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Contemporary Catholic Questions

Cover Page Footnote

This talk was delivered at Sacred Heart University on March 21, 1991 as the fourth annual Bishop Walter W. Curtis Lecture.

MONIKA K. HELLWIG

*Contemporary Catholic Questions**

We are used to certain issues making the headlines in the press. In one of my classes, as we got to the end of the semester in a course called "Introduction to Catholic Theology," one of my undergraduate students said "But when are we getting to the Catholic issues?" and I said to her, "Well, we have spoken about a Christian view of reality in relation to God as Creator, as Redeemer, as Sanctifier. We have spoken about the particular questions it raises for believers to know that at the same time we are living in a good creation but in a disorder created by sin and also a reordering created by the ongoing redemption. We've talked about the nature of the Church, we've talked about Jesus as revelation and presence not only of God, but revelation and presence of the truly human. We've talked about what it is to be a follower of Jesus, we've talked about the content of our hope, we've talked about the function of the Church, and so on." I said to her, "What do you mean then when you are asking me to get to the Catholic questions?" And she said, "Well, I mean the Catholic questions. I mean contraception and divorce and abortion." That is the unfortunate consequence of very sharp focus in the press and in certain public debates on what are after all hardly the central issues. They are important issues, but not the central issues of Catholic identity. They are not the central issues of Christian life.

I want to turn attention away from those for the moment and point out that we are involved in some enormously challenging questions, but that they have been changing. The pre-Vatican II questions tended to be: "What is the best defense for our Catholic understanding against the arguments that come from outside?" "What is the best way of fortifying our young people so that they know the answers and they are formed and committed to this life in this community?" Vatican II changed the questions. What we were then asking was: "What does fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

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mean?" Before the question "What does it mean to be Catholic?" we were asking the question "What is it to be Christian, to be a follower of Jesus?" After that we asked, "How then should the Catholic Church be relating to other Christians?" and "How should Christians be relating to those of other religions and other traditions, and what is the Christian task in the world at large?"

However, already the post-Vatican II questions have taken on a new direction again. One of the reasons they have taken on a new direction is that the outcome of our asking "What does it mean to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?" was, among other things, a great opening to ecumenism. It is true that institutional ecumenism did not progress very far to date. But popular, grass-roots ecumenism is really "off and running," and so the questions have changed. The new questions are "What does it mean then to be Catholic and not Protestant?" and "Why would you be Catholic?" and "What are the characteristics that make the Catholic Church Catholic?" Before Vatican II we would hardly have asked those questions because it was so obvious what it was that made the Catholic Church Catholic: a variety of rather strictly observed customs and practices and rules, a very carefully elaborated explanation of doctrine that everybody learned and was familiar with, and a very strong sense of being in some way a separated community, in some way a close community. In the post-Vatican II era, we might set out the issues something like this: One question is, "Why be Catholic?" Another is, "What does it mean to be Catholic?" People often put it in terms of rituals to observe in order to be Catholic. But you might put it in a somewhat deeper way and ask, "What's the essence of belonging? What really constitutes the identity?" And you might put it another way and ask, "What distinguishes the Catholic Church or the Catholic community?" Given that we've opened up ecumenically, given that we've rediscovered our biblical roots in a new way, which makes us much more like many of our Protestant fellow Christians, given that we aren't imposing so many ritual obligations on people, which makes us much more like most of our fellow Christians, what remains to distinguish the Catholic Church or the Catholic community?

Another approach with a slightly different slant, is to ask "Are there particular values that we as a Catholic community, and as

individual adherents of the Catholic community, ought to be exemplifying and passing on?" This leads to the further reflection: "So *how* do we pass it on?" These are the main concerns of this paper, which will end with some reflections on the role of Catholic universities, namely "How should Catholic universities participate in shaping the continuing Catholic identity, the continuing Catholic contribution to the history of salvation and the continuing support to individual Catholics?"

The first part of what I want to set out in some detail is: "What is specifically Catholic? What makes Catholic individuals, institutions, traditions, practices, characteristically Catholic?" My answer is not, of course, the only one. My answer is not a magisterial one, but a suggestion for reflection and discussion. I suggest that there are five characteristics that are not necessarily unique to the Catholic Church but that are characteristic of it, and which put together make up the pattern of our particular identity. I am taking it for granted that we are concerned with being followers of Jesus as other Christians are, that we are concerned with the centrality of the scriptures as guidance in that, as other Christians are, that we are concerned with the redemption of the world as other Christians are. What is specifically Catholic, therefore, is not the totality of Catholicism.

The first specifically Catholic characteristics is emphasis on salvation/redemption as a community project. Although we do not differ from *all* other groups in that, we do have a traditional emphasis that is very precious and is an important component of our contribution. The Anabaptist churches also have something very important to say in asserting that faith is a fully free personal commitment that can only be appropriately and fully made by an adult person who has weighed the importance of the move. Indeed, most of the Western Protestant churches are saying something very important when they emphasize that nobody can be a believer for another because it is a matter of a personal commitment. But in complementarity with that we have something very precious in our Catholic tradition and should not let go of it, namely, the sense that the redemption that Jesus preached was essentially a community project. Redemption has to do not only with individual and direct attention and response to God, but also with the totality of people's

lives, and therefore with all kinds of interlacing patterns of relationships among people. And if it has to do with that kind of network of relationships in a world that is largely distorted by a heritage of sin, then certainly the project needs the reinforcement, the support, the solidity, of a community restructuring relationships, hopes, values, expectations and behavior together.

That has been very prominent in our tradition. A positive side of it, of course, is the support and the strength of the tradition and of the community. There is a negative side that can come in, and the negative side is the over-development of institutions. Life — especially life of many together — needs to structure itself. There is no other way. There must be some predictabilities, and therefore there must be some structure. But structures of themselves do not beget life, and one of the risks of a heavy emphasis on the community project of salvation is the tendency to hold the community together by too much structure: that is to say, the tendency to create structures and let them outlive their usefulness. Structures that were supposed to support life can end by crushing it. But that is the risk that goes with something very positive and very important, and the positive and important aspect is that the very nature of the redemption is such that it is a community project, that it requires collaboration, support, solidarity, and mutual commitment. It requires both mutual and common commitment: commitment to one another and commitment with one another to the same project.

There is a wonderful saying among the Hasidic Jews of Eastern Europe. They had noticed that when people emigrated, usually to America, they were at high risk of losing their Jewish faith and their roots in the Jewish tradition. And so they speculated “What is a really strong faith?” To which they gave one remarkable answer among others: “If you are living the faith of your ancestors, with your whole community supporting you, and all the strength of the tradition behind you, that has to be a very strong faith. But then again, if you uproot it and go to another place and lose the contacts, it might not be strong enough. Well, then there would be another kind of faith that is a very strong faith, and that is the faith that you come to yourself when by earnest seeking you wrestle with questions, and you come to a faith commitment that’s very strong

because it is really your own. But then again, if you come to it by your very own quest and then come up against someone with a more persuasive argument, maybe that person will shake you out of your faith again. So what is the solution? Is there any faith that is really strong?" The Hassidim give this remarkable answer: "A really strong faith is when you personally come to appreciate the faith of your ancestors. Then it has the strength of the community and the strength of your personal commitment combined, and that is the really strong faith." What this saying emphasizes is that while community is a basic ingredient — and Jews have been even more conscious of that than Catholics because they have often been a persecuted minority — it isn't entirely adequate unless and until there is personal search and personal commitment.

That brings me to the second characteristic which I think is very particularly an aspect of Catholicism, and that is the strong conviction that there is a continuity between faith and reason. You will remember probably that long ago St. Anselm said that what religious study or theology really is is faith in quest of understanding, faith in quest, therefore, of integration, of appropriation, of becoming properly one's own. Deep in our tradition, and it is well exemplified by the higher Middle Ages, is the sense that there is only one God. The God who creates the world and its natural laws, who creates human beings with minds that can comprehend natural laws, make moral judgments, and discern purpose and goal, is also the redeemer God, who invites the human community into the realm of grace, reconciliation, and redemption.

Although faith goes into the transcendent, it does not go irrationally, making leaps in any random direction. It makes a leap because there are reasonable grounds for making the leap. Beyond that, it has been characteristically Catholic that after making the leap of faith, one does not go woodenly by hearsay but tries to understand the content of faith. One explores how the faith, the beliefs, the rules, that have been taught relate to human experience, using your critical intelligence to penetrate to the source of it. This is a very important principle. Following the principle of continuity of faith and reason, one cannot be a Fundamentalist. One cannot be a biblical Fundamentalist, nor a conciliar Fundamentalist, nor yet

a catechism Fundamentalist, nor a papal Fundamentalist. What I mean by that is that one cannot simply take a verbal formula as covering the whole reality adequately so that one's intelligence is no longer needed, or that one's own evaluation of experience is no longer needed. If you are committed to what I am proposing to you as a characteristic trait of Catholicism, namely the continuity between faith and reason, you just cannot at any level function in a fundamentalist fashion, taking the formula as having said all that can be said forever, without further exploration, without further qualification, without further new questions arising.

That is a tremendously important characteristic, and the positive side of it is evident. The positive side of it is that it builds a solid basis for personal and effective faith, if taken seriously. It offers integration of all aspects of human life, so that one does not divide life into a religious sector and profane areas where religious faith has nothing to say. It is integrating because one must tackle the whole of reality and grapple with all of it. Commitment to the continuity of faith and reason offers a wonderful basis for discernment in new situations, unique situations, difficult situations, situations that aren't covered by general laws and rules and so on. It offers a wonderful basis for adaptation in times of rapid change in the culture, the technology, and the social organization of the world. In sum, a firm commitment to the continuity of faith and reason, which is a commitment to use your reason in relation to your faith, offers the basis for integration, adaptation, discernment, effective faith.

But again, there is of course a negative side: there is a risk, a possibility of it failing of its purpose. The negative side that we have often suffered from in our conviction about the continuity of faith and reason is a certain tendency to dry abstraction in theology and catechesis. Those who are old enough will know what I am talking about. The young might not. In the heavy commitment to using reason in the service of the faith there is a tendency to reduce reason to the rational. But the human intelligence has more to do than speculate or create syllogisms and logical continuities: there is a broader ambit to be dealt with than that. There is the whole range of imagination, creativity, empathy, practical problem-solving, intuitive grasp of human situations, analysis and synthesis,

and so forth. There is a risk of reducing all this to a sterile residue, but in this post-Vatican II era we may be rebounding from that trend, and swinging a little too far to the “touchy-feely” approach.

A third characteristic that I would suggest as co-constituting Catholic specificity or identity is the treasuring of the cumulative wisdom and piety of past generations: the treasuring of all our history and what we can learn from it. That was one of the big issues that divided us in the sixteenth century. The Reformers claimed that corruption had been so pervasive that there was obviously one safe source to turn to, and that was Scripture, because it was inspired and did not change. Rome and those allied with Rome replied that it might be so, but the better response is to try to reform or correct the corruption rather than give up the treasure of all of our past history. Up to Vatican II we did not give up the treasure of our past history, though we did tend to reduce it to isolated and separate categories. We treasured, for instance, hagiography, the lives of the heroes of the tradition, but we did not integrate them with our understanding of theology. We treasured the spirituality traditions, but we kept them separate from our dogmatic theology. We treasured the theological development, but we did a very odd thing with that: we treated it as though it had come to its final consummation at the Council of Trent, so that we did not have to deal with new questions and new issues.

In some sense, before Vatican II we cherished our treasury of cumulative wisdom and experience from the past but we were a little afraid to touch it. We looked at it, but we didn't handle it or do things with it. In the post-Vatican II era, we are much more in danger of forgetting the treasury and looking for new coinage. We have found the past a complicated burden because it separated us from many of the other Christians of the West, and we wanted to begin afresh. In the post-Vatican II era we are a little inclined to devalue that treasury of wisdom and experience and piety from the past, and that leaves us a very important task: to rediscover the treasures, but this time not just to look at them but to touch them, do things with them, to use them, to use them in the present, exploring their potential.

The positive side of treasuring the wisdom of the past is the strength, the rootedness, the depth that results. American society

tends not to appropriate history very much. It tends to have its eyes on the present and the immediate future, where many other societies constantly had their eyes on the past. That has its plus and it has its minus. If we don't look at the past, we are deprived of the wisdom and discernment that would save us from making all the mistakes ourselves. Not to profit from what others have already done means having to struggle through everything again. It means living at a very primitive level. By primitive, I do not mean without a written language, and I do not mean at a low level of technology: I mean learning only your own immediate experience and not profiting from a cumulative tradition. People are very much enriched if they can profit from the past. So there is a strength, a rootedness, a belongingness, a depth of experience and reflection when we treasure the wisdom from the past.

There is of course a negative side also, and that is the risk of getting stuck, the risk of allowing the past instead of supporting us to press down on us, instead of its being something we can climb onto to see farther, having it as something on our back which we have to carry along so that it crushes us and we are only looking to the ground. Perhaps our pre-Vatican experience was a little like the latter. It was a little like an enormous burden that had somehow stagnated our ability to deal with the present. Nevertheless, the post-Vatican situation carries the danger that we simply set aside the tradition, the wisdom of the past, the cumulative experience, the cumulative piety, so as to be rid of the burden. That of course is not what we need to do. Instead of carrying it along as a burden, we need to climb along top of it as a vantage point. We have to find ways of doing that, of using the wisdom of the past to serve to enrich us.

A fourth aspect that is constitutive of Catholicism, is (in spite of indications to the contrary) a non-elitist thrust. It is true that everyone who is old enough remembers a certain feeling of superiority over other people because the Catholics were right and everyone else was wrong, and we were in a very special category. It is true that in this country in particular we can think of some pretty scandalous history of racial segregation even in churches, of ownership of slaves by people who thought they were devout Christians, and so on. How, then, can we claim to be non-elitist?.

Though we have not always lived by it, a non-elitist attitude is basic to Catholicism, that is, to the ideals, goals, and focus of the tradition. For instance, the very existence of a sacrament of penance says that members are not expected to be perfect. Indeed, after some experimentation in the early centuries, we came to the conclusion that we should not have a sacrament of reconciliation only for certain people who were scandalous and different, but that it really was a matter for everyone. In other words, we did not have a church of saints with the sinners on the outside. An important principle was established there. Moreover, there is the conviction that the church cannot be a national church, that it cannot be the church of a particular class or a particular language group. Our former emphasis on retaining the Latin of the liturgy had, I think, behind it that sense of universality as being non-elitist — not the language of one community favored over the languages of other communities.

Obviously this had its disadvantages too. One was that Latin was the language of no community while the church still used it. It had become intelligible only to the educated of western countries. Of all the five aspects that I've selected, probably this question of non-elitism, which we used to call universality, is the most problematic, in the sense that we have least discovered how to implement it. The positive side consists of ideals that keep emerging; the negative is that our practical experience has been of a lot of accommodation to false current values, a lot of compromise on that, a lot of evasion of issues.

The fifth characteristic that I want to stress very specially is the sacramental principle, and I shall explain what I mean by that. I do not mean only that we have seven sacraments while most other Western Christians have two. That in itself is interesting and worth reflecting on. But what I mean goes farther than that. The sacramental principle begins with our Judeo-Christian history, with the kind of realization that emerges in the story of Jacob in the desert. Jacob, fleeing from Esau with a sense of being horrendously alone and isolated, then receives the comfort of a dream in which there is traffic up and down on a ladder that reaches to heaven. It is the comfort of being connected, of God's presence there, of Divine Providence, concern, and compassion-being there. But the

point here is what happens afterwards. Jacob says, "This is a very important breakthrough, therefore I must be able to come back here. The presence of God is not always evident to me. The creation around me is not always transparent to God, but at this moment it was. So I will erect here a stone altar so that I and my descendants can come back here, and we can call it Beth-el, the house of God, and we can remember, and in our remembrance the present situation will become clearer, will become more transparent, or at least translucent. If we can't see through it, at least some light comes through to us." And Israel of course built heavily on that idea: When there are transparent moments, moments of intense clarity of the experience of God's compassion and presence and power, one does not let them float by, but seizes on them by seizing the things connected with that moment, some activity or symbol or ritual connected with that moment. The memory of that moment is enshrined in image, story, and ritual to keep focusing memory, imagination, and attention to see the world as the place of God, as contained within God's providence and God's care.

There is another saying that comes from Jewish history, and it comes from Moshe Ben Maimon, whom we usually call Maimonides, from the medieval period. He was asked, "According to the law, do you have to treat converts to Judaism the same way as you treat people who have been born in Jewish families and reared there?" His answer was "Of course the law requires that." But having given the legal answer he reflects a little and says, "But, as a matter of fact, no matter how welcome we make them, it never really is the same for them. If you have been raised in an observant Jewish family, you feel God like the ground under your feet: you feel God; you don't have to go in search, you don't have to struggle to ask whether God cares, whether God is there, etc." I have paraphrased his answer because the great gift of the sacramental principle is to make it possible for people to feel God. It becomes possible for people growing up in the community, living in the community, to see space and time through the festivals of the year and the shape of the week, to experience space and time and social organization and the aesthetic qualities of life as all referring to God, focused on and sustained by God, speaking of God:

Of course if we were to live in the paradise situation of utter innocence, everything would speak to us spontaneously of God. We don't live in the paradise situation: we live simultaneously in God's good creation and in the disorder of sin, the reordering of the redemption. Because we live in that potentially confusing situation, everything does not spontaneously speak to us of God and everything does not spontaneously lead us to see ourselves truthfully in our relationship with other people, with our ultimate end, and with the world around us. Because things do not spontaneously do that, we have to seize with tenacity every point of breakthrough, and we have to enhance it in our memory with narrative, with iconography, with music, with symbols. In this way we build complex symbols over a long period of time, fashioned out of reflection on experience, meditation, assimilation, with ritual, with a calendar, with moments that we designate in the year and in the week, and so on. That is the sacramental principle: the understanding that if we are to receive the gift of God's continuing self-revelation, we must train ourselves to recognize it by treasuring the breakthrough moments, celebrating them, enhancing them, reflecting on them, participating in them, and reenacting them constantly as a community.

That of course is the explanation of the elaboration of a sacramental system, the use of statues, incense and candles, holy water and special church buildings, vestments, processions, genuflections, and so on. The principle that is behind all that is to fashion in an experiential way moments of focus, of reflecting, of memory, of meditation — to build up the sense of the breakthrough of the transcendent God into our experience, to shape the Christian imagination.

By imagination I do not mean inventing something fanciful. I mean interpreting the reality around us: the way we construe and put together the elements of our experience. Everybody knows that, famous saying about whether the glass is half empty or half full, and you can say that same applies to whether the world in which we live shows there is no God or shows that indeed there must be a God, whether the world in which we live, the history in which we have our lives, shows that God is totally transcendent and lets the world go its own way or whether on the contrary it shows that God

intervenes and is provident. It is so easy to look at the same evidence but come to different conclusions. What makes two people or two communities look at the same evidence and come to different conclusions? It is in part their past experience, in part the questions they are asking about the situation, and very largely the way their imagination (in the broad sense of imagination) has been focused and trained and accustomed to put the bits of the evidence together, to construe it: in other words, whether they can feel God like the ground under their feet, whether they have an unshakable kind of foundation for their faith — unshakable because of all the elements that converge in it.

It seems to me that integrally characteristic of Catholicism (though certainly not unique but shared, for example, with the Orthodox churches) is this aspect of the sacramental principle. It is a way of constant positive affirmation of the divine, a way of analogy. There have been among Christian traditions and also among other religions those who said that the most direct approach to the divine is by a way of negation, by acknowledging what we do not know, cannot imagine, cannot conceive even by purest intelligence. The extreme of that in Christian history is a kind of mysticism that seeks nothingness, that seeks to do away with imagery, imagining, emotion, thoughts, and to enter into the kind of darkness or nothingness that is beyond. There may be a place for that, but characteristic of Catholicism through the centuries is the sense that it is by no means the way for everybody, and that it is seldom if ever a way for someone to begin. The way for the community at large is by analogy, by experiences within creation, to build up a strong sense of the presence of God, a strong sense of the power, the compassion, the concern, the ongoing interest, challenges and exigence of the divine in our lives.

Some of the important questions for us today, if what I have suggested about the characteristics of Catholicism is true, have to do with the relation of all of this to the individual's reasons for being Catholic. Many people who were raised to think that if you want to be saved you have to be Catholic find it very distressing that Vatican II goes back to a very ancient tradition in the Church (which can be found, for instance, in Justin the Martyr in the second century) which asserts that God has lots of ways of saving

people. If God drew the Hebrews through the prophets, certainly he drew the Greeks that way through the philosophers. We do not restrict God's way of saving by the institutional structures we set up. There is no evidence that God insists on certain kinds of knowledge or presence at certain historical moments for salvation: God seems to save all those who strive for salvation and for reconciliation with the ultimate source of their being. This leaves many people with the question: "So why be a Catholic?" The rules even now are more burdensome than in some other churches or religions, so why bother? What I have suggested as the characteristics might be a guide to the reason. It might be a very good think to be a Mennonite or a Member of the Society of Friends or a Lutheran or a member of the Reformed Church. We don't have to say that those are bad in order to have good reasons for being Catholic. The reasons for being Catholic might be the convergence of those characteristics described above and the kind of support and coherence that they offer.

Related to this is the question of what makes you a Catholic: We used to have a very clear-cut answer to that: being baptized and not excommunicated, accepting in principle all that the Church teaches in faith (whether or not explicitly known or understood) and accepting the authority of the Church in principle though possibly breaking the rules in practice. Those were extremely clear criteria. Nowadays we have to think a little more. One's faith is internal, but to define faith by reference to what has been officially taught makes it external. To define obedience to God by reference to certain institutional structures makes it external. I am suggesting that what comes out of the post-Vatican II era is the realization that the externals are not adequate if they do not express something that is internal and personal and committed. Perhaps we have to think about membership in a much more active way. What makes people authentically Catholic has to do somewhat with really appreciating, incorporating in one's life, and promoting the specific characteristics of the tradition. I have suggested five of these. Others might well be added.

That also raises the question: How do those characteristics relate to the Catholic Church as Church, as institution and as community, a community maintaining its own members, and as a

community of witness to others? To think about the task of the Church and the specificity of the Church in terms of those characteristics having to do with the process of redemption humanly appropriated gives some very interesting answers about what makes the Catholic Church Catholic. I wanted to raise also the issue: How can we pass that on? Supposing I am right about the characteristics, I see a new kind of challenge, and that is that whether we like it or not, the family has much less influence on young people's shaping of their goals and ideals than it used to have. Whether we like it or not, there are the media, there is easy travel and communication, there is advertising, there is peer pressure, displays in every shop window that try to influence our values and choices and objectives for ourselves and the way we view reality. Most significantly there is the insidious presence of subliminal advertising and suggestion which is becoming more and more pervasive. Children are exposed very early to many influences outside the family in a way they used not to be. Parents used to be able to influence their children much more. The parish is not as formative an experience as it often was in the past, because the variety of available entertainments, the variety of clubs, activities, and other associations offers many more ways to spend time and shape one's identity and values. The school is no longer the kind of enveloping influence it once was, for the same reasons.

That's one side of the challenge: How do we pass it on when we no longer have the inclusive shaping of the lives of the young people, of the family, or of the community. The other side of the challenge is: How do we pass it on when it is no longer formulated in quite such a black and white, clear-cut way. It was very easy to pass on the old catechism, with its explanation of the beliefs, its explanation of the commandments and the rules, its explanations of worship and the basic sacramental theology and further ideas about prayer and the spiritual life. With everything in a neat formula, it was too neatly external but there was a way of passing it on. Now we have a whole new challenge: if the situation demands that the Catholic community must consist of people taking a lot of individual responsibility, making a lot of individual discernments and decisions, then we do not have such an easy vehicle for passing on the tradition. What we really need is a much stronger community

experience of other people who embody the tradition, who are exemplary in living that kind of life. We need a much stronger community experience of mutual support among the people that do it, and this is a wide open challenge. Nobody as far as I know has any easy answers to it. We really have to approach the task very creatively because we want to pass on faith, not mindless practice of observances.

I've heard several rabbis give the Sinai sermon: what God said, what the people said, and what happened at the foot of the mountain. Every time it's been a wonderful experience. On one particular occasion, the rabbi who was preaching on it put particular emphasis on the fact that when Moses catechized the people, questioning them on what God was saying to them and what was going to be their response, he elicited from them the answer "We shall do and we shall obey," two different verbs in the Hebrew. The rabbi asked, "Why would they need two verbs?" He answered "Because when you look into it carefully, one of those verbs implies fulfilling explicit commands, but the one that we translate 'obey' implies discernment of what would God would want when there is no explicit command." That is where our present task begins.

I think we've come back to a period in which we have to realize that a great deal of our life as Christians is not covered by explicit commands. A great deal of it has to do with critical evaluation of what is appropriate or consistent with faith in this situation. It is an enormous challenge and it cannot be answered just theoretically from speculation: we have to grapple with it practically.

Another aspect of this is: What is the role of a Catholic university in that? Obviously universities have historical links with the church that are very strong. The early universities of the medieval period received their charters from the Holy See, because that gave them the freedom to do what they needed to do. By the same token, they saw themselves as dealing with ultimate questions, trying to acquire not only wisdom in some theoretical, academic way but wisdom applied to civic and professional competence, wisdom applied to action. The early universities dealt with medical expertise, legal expertise, and philosophical and theological

expertise. They were concerned with building societies and dealing with reality.

The quest for wisdom in our day as in theirs cannot really be separated from the seeker's religious convictions. There are people who are on a quest for wisdom who have no religious convictions in the classic sense of what is religious. However, there is no way to be a believer but set faith aside while on a scholarly quest for wisdom. That in itself is nonsense: there must be integration of various approaches to truth and wisdom. What specific resources do we have in our Catholic heritage for the quest for wisdom? What specific resources do we have to explore? I suggest that there are four principal ones. The first is a world-view including an anthropology, an understanding of what it is to be human and an understanding of reality, its meaning and coherence. There is a well-developed world-view and anthropology in the Catholic heritage of philosophy, theology, literature, iconography, music both sacred and secular, ritual, customs, and observances. All of those express a world-view and an anthropology, a sense of the meaning of reality, and a sense of what it is to be human.

Secondly, in our resources we have an ethical tradition, both personal and societal. It is expressed in moral theology, in philosophical ethics, in hagiography (the way we tell the lives of the heroes, and what we say was good and bad about their lives, and why it was good and bad, what was constructive there). It is an ethical tradition that deals with what is the good life for an individual and what is the good life for a community, an ethical tradition that discerns and identifies issues of social justice and peace.

A third resource that we have is our prophetic tradition: an attitude of detached discernment gained by attachment to a vision of the reign of God. That prophetic tradition is expressed in the New Testament in the Beatitudes, inviting believers to look at things from quite a different perspective and consider how they would then evaluate what is going on in the world, what is going on in their lives, in their society, in their nation, in their history. This prophetic tradition needs to be expanded and adapted to meet the challenges and issues of our time. University research and reflection is a privileged place for this to happen.

Fourthly, we have in our Catholic resources for relating practical competence in civic life and professional life to true wisdom, the additional treasury of spiritual and mystical traditions. Often these are autobiographical: someone relating her or his own path to wisdom and full realization of what it means to be human in relation to God the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier. What the spirituality traditions add to the ethical and the prophetic traditions is the emphasis on transcendence, insistence that the human person is always called to move beyond, to be more than, to become something further, and ultimately, of course, related to God.

I would like to leave you with the suggestion that we ought to reflect on the characteristics that constitute our tradition, that are internal, so to speak, for all of us. We all have to be actively engaged with the cultivation of these characteristics. It is not enough to define our tradition from the outside, by certain structural laws, restraints, guidelines, imposed. We must seek to understand the goals, the aims, and the inner drive that shape the tradition, and to make them our own creatively. We have to ask exigently and very practically how we can continue the tradition and cherish the treasures of the tradition in our changing kind of world. We must create a new sense of community of mission, of purpose, of life, of witness, and of continuity in changing circumstances, where the external reinforcements are not automatically there. This is our task and challenge, and in this Catholic universities surely have a central and critical role.