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Conversations On Jesuit (And Catholic?) Higher Education: Jesuit Sì, Catholic . . . Not So Sure

David J. O'Brien

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Conversations about Jesuit higher education are usually a lot friendlier, certainly a lot more civil, than conversations about Catholic higher education. Even the most crusty “cultured despiser” of religion finds Jesuits interesting, although perhaps most interesting when rather far away, say in sixteenth-century China or twentieth-century El Salvador. Most faculty, of course, despite prevailing stereotypes, don’t despise religion at all. On Jesuit campuses they probably know and like at least a few Jesuits, partly because Jesuits have been working hard at being better known and liked. And, as teachers and scholars, Jesuits enjoy enormous respect. After all, Jesuit academics are almost always extremely well educated. One professor said of a newly arrived Jesuit colleague: “he’s studied everything, everywhere.”

But Catholic, that’s another matter. One woman theology professor remarked that “the word Catholic conjures up a whole set of images of the university ready to pounce on people” and “scholars are understandably not too keen on that” (*New York Times*, May 1, 1991). Perhaps partly as a result, at Jesuit colleges and universities the word Jesuit is much displayed, but Catholic is harder to find. When there is a discus-

sion of Catholic identity, it is usually abstract, often boring, or when concrete (dealing with the Vatican and bishops and orthodoxy), threatening. Academically, Catholic character partakes of a museum, a heritage worth preserving to satisfy antiquarian curiosity or provide weapons against one or another modernist aberration. Theology in general, Catholic theology specifically, and campus ministry are available for those who are interested, but they occupy a role comparable to that of the local parish, voluntary options having more to do with private life and personal interests than with the serious work of research and teaching.

Marginalized as it may be, Catholic, as in “Catholic college or university,” nevertheless remains a nagging problem. The Galileo case was settled recently (wasn’t that a relief?) but the unfortunate—and altogether unjust—treatment of Charles Curran, the Catholic University of America theologian driven from

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Catholic higher education for views little different from those held by most American Catholics, disastrously resuscitated ancient suspicions about the church.¹

There may reside in those suspicions some of that visceral anti-Catholicism common among intellectuals, but nervousness about Catholic connections leading to ecclesiastical pouncing also reminds one of the poster whose caption reads: "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you." After all, the Vatican in recent years has been disciplining prominent theologians, cracking down on dissent, and issuing doctrinaire pronouncements on all sorts of controversial matters, often without asking the advice of the church's own experts. And, as control of colleges and universities by religious orders has grown less reliable, the Vatican has taken ever greater interest in their affairs.

Church law already requires theologians to secure a mandate from the bishops if they teach in Catholic universities. In 1989, after prolonged negotiation, the Pope issued an apostolic constitution on higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which affirms academic freedom and recognizes the autonomy of the university's internal government, but retains the requirement of a mandate and insists on some form of juridical accountability of Catholic universities to church authorities.²

An important committee of the American bishops has proposed a set of legal norms to implement that apostolic constitution, a move almost all college and university presidents regard as impractical and unnecessary. Until now, the bishops have depended on dialogue with university presidents—on conversation, if you will—to maintain a delicate balance between hierarchical and academic responsibilities, but there are many prelates who favor a more aggressive and legalistic approach. So, after a generation of wearying efforts to affirm the autonomy of colleges and universities from formal church control, and to guarantee academic freedom while remaining faithfully Catholic, church-connectedness remains a chronic problem.

The Ambiguity of Catholicity

Of course these matters don't bother faculty and students very much. At Jesuit schools, the Jesuits are supposed to take care of such Catholic matters, to keep Rome, worried bishops, and restorationist sectarians at arms length and worried Catholic parents and alumni more or less satisfied. But, quite apart from the shrinking number of Jesuits, the Catholic problem is

not so easily dealt with. For one thing, while Rome and its backers demand tighter links between church and school, there are external factors working in the other direction. All Catholic colleges and universities depend heavily on public support, for example. The courts have been far more flexible in dealing with church-related higher education than with church-sponsored elementary and secondary schools, but there are significant pressures to avoid even the appearance of religious discrimination or proselytization, pressures intensified at schools that wish to operate in the respectable academic mainstream, as do all the Jesuit schools.³

In fact, the quest for academic respectability, fueled by the drive of Catholic minorities to enter the middle classes, has been the most dynamic force for change in Catholic higher education since 1945. It has brought to these schools high-quality teaching, increasingly impressive research, highly professional faculties, more diverse students, and an array of services comparable to the best private institutions. It led to the creation of independent boards of trustees, with lay persons in the majority, legal separation of the schools from their founding religious communities, faculty participation in academic governance, and academic policies heavily influenced by the discipline-centered bureaucracies that dominate contemporary university life. It also left huge question marks punctuating legitimate worries about Catholic identity,⁴ questions that remain after skillful leaders have finished persuading Catholic constituencies that their schools remain faithfully Catholic while simultaneously convincing courts, funding agencies, and nervous faculty that it doesn't really matter all that much.

The result is a balancing act requiring great skill. Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, former President of Notre Dame, was for many years the premier spokesman for American Catholic higher education before both the hierarchy and the general public. He once told a group of parents worried about the threat-

*What is the most important thing to be done for the future of the enterprise?
Hesburgh's answer:
"Guard your Catholic character as you would your life."*

ened closing of their parochial school that they should simply ask the bishop to give them the school: "You take on the total responsibility for financing and operating it, but you assure him that it will be a completely Catholic school." Ten years later, under lay control, the school was prospering. The lesson for Hesburgh was clear: "I firmly believe that this is the pattern for the future. We have long since gone this route in Catholic higher education." American Catholic universities, under lay boards and recognizing academic freedom, "are not a direct arm of the church," Hesburgh argues, but they are "if anything, more professedly Catholic than ever." They work hard to be both academically excellent and "profoundly Catholic." What is the most important thing to be done for the future of the enterprise? Hesburgh's answer: "Guard your Catholic character as you would your life."⁵

Hesburgh's is a fair description of the case at most Catholic and most Jesuit schools. Yet there are clearly 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 designation as 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-governance? Is an answer to these questions that satisfies university leaders also an answer that meets the criteria of ecclesiastical officials, especially those put forth in recent years by the Holy See? For better or worse, the experience of Catholic higher education over the last generation exemplifies a new, more flexible and ambiguous church practice in the United States, one that the Vatican has not yet understood but one whose challenges and responsibilities American Catholics, including those of us in higher education, have yet to face as well.

From Problem to Possibility

Let me offer several propositions as the basis for that difficult discussion of the Catholic element of Jesuit and Catholic education, in hopes of moving from the chronic contestation of the past to a more positive and constructive collaboration.

1

American Catholic colleges and universities have a responsibility to relate in some way to the hierarchy and to the Catholic community.

Vatican II did not change everything. Even bishops most friendly to higher education, like Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, regularly point out that "Vatican II opened new perspectives on decentralizing authority" but it also "left in place pat-

terns of leadership which guarantee strong centers of authority within Catholic polity." Malone and other bishops expect to be more than potted plants at graduation. As Bishop Malone puts it, "Bishops have a role to play in relation to these university institutions on behalf of the Catholic community and its faith tradition."⁶

Bishops expect to be more than potted plants at graduation.

There can be little question of the United States hierarchy's strong moral support for Catholic higher education.⁷ Over the course of many years of meetings and conferences, academic leaders like Hesburgh, Paul Reinert, S.J., and Alice Gallin, O.S.U., persuaded ecclesiastical officials in the United States that they could best show their support by allowing "the institutions themselves," in Malone's words, to maintain "the proper alignment in this enterprise."⁸ Until the Vatican inserted itself more actively into discussions with universities and theologians, most bishops seemed to believe that dialogue, civility and mutual respect were sufficient to insure that Catholic colleges and universities served the church, without the need for direct episcopal control. A standing committee of bishops and presidents played a major role in insuring open communication, building trust, and working to explain American practices to the Vatican.

Yet it is also clear that this informal and altogether American arrangement, now endangered by the Apostolic Constitution and the growing power of a

few less sympathetic bishops, depends not only on episcopal self-restraint but also on the willingness of boards of trustees to insure that there is what *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* calls an institutional commitment to Catholicism, that orthodox faith is taught and dissent is kept within acceptable, and unembarrassing, boundaries, and that the school in some way serves the church. Unfortunately, these responsibilities are rarely discussed except in terms of public relations problems, like pro-choice or gay rights groups on campus, or in terms of sympathetic and hostile bishops, as if episcopal (and papal) personalities were the only problem. But the loose arrangements required by American circumstances, where Catholic affiliation is voluntary and its terms are set by the colleges and universities, carries reciprocal obligations. To the degree that institutions share responsibility for their common life, their specifically Catholic obligations rest not upon the sponsoring religious order alone, but on the trustees, the administration, the faculty, and all who participate in the life of the institution, including non-Catholics. It is not clear that local communities (in some cases not even trustees) have wrestled with the problem of defining those responsibilities and translating them into institutional policies.

Should they do so? As the Presidents regularly tell Rome, the universities have responsibilities in three directions: (1) toward the public and the government, which provide legal standing and considerable financial support; (2) toward the academic community, which shapes the professional life of the faculty, and accrediting agencies, which assure standards of integrity and quality; and (3) toward the church. For the Catholic college or university, the last is extremely, but not exclusively, important.

That said, there are many reasons to take Catholic affiliation seriously. Some are practical: the historical tradition, or saga, of the school, which has given it a distinctive place in the local community and often sustains its unique spirit; the support of Catholic alumni, parents and benefactors; the presence of significant numbers of students attracted by the Catholic professions of the school; the continuing, if reduced, support and presence of the sponsoring religious community. Then there is simple integrity: the need to be truthful by translating Catholic professions into concrete practice. And perhaps there is still a chance that these schools can draw upon the resources of the Catholic tradition and the contemporary church to make a real contribution to American culture—that they can serve, in some special way, the common good.

Most of all, taking Catholic responsibilities seriously depends on whether one thinks the Catholic church is important and Catholic education worthwhile. At times even believers do not seem altogether convinced; in most places public discussion of the question has not even taken place. So the heart of the problem may be less “secularization,” as some supposed friends of Catholic higher education argue, or the anti-intellectual attitudes of conservative Catholics and ecclesiastical bureaucrats, but the loss of nerve among Catholic academics themselves. In any event, the Catholic issue needs to be placed on the table.

2

Developing a positive expression of Catholic identity requires commitment and strategy: something must be done.

Most schools, including Jesuit schools, articulate their Catholicity in terms of the leadership role of religious orders, the presence of strong theology departments, usually containing an emphasis on self-consciously Catholic theology, the presence of campus ministry and a strong pastoral and liturgical life, opportunities for spiritual growth and Christian service, and many specific programs and projects serving the local and national church. It is these features of the schools that are highlighted when the question of Catholic identity is raised. They manifest a continuing commitment to remain Catholic in some sense.

It is less clear that these elements meet the responsibilities of Catholic colleges and universities. Pope John Paul II looks to the Catholic universities to promote the dialogue between

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Christian faith and human culture. Bishop Malone expects Catholic colleges and universities to serve the church by assisting Catholics to understand their new roles of leadership in American society and by participating in the public life of the Catholic community. The bishops, in widely heralded pastoral letters on war and peace and the American economy, appealed to the colleges and universities to engage in research and teaching aimed at peace and economic justice. Others suggest that colleges and universities should

turn their attention to the newer Catholic groups, Hispanic and Asian, and assist them to make their way in the United States, as they assisted European immigrants in the past. And there are some who would lead the schools in a more confessional direction, modelled on the best of the evangelical Protestant schools.

In each case, these appeals stumble over many of the same problems that beset the church generally. One exasperated lay academic, faced with yet another charge by a bishop that Catholic educators were not "turning out loyal and committed Catholics," snapped "neither are you!" The pastoral letters on peace and economic justice ran up against the modern tendency to sharply separate religion from economic and political life. Similarly, on campus, appeals to form Catholic lay leaders and to offer Catholic perspectives on contemporary culture ignore the yawning chasm between campus ministry and the research and teaching at the center of university life, and between theology and the other academic departments and professional programs. As Boston College President Donald Monan, S.J., has pointed out, even the definition of the situation—increasing excellence in teaching, research and administration but declining Catholic identity—suggests that the real work of most of the faculty and professional staff—teaching, conducting research, and administering—has nothing to do with whatever it is that makes the university Catholic.⁹ So the separation of faith from the problems of daily life, and especially from the

problems of public life, is institutionalized on Catholic as on other campuses.

Effective strategies to overcome these divisions and develop programs to enrich the intellectual life of the church will thus require serious attention to some of the most perplexing problems of modern culture. Enforcing orthodoxy on the theology department and sexual orthopraxis on the student services office will not do, and more will be needed than simply recruiting new vocations to the sponsoring religious order or hiring more Catholic faculty.

As Bishop Malone says, "Catholic educators themselves must engage in a high-level examination of their collective purpose and develop an overall strategy." The absence of such a strategy reflects a deeper problem: the failure of most academic leaders to acknowledge their share of responsibility for the public life and witness of the American Catholic church. Catholic higher education has an enormous stake in church reform toward collegiality and shared responsibility, including continued development of a strong episcopal conference, better mechanisms of consultation and shared responsibility at the national level, and stronger pastoral councils and more intelligent pastoral planning in dioceses and parishes. This stake should lead to deliberate participation in the public life of the church by religious communities, college administrators, Catholic faculty and Catholic learned societies.

The Church, like any other organization, is profoundly influenced by the deliberate actions of those who decide to attempt to influence it, a decision made some time ago by more conservative Catholic groups. American Catholic academic leaders have organized effectively to defend their interests against Roman intervention, but most of the time they respond to the actions of ecclesiastical authorities with indifference or the same shrug of resigned helplessness characteristic of most American Catholics. This reflects a refusal to take a share of responsibility for the life and work of the institutional church, with which, for better or worse, the destiny of Catholic higher education is inextricably intertwined.

Other elements of an effective strategy would include:

• (i) Expansion of cooperative programming with the local and national church, bringing academic resources into more direct contact with church ministries, as has been done in programs to train lay ministers and religious educators. Areas in need of imme-

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diate attention include the education and formation of clergy, deacons and religious, the work of Catholic Charities, the Campaign for Human Development, and Catholic Relief Services, the fostering and support of independent lay movements, and the continuing effort to initiate national dialogue on the moral dimensions of public policy. We need to provide many forums for open discussion about the meaning and mission of the church, and of the American church in particular. The Catholic university is the place where the church does its thinking, Notre Dame's Father Hesburgh used to say. But Archbishop Weakland points to an erosion of the desire to think throughout the church. There are culture wars, and cultural politics, in the church as well as out. The Catholic college and university has a specific responsibility not only to preserve its particular tradition but to bring that tradition into engagement with the ongoing life of the church. We will say no, as we should, to the restoration of ecclesiastical control; but we must find creative ways to say yes to the Catholic community, whose vitality and intellectual strength is a civic as well as a religious good.

- (ii) Faculty development programs aimed at strengthening and motivating those already on campus to relate their teaching and research to the needs of the church and identifying and supporting Catholic graduate students and junior faculty. We need to develop Catholic Studies programs to provide the institutional base and support for Catholic scholarship and teaching. Support for Catholic intellectual life in Catholic colleges and universities is an institutional responsibility, shared by everyone, and not a matter for the sponsoring religious community, the theology department and campus ministry. The institution shows its support by devoting financial and human resources to theology and Campus ministry, but also to Catholic intellectual life, one form of which is Catholic Studies.¹⁰

- (iii) Deliberate action to influence faculty hiring to insure a critical mass of faculty in all disciplines committed to the mission of the school and alert to the agenda of the American church, a step that will require courage and honesty from sponsoring religious communities and Catholic faculty and administrators.

Most important is the formation of leadership among trustees, administrators, faculty and students. The number of religious and lay personnel on campus

and nationally who are committed to a constructive ecclesial role for Catholic higher education and are willing to do something about it is limited. They must be willing to work together to influence the direction of particular institutions and Catholic higher education generally. Their effort should be open, honest, and constructive. Without such organized action, the balancing act between church and university may continue, but real and important possibilities to enrich the church and contribute to the pursuit of its public mission will be lost.

3

Catholic identity carries with it some specific academic responsibilities.

The academic implementation of Catholic identity requires programs that support Catholic scholarship, reintroduce religion into the intellectual life and into general education, make knowledge of the Catholic tradition and of the life of the contemporary church accessible, and integrate considerations of civic and social responsibility—both public and private morality—into research and teaching not only for undergraduates but in graduate and professional schools as well.

Theology departments labor under multiple and often conflicting assignments. They are supposed to provide access to Catholic theology, establish theology as a respectable academic discipline, offer an intellectually coherent approach to fundamental religious and moral questions, and engage in various forms of interdisciplinary research and teaching. When they attempt to meet the need of today's students for an honest examination of fundamental religious and moral questions, they are attacked by Catholic conservatives; when they try to provide opportunities for serious study of Catholic history, doctrine and moral teaching, they get hit from the other side for "privileging" Catholicism.

Often, with campus ministry, the theology department is made to bear entire responsibility for the Catholic mission and identity of the institution. Yet it is clear that this responsibility rests on the institution as a whole, that it should involve efforts to bring Catholic faith to bear on all areas of learning, and that it aims at graduating persons who have made their

religious and moral commitments intelligible. These objectives require systematic attention in every department and school by scholars and teachers for whom this work provides their central intellectual and educational commitment. One way to do this is to establish Catholic Studies programs, through which the schools could provide a home for Catholic scholarship, organize projects to serve the intellectual and educational needs of Catholic students and of the church, while providing a basis to make religious interests a factor in at least some personnel decisions.

4

Catholic higher education makes sense only in terms of Catholic intellectual life.

Despite its rich flowering in recent years, Catholic theology has had minimal impact on American academic culture. As Michael Lacey argues, it is still “regarded at best as part of the maintenance machinery of a sectarian subculture.” Incidents like the Curran case generate the suspicion that Catholics still “do not really understand the depth and intensity of the struggle that modern secular scholarship at its best has been engaged in.” Lacey agrees with William Shea of St. Louis University that one reason for this is that Catholics pay too little attention to others, who remain either beneficiaries of toleration or objects of evangelization. As Shea sees it, the Catholic university has taken the plurality of modern culture into itself, at the risk to its identity; that experiment offers unique and so far unexploited opportunities to explore with those others the religious meanings of the

common life. But to do so, Lacey argues, Catholics have first of all to “take responsibility for [their] con-

victions and exercise and argue those convictions in the political, academic and ecclesial arenas,” in public.¹¹

Catholic scholars have often been told they need to demonstrate such intellectual seriousness. For years this meant primarily establishment of first-rate graduate programs. But Lacey thinks otherwise: “I would recommend that rather than thinking simply in terms of gradually developing through marginal improvements a great, comprehensive Catholic university, we think instead about creating a more modest, more flexible, more specialized and altogether more modern institutional form . . . some kind of institute for advanced study to be devoted to the needs of Catholic scholars in all of the humanities and the social sciences.” Such a center might awaken interest in Catholic ideas among American academics. It might catch the attention of Catholic scholars now not very interested in religion. After all, no university can honestly claim Catholic identity unless a critical mass of the faculty is intellectually committed to Catholicism. But intellectually committed Catholic scholars will not automatically emerge from secular graduate schools; they need to be identified, recruited and supported. Most of all, they need to be invited to share in a sustained dialogue on issues that matter. Such a center, or some comparable project, might initiate that dialogue.

There are small signs of what may be a historic shift in understanding of religion’s role in scholarship and teaching.¹² Catholic intellectuals and educators can help nudge that change along. In any event, Catholic higher education will not achieve any of its objectives without a faculty seriously engaged at once with Catholicism and with the issues of contemporary culture. Identifying and supporting such people must be the first priority of Catholic—and Jesuit—colleges and universities.

Catholic scholars and intellectuals in many fields seriously engaged with issues of meaning and value within the framework of the Catholic tradition will not appear automatically once a college or university decides to inaugurate a Catholic Studies program. Recently a group of evangelical scholars received a large grant to identify promising students in Christian undergraduate schools and to bring them together with first-rate Christian scholars for summer seminars in the humanities, sciences and social sciences. There respected teacher/scholars will encourage them to consider graduate study in first-rate institutions and affirm their desire to pursue vocations shaped by faith. After that experience, letters of recommendation and

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even financial assistance may be provided for those attending graduate schools. Some may return to teach in Christian colleges; all will help raise the intellectual and cultural level of evangelical America. Unfortunately, for the most part we in the Catholic community have not even recognized the need for such deliberative action. On campus we complain a great deal about the level of intellectual life in the parish and the chancery office but only a few of us have decided to do something about it.

5

One key to revitalizing Catholic higher education lies in its commitment to education for justice.

Catholic schools have a special responsibility to attempt to integrate religious questions into general education and to offer interested students, including those in professional and graduate programs, opportunities to engage the Catholic tradition and to learn of the life and work of the contemporary church. They also share with all other schools an obligation to assist faculty and students to think through their social and civic responsibilities, especially in the context of the specific forms of learning they pursue. Catholic teaching at all levels insists on the connection among faith, scholarship, and the search for justice and peace. The Jesuits in particular have made the service of faith and promotion of justice, in the context of a preferential option for the poor, central elements of their educational mission.

In colleges and universities, the justice imperative is usually connected with community service programs for students, and courses in ethics in departments and schools. Indeed the PULSE program at Boston College is a national model for integrating community service into the curriculum. Emphasis on service and ethics is certainly commendable, but the limited impact of these programs after two decades of rhetorical commitment indicates that there are some problems.

For one thing, the ethics involved are usually personal and professional. They highlight the moral problems people face when working in particular fields,

and they locate the center of action in the person and his or her conscience. They speak less about the institutional settings within which such decision-making takes place, and rarely address the politics of decision-making in business, law, medicine, or in society at large. Unavoidably, there is often a negative character to the discussion, as it usually gives more attention to avoiding evil than to doing good, what a friend calls the “ain’t it awful” school of Christianity. Alert to the multiple temptations of modern society, we learn how to draw the line over which one cannot step without losing integrity.

Even when drawn further, to do good, the good is usually personal, involving legal or medical assistance or efforts to hire minorities and women. Less is learned about how to transform sinful social situations, such as a class-biased justice and medical system, so that it might become easier to be good. Still less is heard about the organizational and political commitments that might be required to make justice a reality.

A second problem is that ethics is philosophical, not theological; it tends to separate value questions from meaning or faith questions. In the process, decision-makers (including professors and students) are abstracted from communities of meaning and value, churches, parties, movements. The person who makes ethical evaluations is not a Protestant, Catholic or Jew, a fundamentalist or a liberal, a Republican or a Democrat. Detached from communities of meaning, dropped into structures which are simply given, the abstract person finds that justice is a matter of choosing the best available option. Goodness becomes just another art of the possible, in an age of shrinking possibilities.

The world-transforming goodness of a Gandhi, a John XXIII, or an Oscar Romero, in contrast, arises from faith, from powerful convictions about meaning; in the absence of serious reflection on such matters—that is, on religion—one tends to adapt to changing historical circumstances. Perhaps that worked

The world-transforming goodness of a Gandhi, a John XXIII, or an Oscar Romero, arises from faith, from powerful convictions about meaning.

humanely when everyone believed that somehow things were always getting better. In light of the Holocaust and other human-being-made tragedies, defeatist meanings (after all, what can I do?) easily fill the void left by the fragmentation of knowledge and the decline of public dialogue. The gap between the claims of education and the realities of culture enlarges, the chasm between sophisticated technical knowledge and helplessness in dealing with larger questions of life becomes all but impassable.

So, what can be done to reintroduce matters of faith into research and teaching, to make meaning part of the agenda of Catholic higher education? A start is to insist that ideas have consequences; this was the late Michael Harrington's summary of his Jesuit education. In his undergraduate years at Holy Cross, the presence of Jesuit priests, their distinctive garb, their unusual celibate and communal way of life, bore living witness to this conviction. They believed, and because they believed what they did, life was different. They seemed convinced that those beliefs were completely reasonable and, therefore, that they should shape the lives of people and nations, not just their own. One could, then, study and come to some conclusions; those conclusions should influence how one lived one's life as spouse and parent, as worker and citizen. Thus, if educators, and especially university presidents, speak of faith and justice, they have to show that these ideals make a difference for them and for their communities and institutions. If not, they make meaning (that is, religion) merely private, fit for chapel and voluntary discussion group, but not for classroom, laboratory or the streets.

Secondly, Jesuit scholar Walter Ong suggests that we need to think differently about the question of "maintaining a genuine Catholic identity" amid a more diverse faculty and student body. "Jesus lived in a historical world and founded His church in a describable historical context," Ong writes. "He thereby necessarily designed it for some kind of continuing development through history in the various and developing cultures across the world." Why did the early Christians use the Greek word *katholikos*, with its meaning of "through the whole," to describe the Church? Why did they not choose the Latin word *universalis*, closer to the word "universal" so often given as the definition of Catholic? The Latin word suggests something of territory and jurisdiction; perhaps it leads to the constant definition of Catholic identity in terms of relationships in the Church's organizational chart. But the Greek suggests something different,

something more like yeast, as in the passage in Matthew's Gospel: "The reign of God is like yeast which a woman took and kneaded into three measures of flour. Eventually the whole mass of the dough began to rise." Thus the Kingdom is a limitless, growing reality, destined ultimately to be present everywhere and to affect everything, but not by converting everything into itself. "Yeast acts on the dough," Ong writes, "but it does not convert all the dough into yeast, nor is it able to do so or meant to do so." So, today, we can no longer say with Hilaire Belloc that "the Church is Europe and Europe is the Church," but we can say with Karl Rahner that the post-Vatican II Church, with its awakening local churches across the globe, is authentically present almost everywhere. In each place it tries to build itself into the culture and incorporate the culture into itself. Ong takes this metaphor and speaks of how the faith engages each discipline, how it welcomes scholars and students of all cultures, how it opens itself to the ongoing revelations of a vast and dynamic universe. Thus the yeast "has a great deal to engage itself with" and to "penetrate all of God's creation we need the collaboration of knowledgeable people."¹³ Everyone is needed. And in that image Catholicism for the academic community turns from nagging problem to generous invitation to probe the deepest meanings of our common endeavors.

The beginning of the next phase of the discussion of Jesuit and Catholic higher education may require more public attention to such matters. Attentive to the culture of pluralism, inviting persons from diverse communities to engage in dialogue about important matters, and committed to a faith that is intellectually serious, Catholics and Jesuits can bring rich resources to contemporary culture. The effort to do so—to ask the faith and justice questions and frame the answers in the midst of contemporary history—alone makes our continuing effort to clarify the Catholic mission of Catholic colleges and universities helpful to the human community.

(The Endnotes for this article can be found on page 30.)

*“That all may be one, as you, Father, are in me,
and I in you . . . That they may be one in us. . .”*

(Jn. 17:21)

The Catholic university today must be a university in the full modern sense of the word, with a strong commitment to and concern for academic excellence. To perform its teaching and research functions effectively the Catholic university must have a true autonomy and academic freedom in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself. To say this is simply to assert that instructional autonomy and academic freedom are essential conditions of life and growth and indeed of survival for Catholic universities as for all universities.

The Catholic university participates in the total university life of our time, has the same functions as all other true universities and, in general, offers the same services to Society...

Land O' Lakes Statement on the Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University (1967)

Since the objective of a Catholic university is to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture, every Catholic university, as Catholic, must have the following essential characteristics: (i) A Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such. (ii) A continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research. (iii) Fidelity to the Christian message as it comes to us through the church. (iv) An institutional commitment to the service of the people of God and of the human family in their pilgrimage to the transcendent goal which gives meaning to life. In the light of these four characteristics, it is evident that besides the teaching, research, and services common to all universities, a Catholic university, by institutional commitment, brings to its task the inspiration and light of the Christian message. In a Catholic university, therefore, Catholic ideas, attitudes, and principles penetrate and inform university activities in accordance with the proper nature and autonomy of these activities. In a word, being both a university and Catholic, it must be both a community of scholars representing various branches of human knowledge, and an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and active.

Pope John Paul II
Ex Corde Ecclesiae
(1990), nn. 13-14

Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus...is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures, and any other ministration whatever of the word of God...

Ignatius of Loyola
The Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus (1540)