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Holiness, the Academy, and the Laity: The Vocations of Teaching and Learning

Cover Page Footnote

Elizabeth Johns, a Fellow at the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Culture at the College of the Holy Cross, is Professor Emerita of History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania. This talk was delivered on April 4, 2002, at Sacred Heart University as the Fifteenth Annual Bishop Walter W. Curtis Lecture.

ELIZABETH JOHNS

*Holiness, the Academy, and the Laity:
The Vocations of Teaching and Learning*

Vocation, as we understand it in the Christian tradition, means two things: each of us is called to follow Christ in whatever we do; and, more particularly, each of us is called to take paths in which our gifts and our strengths will be most fully used. This second definition is an understanding that all of us can ponder, regardless of our faith tradition. For God — or, as some might say, chance, or genetics, or history — has taken the initiative in giving us these gifts. Circumstances help us to sort out our response, and our character and the community around us help us to use our gifts. Most of us have had the realization that we could have followed any number of paths, that our vocation was not predetermined, but that we could assess ourselves, our deepest desires, and the opportunities around us at several points and make what seem to be turns in the road. How, then, might we define vocation? A mysterious but certain call or drive in our inmost being at many moments of our lives to become who we can best be at that time.

I suspect that for most of us in higher education, the fundamental drive — the deep-down vocation — is to learn. Consider the wonder of the irresistible urge to find something out, to learn more and more about it. Often a quite unexpected coming together of intelligence and social influence and opportunity shape this desire. To search for information, to assimilate it, to feel bonds with those who have learned this material before, and to experience ourselves developing strengths and even wisdom in this knowledge — surely this learning process is fundamental to our humanity. Most of us faculty are eternal students. Some are pulled by what happens _____

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under a microscope, others by social behavior in stressful situations, some by the power of images, some by the sequences of sounds that we call music, and still others by metaphors that leap out from poetry

and story-telling. Whatever it is, we are magnetized by it. We come to look at the world through its lenses.

I myself will never have enough of the wonderful fragrance of a library. The thrill of realizing that I am curious about something, and then reading what I can about it, finding out that the present explanations seem incomplete, and then hunting out new sources, watching my mind modify earlier understandings, and finally as I sit at my computer trying out bits and pieces of a new point of view — all this never ceases to give me a sense of well-being, energy, in fact, a real high.

Many of us who follow the drive to learn all the way to the highest degree (I don't like the phrase "terminal degree" — it sounds deadly, and perhaps for many it is) become professors in higher education. We accept the opportunity to teach in the field we are excited about as scholars, and slowly we find ourselves engaged in the vocation of teaching. Only rarely, I think, does one come to teaching as one's first vocation. This was certainly the case in my own attraction to learning as a life work. When I was first employed as a college instructor, the job offer seemed like an accident, and the first year I had a double vision about what I was doing: I felt committed, but also as though I were on the sidelines looking on. But I dug in, and each year I came to feel more and more that teaching was my vocation. I began this work more than three decades ago, and in the years since have taught in a variety of institutions — two historically black colleges in the south, a working-class community college, two state universities with graduate programs, an Ivy-League institution, and now a Catholic, Jesuit college. It's not been a bed of roses. This long career has been punctuated by experiences that challenged the high ideal of teaching that I came so wholeheartedly to adopt: experiences with colleagues, with the work load, with students and their parents, with the community outside the academy. So many things were disappointing that it was the vocation of learning that kept me going. Learning kept me going, that is, when I wasn't too exhausted to pursue it. Over the years, I knew joy, frustration, anger, resignation, amusement, and hope. Hope always came to the rescue.

This prelude brings me to my topic today: what I believe should be our creed in the academy. In a nutshell, my ideal creed calls for what I did not always find: community with those in the academy and

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with those in the world outside it; an awareness of the place of our specialized knowledge in the larger human quest for understanding; and reverence for the developmental journey of each of us, faculty as well as students.

With these ideals in mind, I want to acknowledge first that over the last three decades I have seen healthy changes in the academy. We are increasingly varied in our backgrounds as faculty and students. I've cheered as colleges and universities have hired women and members of minority groups in increasing numbers, as faculties have introduced courses that focus on geographical and historical experience beyond that of Europe and North America; as scholars have undertaken historical and sociological and psychological and literary and art historical studies that take into account gender, and race, and class, and sexual orientation; as opportunities to participate in athletics on campus have been extended to women; as colleges have placed more and more emphasis on effective advising and on helping faculty with teaching skills. I've witnessed the initiation and successful pursuit of service learning; I've watched the spread of continuing education that encourages life-long intellectual growth. I've actually seen faculty curriculum committees and faculty senates *agree* on a new core curriculum. In one institution where I taught, we began the first revision when I arrived, and when I left thirteen years later, we were well into the second complete overhaul.

And help for the academic enterprise has come from outside, too. I have seen generous gifts from alumni that have put new programs and new buildings on campuses; encouragement from local and regional newspapers about the mission of the college; alumni of modest means who mentor students about the world after graduation.

At the same time, however, we suffer in higher education from the American tradition of individualism and from the separatism of the faith traditions to which we subscribe. We are often such narrow specialists that we cannot discuss what we do with those outside our immediate field. We may have a vital relationship with God, but in the academic setting very few of us bring it up. It's considered unintellectual. And we tend to reify each other's status, as though a student is a student, with a boilerplate definition, a faculty member a faculty member categorized by ``instructor," ``assistant," ``associate," and ``full," and an administrator an ``administrator." Yet we are all

engaged in the most important tasks in our culture: to learn and to teach how to think and to live critically, aware of the past, sensitive to the global culture in which we live, and imbued with a commitment to morality and justice. This requires the whole person: breadth of understanding, flexibility, and attention to individual gifts.

Let me propose three questions that may help us to see where and how we might alter our course. I have adopted them from the Sacred Heart mission material.

Who are we? Why are we here? and Where are we going? Every one of us needs to ask these questions. We need to ask them not simply once, with answers that guide us forever after. Rather, we need to ask and reflect on them often, even throughout each day, each week, each year. These questions and our deepening answers to them should form the foundation of our activities, our encounters, our daydreaming. We may think of them as implicit in our work and devotions, but they achieve their full power when we ask them consciously. Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we going?

What problems might these questions help us to address? Understanding what these problems are is critical to our work in higher education: to our vocations here, to our commitments to learning and to teaching.

I see three habits of thought and practice that give us grief. Two of them involve the way we in the academy assess our colleagues. And the third involves the way we teach and write in our disciplines. I am going to develop these areas within the context of my three questions: Who are we? Why are we here? and Where are we going?

Problem #1: We envision ourselves as individuals rather than as a community. In fact, I see us as individualists to an extreme. This shrinks our possibilities as learners and as teachers. It's true that many of us find ourselves in relatively harmonious departments; we enjoy opportunities to team teach from which we learn a lot; we are invited by the administration to work collaboratively on widely acknowledged campus problems. Yet, for the most part, we get caught up in our "autonomy" from each other and from the institution. We're not severely introspective, most of us: we're in a rush. We're simply trying to survive, we say, to leave a few minutes per day, or even per week, when we're not swamped with a mass of student papers, or innumerable committee meetings, or responsibilities of juggling

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children (or parents) and work. We don't seem to be able to slow down to think anything through with each other. We can't even spend much time listening to each other, particularly in asking our colleagues about their research or their classes beyond the most cursory "How's it going?" In fact, many of us erect a wall between ourselves and our colleagues, and between ourselves and our students, and certainly between ourselves and our administrators. We're so used to thinking about the individual good that we find it difficult even to define the common good of our departments, our disciplines, our institutions. Yes, for numerous reasons we faculty are individualists, imagining — *willing* — ourselves to be autonomous. And the cost is tremendous. How often by trying to preserve ourselves do we feel exhausted, lonely, regretful, even bitter? We occasionally reflect: what happened to that ideal academic life of reading, thinking, talking things over with colleagues that we envisioned in graduate school? This so-called preservation of self is anything but that.

We pursue this autonomy not only as professors, but we encourage such identity in our students. Despite the strides we are making in bettering our advising, in developing honors programs and in initiating special first-year courses, we don't typically offer our students a learning community of mentors and apprentices. We "give" them the course material as though it had nothing to do with who they are (to say nothing of who we are). And what is students' experience of themselves in our eyes? Suddenly they are no longer the class valedictorians. They find, in fact, that they seem to be only average students. And enforcing their new sense of themselves as little more than a number, we resort in our heavy course load to teaching through lectures, rather than encouraging questions or discussion in which they can find their own voice. Occasionally we will hear of students even in small classes whose professors never learn their name. And in grading — grade inflation notwithstanding — we take no prisoners. How many of us have heard a faculty member proclaim, "I got mine the hard way; they can, too"? For one reason or another we shift the aloneness that we've learned to live with onto students' shoulders.

As we think about our professorial self-protection, we might also be honest about what happens to us when we become administrators. Of course some pulling away from faculty colleagues is necessary when

one becomes a leader. However, isn't the temptation very strong to refrain from seeking faculty consensus in order to "leave one's mark" on the direction of the institution? What a lonely path that is. And as far as faculty are concerned, the minute colleagues become deans, they become one of "them." I think the responsibility lies on both sides: we make deans "the other"; often they choose that role themselves. The ideal here, too, seems to be self-preservation. Typically it backfires.

If you're a member of the community outside the educational institution, looking into this academic scene from afar, you wonder about this complicated scenario that you see. Why all the complaining about being too busy and worn out? faculty in the classroom only twelve hours a week? students taking only five courses per semester? funding for the enterprise provided by the church, or the state, or tuition, and not your own sweat? Doesn't anyone over there know what life is like in the real world?

Problem #1, then, is our extraordinary, and damaging, individualism. Are there ways to modify this extreme? I propose that by asking the question "Who are we?" as often as we can, we can work toward making our lives more connected to the lives of our colleagues. That I use the plural pronoun rather than the singular "I" is crucial to my conviction. For we find out who we are only in relation to others: in relation to our parents, our siblings, our fellow students, our teachers, our friends, our co-workers, our ethnic and national heritage, our God. We are creatures mysteriously given life, and whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, we live in relation to our Creator and to each other. Furthermore, each of us is unique, with specific creative capacities. The Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions join the many others in the world in proclaiming the sacredness of each person. In the Catholic tradition, our relatedness is what the document *Lumen Gentium* in Vatican II called the "holiness" of each of us. I suggest that to acknowledge this relatedness, this holiness, is to want to live quite differently. To be fully aware of our connectedness with each other is to be thoroughly engaged in the world, in the present, in the person and activity before us. It is enormously helpful to look at another human being with the acknowledgement that she, too, must die. This shocks us into awareness of our shared destiny. We step down from our high horse as we start to see ourselves in others' eyes.

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We release ourselves to react to the absurdities of our lives with humor, and there are plenty of absurdities. How appropriate for the academy this command to consider one another holy, where each of us is an authority of sorts, yet dependent in our tasks, in our intellectual and practical world, on a mutual relationship with our colleagues and our students, and, yes, our administrators and our staff.

Let me offer some more specific suggestions about doing our work in academia as we keep in mind the question "Who are we?" In plotting some action, the least we can do is get together for coffee and agree *not* to complain (about our work load, our students, etc.). What then, shall we talk about? We can ask a colleague to tell us of her/his academic journey. The simple question "How did you decide to become a physicist? or a librarian? or a soccer coach?" opens the door wonderfully to being part of another's life. Before long, the colleague might turn to us with the same question. And we find out a lot about ourselves as we hear our own answer to this question. Similarly, with a student one can introduce the question, "How did you happen to come to Sacred Heart?" Small groups of faculty can meet occasionally, over a brown bag lunch, to discuss one issue in their discipline, or in their department's course roster (not to complain about it, and not to complain about students): for example, "What is the most successful class you ever taught? Why?" or "What is the best exam you ever gave? Why?" Administrators can be included in this – in my experience, they virtually pant for the opportunity to talk again about their field. Another possibility that I have seen work well is for departments to have regular colloquia in which faculty take turns presenting research that they're working on, or a new course that they are developing, or even an old course that they're sick and tired of, trusting that colleagues will generate some new ideas for it. Such initiatives can also work with students. Faculty can invite to their office small groups of students to discuss their intellectual experience in college: a specific opening question that works well is "Is college what you expected?" or "Is college different from what you expected? How?" Ask, and then listen. If you are meeting with students in one particular course, even *one* such meeting or gathering puts a whole new tone on every thing else that happens in the course. Or in the course itself, ask one essay question on an exam – perhaps the final – about the relation of your course to other material the student has

been learning, or to what the student thought the course would be about when she registered for it.

Who are we? We are related; we are each valuable; we need to hear each other's story, and we need to tell our own. One of the most amazing outcomes of even beginning to implement these processes is that one learns more about oneself in learning about others. Light begins to shine in the darkness of isolation; new possibilities present themselves. Colleagues and students come up with ideas that never occurred to us. We begin to realize our own holiness.

I move to the second habit that we live with in higher education, which is that we teach and write in our disciplines within narrow boundaries. We have become more and more specialized. We didn't intend to do this, I believe, but it has now happened, and we suffer from it. Sometimes scholars within the framework of one discipline cannot even talk with each other, for they do not have a common vocabulary or a shared fund of knowledge. We feel more and more compartmentalized. In my own experience as an art historian at Penn, for instance, I had a brilliant colleague who studies images and architecture of the ancient near East, from approximately four thousand years ago. Because my training focused on art history after 1700, I was at a loss to know much about what she did. I finally figured out something to ask her. Every so often I'd say, ``Holly, what should I be asking you these days?" Our isolation from other persons in our discipline is bad enough, but it is even more lamentable when we distance ourselves from people in other fields. Almost all of us face the embarrassment (I hope we're embarrassed!) of being so deeply burrowed in our field – say in experimental psychology, or in Soviet history, or in the history of photography – that we cannot explain to someone outside our department or to people in the world outside the university what we do. Often, if we do manage it, we sound patronizing. Because since early in my career as an art historian, I have been invited to give lectures to museum audiences, I have had to deal with this issue frequently. I decided that if I can't tell an ordinary citizen what I do and why (and in only a few minutes), then there's something wrong with me, not the ordinary citizen. It's not a matter of watering down, rather of using language that enables me to reach out to other creatures with whom I share this mysterious gift of life.

Enter here my second question: if we ask ``Why are we here?"

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we can restore perspective to our learning and our teaching very quickly. For the question demands that as learners and teachers we place not just our field of expertise, but our very decision to study it against the background of fundamental questions of human meaning. And "Why are we here?" is perhaps the most fundamental question. Every religious tradition has profound answers to it. If we are Christian we see ourselves, to use the language of St. Ignatius in the Catholic Christian tradition, as living in order to praise, reverence, and serve our Creator. But in our great commonality with other human beings we can also answer the question in terms that don't sound like a catechism, such as: We are here to pay attention to the stunning fact that there are facts, to rejoice in life and to serve others in their need, to develop as large a worldview as possible, to make our contribution to the ongoing creation in whatever ways we can.

All of us in the academy, regardless of our faith tradition, need to ask the question of our field: What does my scholarship have to do with the fundamental questions about the meaning of life? For each of us has chosen a discipline, which is a way of looking at the world that excludes certain possibilities in order to give importance to others. Why, we need to reflect, have we agreed to exclude certain questions? What are the questions that we find valuable, that we devote much of our life to probing? And why do we find them valuable? What is the relation of my discipline to the questions of meaning that I have asked and answered within my faith tradition?

Let me give some practical examples from my own field, art history. If my students and I are looking at the images of God that Michelangelo painted on the Sistine ceiling, I do not stop after I lecture about fresco technique, the images that were in the chapel before Michelangelo went to work, the specific scriptural passages he alluded to, the controversial conservation. These are important questions in my discipline, and I treat them thoroughly, but I move on to important questions in life. I ask, "What kind of God does Michelangelo depict?" "Is this a God that is the image of people in the sixteenth century?" "How is this God different from the God you believe in?" "How do we know who the *real* God is?" I let some of these questions linger in the air. Sometimes I suggest that students imagine themselves in front of an easel painting the God of their belief.

Here is another example: in teaching landscape paintings, I ask,

“What *is* the meaning of nature?” “What is our place in nature?” “Do we see God in nature?” “If God is in nature, why was this question irrelevant only 200 years ago, when Europeans saw wilderness as a place of God’s absence?” If I am teaching a seminar on landscape, typically for upperclass students, I will make one or two of these questions the topic of a writing assignment. Then, too, we can offer ourselves and our students the breadth of a global perspective. We might present for discussion, for instance, this question: “With what points of view might people from other areas of the world, other cultures, look at this topic we’re considering?” A temporal perspective is also healthy. In art history I might say, “What questions am I asking about Rodin that people did not ask 100 years ago? What were the questions then?” and “What might human beings in the future, say 100 years from now, want to ask about these sculptures?” In addition to raising questions that introduce spiritual and historical perspective, there is also a place in our disciplines for wonder, and we need to teach our students this. In my own case, from time to time when I first put a slide on the screen, I’ll simply be quiet. Finally, I’ll say, “Isn’t that magnificent?”

Each of you can summon rich material to toss out for your students’ reflection about the discipline you teach, and within it your particular subject matter. Often the material has dramatic parallels with questions the students are asking or are ready to ask in their own lives: psychology raises questions about the nature of the self; literature about the function of stories; biology about the ethical issues in studying cell development.

These are not teaching methods that we automatically use. We in higher education tend to separate the “streams” of our lives. There is the suspicion that if one is a top scholar in a discipline then one stays tightly within it. And then, as I have mentioned before, there is the general conviction in the academy that to be religious is somehow to be unintellectual. But not only is it possible to teach the discipline within the framework of questions of fundamental meaning, I think it is essential. Is it unintellectual to hypothesize why we are here in the first place? Is it unintellectual to raise the question: “How do we *know* this material?” Is it unintellectual to declare the assumptions that we are building our arguments upon? “Let’s be objective,” people say. Well, as I’ve already pointed out, every discipline is based in choices of

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material and method, in boundaries erected, that do not qualify as "objective." If we don't acknowledge the assumptions with which we work, we are hardly a complete person. We jeopardize deeply meaningful discussions with colleagues in other fields; we fail to prepare our students for the fullness of life ahead of them.

These larger frameworks of interpretation are invaluable in correcting the pre-professional bias of so many of our students. More than a few of them have come to college in order to pursue particular professions — to get into law school, or medical school, or to become an investment banker, or to develop as a practicing artist. When we teach them introduction to physics, or calculus, or the romantic poets, or medieval architecture, or the French novel, or Chinese history, we have the opportunity to awaken in students the realization that the profession they're aiming for is only one small piece of the human experience.

To incorporate the larger questions into our pursuit of a discipline — to ask "Why are we here?" — is of course to invite disagreement and even disapproval. And most of us don't like that. "We aren't here to argue," many would say, "just let me get on with my work." Here I introduce the concept of hospitality. Hospitality does not mean simply listening to others, being receptive to their ideas, although this is an important part of it. The root of the word means both "host" and "guest." To be hospitable is to create and sustain a relationship of mutuality. I am your host, and I want to listen to you. And I am your guest, I want you to listen to me. Can you imagine the transformation in department meetings if we lived this creed? The mutuality, the sincere graciousness that we would extend?

There are several activities that foster fruitful exchanges. One is the ongoing faculty hospitality to others' teaching and scholarship through colloquia in departments and across departments. Faculty conversations based on common readings, which I understand that you have done here at Sacred Heart, is another great idea. Quite successful hospitality to other points of view in some institutions is that faculty from several disciplines teach courses from a common core of readings. They begin to prepare the previous year, and gather regularly for discussions of the material during the year in which they teach this common core. At Holy Cross the first-year program has proven to be superb for bringing faculty together to talk with and listen to colleagues

from other disciplines. Yet another form of hospitality, and of making deep connections with colleagues, is the mentoring of young faculty by experienced faculty.

I move to problem #3: the vision we have of ourselves and of each other as static personalities rather than as human beings journeying through life's many stages. We tend to have a view of a faculty member, a student, and an administrator that is set in stone. For instance, to start with our assessment of ourselves as faculty, by the time we become a faculty member, we think we know ourselves pretty well – academically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. We apply such judgments to our colleagues, too. This is who we are, we think, and this is who they are. We have “standards” for ourselves and for each other. We have “standards” for our students, and standards for our administrators. Our alumni have standards, too – and some become furious because our college is not the same as it was fifty years ago.

But of course, no one of us stays the same, no institution stays the same, and this is healthy. Development, in fact, is part of the universe. It is integral to human beings, right up to the moment we die. Some of the most fruitful studies of identity in the twentieth century followed and continue to follow on Erik Erikson's work, in which he proposed what he called the life cycle, the several psychological stages through which we move as we mature, live through adulthood, and in late maturity face death. These include the development of trust, the establishment of autonomy from our parents, the recognition of our sexual identity, our decision about how we will contribute to the world, and, late in life, our decision to nurture the next generation or to withdraw into solitude. Following Erikson, Daniel Levinson and others focused on adulthood to look at more practical elements of our development: our choices in choosing our work, our decisions to marry or not and to become parents or not, our experience in moving through our career, our coming to terms with disappointments in our life work, and our deciding just how we will live out our later years. Most recently, developmental psychologists, most notably Sharon Parks, have focused on the tremendous challenges that young people of college age face in their development. I'll say more about these in a moment.

In asking the question “Where are we going?” we need to think

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about development. What are the implications for the present and the future of the path we or our colleagues have taken so far? Let's look for a moment at the stages of a faculty journey. How did we become faculty in the first place? Perhaps many of you, like me, loved learning in college and never wanted to stop. We went to graduate school, maybe not right away, but after several years of doing other things we realized what our deepest desires were. We groaned our way through academic coursework, labored as teaching assistants, borrowed money, aged. We finally finished our dissertation and got our advanced degree. We got a job! If we were lucky, we landed a position on a tenure track rather than as an adjunct. Then the next professional stage began: the adjusting to a department, to the students, to colleagues, to working for tenure. Let's say that finally we were promoted, with tenure. We had finished mining our dissertation for publication. What next? The huge teaching load and the numerous committee assignments made it nearly impossible for us to research a new project, even to read widely enough to decide on one. Perhaps we're the only faculty member who can teach a certain required course, and the exhaustion from seemingly endless repetition has set in. If we have married or have a life partner, we are living through the marital life cycle, another journey with stages. When to have children? How to combine children and work? How to juggle child care with professional opportunity when we finally get the precious funding to attend a conference? We're involved in the parental life cycle. As we age, we have our parents to consider, to care for – we are on a life journey in which we become the parents of our parents. And how about our work in our departments? Do we mentor the younger faculty or do we back off, taking comfort in the work we did ages ago? And what is our course as intellectuals? Have we grown in our field? How have our views toward the discipline developed? We grow, too, in our faith identity, and in our sense of ourselves as social beings. The questions, the challenges, keep coming. None of us is static, and each stage in the journey offers us a transformed intellectual identity. We need to take these journeys, these stages, into account in assessing our colleagues and ourselves. What if we rethought our expectations of faculty for tenure, promotion, and service within the developmental perspective?

How about the developmental journey of students? At no point in

their lives are people of college age – anywhere from eighteen into their middle and even late twenties – wrestling with more critical developmental questions. Let us consider what they are. Students have left home, probably for the first extended time; even if they are still living at home, their departure for college represents the first stage in their preparation for an independent, adult life. They have been shaped by their parents' personalities, values, customs, and faith tradition; students may not even be conscious of this shaping, for it seems "normal" or "natural." What happens in college is that all of this normality is bit by bit called into question. This calling into question doesn't happen only in a philosophy class or a religion class, in which the student's faith tradition may be challenged. Rather, it occurs in subtle and sometimes dramatic ways at every turn. The contents of a sociology class may explain racism and classism in ways that seem to disparage what the students' parents stood for; a professor may demand writing skills way beyond the high school honor student's image of his or her competence; an art historian may so sweep the student into what his parents lambasted as "effeminate" that he rejects every other value they stood for as well; a professor may knock the legal profession and thus challenge the student's life-long ambition to be a lawyer; the student may find herself drawn to affection for other women and be unable to talk with her parents about it. All of us here have known many such examples; students in college navigate through turbulent waters. They are exploring their identity apart from that of their parents, or that with which they came to college – an intellectual, social, and sexual identity; they are rejecting a faith tradition and perhaps leaving college without reabsorbing any tradition; they are testing the very nature of friendship and its relation to everything they had known before and are choosing now; they are exploring a professional or vocational identity, their earlier plans having been discarded; most important, and enfolding all these, they are learning how to decide what is true. They are moving toward feeling at home in the universe of the adult.

Our task, our privilege, our vocation, regardless of our field, is to give students the equipment to do this. Hence, our awareness of students' developmental tasks is critical to our teaching. Where are our students going and what do they need for the journey? As I have suggested earlier, we need to be clear about what knowledge means,

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how we arrive at it, what it can tell us and what it cannot. We need to teach in modesty that there are a number of points of view – religious, political, social, economic. This does *not* mean that all is relative; rather that each of us cannot know the entire truth. If we have taught students how to frame our field against the larger human search for knowledge and naming, we will have helped them enormously in this developmental task of finding their identity, their own beliefs, their vocation.

Let me say something here about the importance of laity in working toward these changes in the academy. To be a lay person is to have the greatest opportunity to be holy – to work toward a mutuality that those in ecclesial authority do not seem to be able to express, and perhaps cannot even know – in so many of their responsibilities. We have no tradition to uphold blindly unless we choose to do so, no structure to consider sacred, no authority to whom to give blind obedience. We can reassess in mutuality what we do and how we do it. We can change directions of a department, of a field, of an institution, and the most junior faculty member can be an agent in this change. Those of us who are concerned about defining the Catholic identity of an institution will see the present deplorable conditions in the Church as a *mandatum* for our leadership: it is the laity who will define Catholic identity.

Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we going? Vocation is a call to holiness, to hospitality, to hope. I've introduced the terms "holiness" and "hospitality," and I conclude with this third: "hope." There are wondrous experiences in the academy. For if the bad news is human nature – we retreat into our private cells, we protect ourselves from the big questions, and we slog along as though every moment is the same – the *good* news is human nature. God's many gifts to us have their effect. They are already at work: in students whose eyes light up with an "aha" look at a memorable moment in your class; in a colleague who gives a splendid testimony about why he teaches in a liberal arts curriculum; in an alumna who comes back to campus and praises her education there.

In recognizing the holiness of each one of us, our awareness of what we are doing in relation to the fundamental questions about the meaning of life, and the fact that we are all on a developmental journey, we fulfill our deepest capabilities. We participate fully in each

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others' lives and in the ongoing life of this mysterious, beautiful creation.