprising that she was working at the Woodstock Theological Center only days after ending her term as president of the Association of Catholic College and Universities, and that another book was in preparation as she lay dying in the hospital. It is no accident that it was to be titled *The Fullness of Life*. She wore herself out living fully and serving God and her many constituencies—us!

It should be no surprise that Monika Hellwig was in the forefront not only of Catholic theology but also of Catholic social teaching. Today’s Catholic and Jesuit colleges and universities are committed to educate for justice. Monika has led the way. She has encouraged fruitful collaboration between the academic and the activist, and one of her recent books was dedicated to a key justice issue, respect for the environment.

Let me close with the final paragraph of Monika’s popular book, *Understanding Catholicism*, a paragraph she not only wrote but lived to the end:

...Christian faith begins and ends in God. It begins with the self-revelation of God and it ends with the reality of the God who is revealed, while the manner and process of the revelation takes in the whole sweep of human history and the whole range of human experience, gathered up in Jesus Christ and brought back into focus so that “God may be all in all.”