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Anthony J. Cernera
Sacred Heart University

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The Catholic Character of Catholic Universities

ANTHONY J. CERNERA

The questions of the identity and mission of Catholic universities have become increasingly important and pressing ones during the last fifty years as we have experienced profound changes at the global and national levels of human society as well as for the Church universal and locally. As the historian Philip Gleason noted: “the identity crisis presently experienced by Catholic Colleges and Universities in the United States is not likely to be resolved in the near future. The crisis is not that Catholic educators do not want their institutions to remain Catholic, but they are no longer sure what remaining Catholic means”.¹ In an article published in 2000 the later Jesuit professor of philosophy, Father Gerald McCool, echoed a similar theme, “The crisis of Catholic education today, ... is due to its inability to define and defend the purpose of its work”.²

The signs of the times, that we are living in the midst of, are dramatic, suggesting perhaps radical challenges, but potentially wonderful opportunities, for humanity and the Church, e.g., globalization; the pervasiveness of secularization in the Western world; the encounter with Islam and the increased importance of inter-religious dialogue; the geographical shift of the center of Catholicism; the scientific-technological revolution; the reality of the poor; and the emerging crisis of global warming are among the most significant. In the United States, the emergence of the Catholic Church from an immigrant subculture to a major community in the mainstream of American life has implications and consequences for the Church that we are still trying to understand.

What are the implications of those changes for Catholic colleges and universities? What is the Spirit saying to us in these profound changes and realities? What is the invitation of God embedded in these great realities and movements of our times? For the leaders and members of Catholic universities one implication is that it is necessary to engage in sustained reflection on our identity, character and mission in the light of these signs of the times. To do less would be a serious mistake.

I propose for consideration in this paper these themes. They are (I) the particular responsibilities of a Catholic university; (II) the distinctive marks or char-

1 P. GLEASON, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1995.

2 G.A. MCCOOL, *Spirituality and Philosophy. The Ideal of the Catholic Mind*, in: *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, ed. A. CERNERA – O. MORGAN, Fairfield, CT 2000.

acteristics of the Catholicism of a Catholic university; and (III) the ways those responsibilities are fulfilled in the expression of these distinctive characteristics of the Catholicism of a Catholic university. Before going forward, it is necessary to state several propositions of what I hope are obvious orientations. First, the Catholic university must first and foremost be a university. Second, we need to honestly face the reality of the broken or dark moments in our tradition, seeking to learn from those moments in history.

I. The responsibilities of the Catholic University

There are three particular responsibilities of a Catholic university worth noting. First, the Catholic university has the particular responsibility for the stewardship of the Catholic intellectual tradition. It also has the responsibility to implement fully its ideal of educating the whole person. Thirdly, it has the responsibility to be of service to the Kingdom of God and the Church in these times and in all parts of the world, especially in light of the needs and aspirations of the poor for justice.

1. Stewardship of the catholic intellectual tradition

A fundamental responsibility of the Catholic university is to preserve, transmit and develop the Catholic intellectual tradition. To say this is both to acknowledge something about the essential mission of the Catholic university as university (all universities have this responsibility) and also to acknowledge on-going task that the Church needs to accomplish (the Catholic university is where the Church should do its best thinking). It is always important that we affirm this stewardship as essential to our mission and purpose, that we keep reflecting on what that means, and that we never take it for granted or assume that we are doing it as well as we can.

The Catholic intellectual tradition is a two thousand year old communal reflection by the Christian community and its members about the deepest questions of human life, the deepest desires of the human heart and its own fundamental beliefs and values which come from the Gospel of Jesus. The tradition is also a reflection on how those values and beliefs both contribute to and learn from cultures and traditions different from its own.

This intellectual tradition needs to be preserved. We do this in our libraries, courses of studies, archives, museums, musical performances, cultural activities and practices, and art galleries and exhibits. We preserve the tradition in the normative values that the members of the University encounter and in the vibrancy of our liturgical and spiritual celebrations.

Since the Catholic university is a place of learning, we also keep striving to find ways to transmit that tradition to our students. Today we are faced with the added challenge of forming faculty members who are knowledgeable of the tradition and

who know how to engage students in learning about the tradition and the wisdom it can give us as we seek to live authentically human lives in today's world.

The tasks of preservation and transmission capture two essential dimensions of the Catholic university's responsibility for the Catholic intellectual tradition. However, this does not exhaust that responsibility. The university's special responsibility as Catholic also entails the task of assisting in the development of the tradition, of carrying the tradition forward. This requires that the faculty and other researchers and scholars within the University reflect critically on the tradition, wrestle with the significant impasses that the tradition is faced with today, willingly engage in the dialogue with the other, and seek to learn from the poor. All of this can be done only by the communal and personal search for truth in an environment of academic freedom and integrity.

2. Education of the whole person

The Catholic university is among the privileged places where human beings are invited to seek actively to become fully human. Catholic education is committed to the full human development and formation of those who study at Catholic universities. We enrich the liberal arts experience of undergraduate students by engaging their hearts as well as their minds.

The task of becoming human is a life long process. We are not born complete. The human journey to wholeness and fulfillment is fraught with great challenges and obstacles. It can often be denied, neglected or abandoned. An education in our tradition is an invitation to human growth and development in which a person is formed in the wisdom that comes from seeking to live lives of faith, hope, love and forgiveness. Because we are made for communion with God and with one another in love, the University has the responsibility of fostering genuine community, opportunities for cooperation and mutual support, service to those in need, and critical reflection on the cultural values that enhance or damage human living. The Catholic university is a place where the liturgy of the Church is beautifully celebrated, fostering the full and active engagement of all the members of the community. The Eucharist and the liturgy of the hours ought to be central to our communal life as a Catholic university, inviting students as well as all the members of the community into the paschal celebration of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

3. Service to the Kingdom of God and to the Church

Clearly the most important service that the Catholic university offers to the witnessing to the Kingdom of God and to the Church is by fulfilling the two tasks reflected on earlier. In addition, the Catholic university also serves by assisting the Church universal and local to read the signs of the time. For example, the strategic plan for the International Federation of Catholic Universities affirms that it fulfills

its mission by “fostering mutual reflection and dialogue among its members on the mission and purposes of Catholic universities and institutions of higher education through the reading of the “signs of the times” in the light of the Gospel.”

In addition, the Catholic university can assist the Church by engaging all professors and scholars of good will, many of whom might be beyond the community of faith, in searching for ways to develop Catholic social teaching and for finding ways to apply that teaching to the great social questions of our day. For example, Pope Benedict XVI in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* invited such engagement. In the encyclical he recognized that “faced with new situations and issues, Catholic social teaching (...) gradually developed”. How might faculties of economics, sociology, political science and psychology assist in understanding the realities that the church seeks to respond to in its service of charity to human beings? *In addition*, could Catholic universities be the privileged places for scholars and intellectuals to gather with political leaders who are committed to the common good to search for the ways to make justice more real in the lives of the peoples of nations and the world, especially those who are poorest and most marginalized?

II. The distinctive marks of the Catholicism of the Catholic University

With this sense of responsibilities in mind, what might we suggest as distinctive characteristics or marks of the Catholicism of a Catholic university? Let me suggest four: (1) Theological anthropology; (2) The sacramental principle; (3) The continuity of faith and reason and the search for Truth; and (4) Catholicism as *Katholikos*.

I. Theological Anthropology

As *Gaudium et Spes* states, the “key” to a Catholic approach to life in our time is humanity itself.³ It is not surprising to us then that John Paul II, an acute observer of modern life, highlighted themes of human nature and dignity in many of the encyclicals during his pontificate.⁴ “Man is the way for the Church,” as John Paul suggested and the Catholic university and the Catholic intellectual tradition as well.⁵

As it was from the outset, so too now the Catholic university and our intel-

3 *Gaudium et Spes* 1 and 3. See A. FLANNERY, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Northport 1992.

4 See J. O'DONNELL, *Theological Anthropology in the Encyclicals of John Paul II*; in: *Continuity and Plurality in Catholic Theology. Essays in Honor of Gerald A. McCool, sj*, ed. A.J. CERNERA, Fairfield 1998.

5 *Redemptor Hominis* 14 and 3. In: *The Encyclicals of John Paul II. With Introductions by J.M. MILLER.*, Huntington 1996.

lectual tradition must be rooted in a theological anthropology adequate for our times. A distinctive element of Catholicism is its understanding of human existence and what it means to be human. Human beings are made in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26; 9:6). The fullness of Christian revelation about God tells us that the inner life of God is communion and relationship. God is not a solitary monad but communion of love. The Father loves the Son completely and the Son loves the Father completely. The Holy Spirit is their eternal love for one another. The mystery of God, revealed in Jesus, is eternal love. It is into this inner life of love that we are invited, indeed, in which we are made and called. We are an image of the Triune God.

Every human being is a spiritual creature who is alive by the breath of God which dwells in us. This is the basis of human dignity and personhood. Since each human person is an image of God (*imago Dei*), it can be said that, in a very real sense, every human being reflects God. The twentieth-century German theologian Karl Rahner, S.J., captured this fundamental insight of Catholic anthropology this way: "When God chooses to be what is not God, man comes to be."⁶

The Judaeo-Christian tradition affirms that persons have inherent worth and dignity before God, and are called into fullness of life and deepening relationship with God, with one another, and with all of creation. The *imago Dei*, that divine image that is basic to each person as created by God, is not a substance or entity, but rather a relation that specifies the peculiarly human vocation of responsible caring for one another and for all of creation, or alternatively a call to full communion with God and all creation. This core belief about human persons is one side of a Catholic theological anthropology; the other, complementary side is the astounding statement of the Incarnation.

When the Christian community gathers at the Eucharist on Sundays, those present profess in the Creed a core belief of Catholicism, indeed what some commentators would suggest is its most distinctive or defining element, namely, the Incarnation of the Word of God: "For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was made man." This is not simply a vision of human existence with God "at our side"; rather, it is the unheard of statement that God became one of us, so much does God love us.

For Catholicism, as indeed for all Christian churches, the center-point of human history is that the Son of God became incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. The eternal Word of God is made visible in the flesh. This has consequences for all of human history, both before the historical event of Jesus and into the future. God is definitively present in all of history from the beginning of time, in the present, and into the future, a future which will find its fulfillment in the final establishment of the reign of God

Rooted in these two principles of *imago Dei* and Incarnation, human exist-

6 K. RAHNER, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, New York 1978, 48.

ence is always graced existence. This existence, which is radically oriented toward God, is also radically social and relational. Not only do we go to God with one another, but our destiny is also fundamentally linked with all of humanity. Furthermore, there is a special connection to the poor and those who are deprived of their fundamental humanity. In the Catholic view, my humanity is diminished when the dignity and worth of another human person is damaged or destroyed. A vision of the human person and her or his fulfillment necessarily involves an active concern for justice in the world.

Several important implications emerge from this distinctively Catholic anthropology as it relates to the Catholic university and the Catholic intellectual tradition. First and foremost, the Catholic university is the place where the deepest aspirations of the human person and the community are of utmost importance. At a Catholic university, the fundamental questions of "Who am I?" "Whose am I?" "Why am I here?" "Where am I going?" are of critical importance. The Catholic tradition continually raises the question "How shall we live?" as human persons with intellectual, emotional, communal, moral, and spiritual needs and desires. It privileges dialogue about faith, principled living, and concern for justice as integral to its essentially religious identity and educational mission. A Catholic institution of higher learning, shaped by this tradition, views its work as education of the imagination, individually and corporately, allowing the best in human and gospel values to shape a vision of human living and the world that is its context. Because of their effects and implications for all of us, these are not isolated concerns. They are profoundly social and deeply religious questions, and they are of ultimate significance.

Students at a Catholic university ought to be provided with ample opportunities to search for the meaning and purpose of their lives within the context of humanity's collective wisdom. In addition, the search for a more fully developed and fully integrated humanity ought to permeate the research and teaching of the faculty and provide a distinctive organizing principle for the general education program for undergraduate students.

Furthermore, it is clear from this perspective that there are always moral and spiritual dimensions to education. Education in the Catholic tradition is concerned about the whole person. A complete education assists students in their human development as persons. The end result toward which Catholic higher education strives is not simply the inculcation of knowledge or skills, valuable as these are. The Catholic educator also envisions her or his graduate as learned, virtuous, and spiritually aware, and Catholic educators commit themselves to fostering these values in their students. The goal is integration of the life of the mind with habits of the heart and right living. Thus, the Catholic university is the place where the religious and the academic are intrinsically related.

Michael Buckley captures this notion well:

Any movement toward meaning and truth is inchoatively religious. This obviously does not suggest that quantum mechanics or geography is religion or theology; it does mean that the dynamism inherent in all inquiry and knowledge – if not inhibited – is toward ultimacy, toward a completion in which an issue or its resolution finds place in a universe that makes final sense, i.e., in the self-disclosure of God – the truth of the finite.

At the same time, the tendencies of faith are inescapably oriented toward the academic. This obviously does not suggest that all serious religion is scholarship; it does mean that the dynamism inherent in faith – if not inhibited – is toward its own understanding, toward its own self-possession in knowledge. In their full development, the religious intrinsically involves the academic, and the academic intrinsically involves the religious – granted that this development is *de facto* always imperfectly realized at best or even seriously frustrated.

To grasp the character or promise of the Catholic university, one must understand this unique institution as an organic fulfillment of the two drives for knowledge out of which it issues: the drive of inquiry toward an ultimacy or that comprehensive meaning that is the object of religion; the drive of Christian faith, i.e., of living within the self-giving of God in Christ and in the Spirit; toward the appropriation of this comprehensive experience in understanding. The inherent integrity of faith-experience moving toward intelligence and of finite intelligence moving toward completion, this mutual entailment is what a Catholic university must affirm and embody, however halting and imperfect its attempts.⁷

2. The Sacramental Principle

Created ourselves as persons, all of us are born deeply connected to the world of created things and others. In biblical terms, the ultimate context for human living is the essential goodness of all created things, of creation as a whole (Genesis 1 and Psalm 104). God intends that all humans live in harmonious relationship with creation. The biblical-theological term for this harmony in creation is *Shalom*.

A more contemporary, ecologically-sensitive theology understands all of creation, as it comes from the hand of God, as sacred, and the role of stewardship that humans have in regard to creation as a sacred trust. That trust is given to persons as a result of their creation in the image of God. It depends upon a sacramental and contemplative sense of “the way things are.” At their depth, all persons and things are rooted in God.

In an older anthropology, human creation as *imago Dei* was understood as

7 M.J. BUCKLEY, *The Catholic University and the Promise Inherent in Its Identity*, in: J. LANGAN, ed., *Catholic Universities in Church and Society: A Dialogue on Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Washington 1993.

rooted in human rationality and was characterized by themes of sovereignty, domination, and hierarchy. When seen in this partial light, creation is to be subdued and used in view of human needs and desires, whims and pleasures. This skewed view has led to such modern problems as environmental pollution, the arms race, and widespread addiction. Contemporary theologians, however, point out that the biblical notion of *imago Dei*, while viewed in terms of rationality among the Western fathers (Augustine and Aquinas, for example), can also be viewed as pointing more toward relationality on the model of the inner fellowship of the Trinity, as other patristic theologians (for example, Gregory of Nazianzus) often did. This relational view may help to complement the theology of *imago Dei* based on the rational nature of human persons, and will be more consonant with modern sensibilities.

In this view, God intends that all humans live in harmonious relationship with creation. Humanity is entrusted with the care of creation, and persons are to act as “responsible stewards” of this gift of God. Humans are to exercise caring relationship toward the whole of creation, a task given by God for cooperative work with God and the human community. The cooperation of human and divine care maintains the creation’s *Shalom*.

The sacredness of creation and the Incarnation of the Word of God into history and human existence led to a sacramental principle which pervades how Catholicism engages the world. According to St. Augustine, a sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible reality. That invisible reality is grace or the divine presence. Pope Paul VI, in his opening address at the second session of the Second Vatican Council in 1963, expressed this classical view in a more contemporary way by referring to a sacrament as “a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.” The sacramental perspective of Catholicism maintains that one can “see” the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite, the spiritual in the material, the transcendent in the immanent, the eternal in the historical. For Catholicism, all reality is potentially sacramental. According to the Catholic understanding of things, it is in the visible, the tangible, the finite, and the historical that God can be found. All of these are actual or potential carriers of the divine presence.

As we have seen, this sacramental view can lead to a contemplative stance toward living and a sense of all creation as sacred. In Catholic colleges and universities, this translates into concrete goals and objectives for general education, major and elective courses, as well as for the other campus activities that promote the development of the whole person.

Colleges and universities are learning communities – what Rabbi David Novak hearkens back to as *universitatis magistrorum et scholarium* – intentionally “centered on knowing the great things of the world.”⁸ Higher education explores those things that – in the words of Parker J. Palmer, Senior Associate at the American

8 P. PALMER, *Remembering the Heart of Higher Education*, delivered at AAHE’s National Conference on Higher Education, March 14–17, 1993 in Washington.

Association of Higher Education – “reveal the world in its wonders and its terrors and its ordinariness” and they give birth to new initiates who learn the methods and disciplines – and practice the virtues – that allow them to become explorers in their own right.

Notice the metaphor here: not independent, solitary, disconnected learners (explorers), which all too often is the image for scholarly research used in the academy. We have in mind the training of explorers in the habit of collaborative and connected learning.⁹ A modern scholarly community should train community-minded and collaboratively competent scholars, whose gift is the exploration of great things in interdependent ways. True research requires multiple perspectives and the cooperation of diverse inquirers. Do our classrooms, our student and faculty performance measures, our scholarly projects reflect such an ideal?

What is meant by “great things” as used above? It is important to understand this term as we use it, because we are suggesting that much of our life together in the Catholic academy should be organized around the exploration of and conversation about these “things.” In keeping with what we’ve said so far, let us try to be clear here.¹⁰

We study and learn about the elegant miracles of DNA and the beautifully complex ecosystems of biology: we even apply ecosystemic models to more deeply understand human functioning in family and society. We study particles and force fields in physics, and we grow to understand that subatomic particles have the same deepest quality as newborn infants, namely, that they are hard-wired for relationship. But do we intentionally make these connections between the knowledge-base of our various disciplines and the truth about their relationship to human living and a sense of creation as grounded in divine purpose? Do we point students toward a sense of contemplation, of wonder?

We study the great works of literature and philosophy, and we come to understand that these works also study and illuminate us as spirited and sinful persons and the struggles in which we engage as part of the human condition. We study the patterns and characters of history, the claims made upon us by the law and the demands of justice; we study the economics that bind (and sometimes divide) us and the languages that allow us to reveal (and sometimes hide) ourselves; we study the artifacts left behind by other humans who have preceded us. But do we ask our students to consider how these “things” are related to them and to their lives now? Do we suggest that there might be ways to integrate the knowledge and wisdom of the past into a deep and values-rich way of thinking and living in the present? Do we speak about the yearnings of the human spirit that we might discern in our disciplines and the roots (goal) of this yearning in a desire for God?

We study more efficient and productive ways to care for one another, med-

9 See P. PALMER, *To Know as We Are Known. Education as A Spiritual Journey*, San Francisco 1993. See also PALMER’S 1993 lecture “Remembering the Heart of Higher Education.”

10 I am indebted to the thinking of Parker Palmer and others for their contribution to these reflections, although their application within a Catholic educational contest is purely my own.

ically and psychologically, and we learn how to educate the young and care for the challenged and the elderly. We learn about the strengths and frailties of our human bodies and psyches. But, within this learning do we teach respect for the uniqueness of each human person and allow students to touch something of the needs of the human spirit? Do we aid students and colleagues to understand something of our divine character as “children of God,” created in God’s image and greatly loved?

These and other fields of study, we suggest, constitute the “great things” around which we gather as a community of scholar-learners. We gather around the “great things” of the world as God’s creation.

In the face of “great things” – challenging, humbling, and mysterious as they are – there is a risk of absolutism or unbridled anarchy; there is also a risk of disconnected objectivism. Any of these can lead to what Whitehead called “inert ideas,” the bane of higher education. However, when in our studies, in our labs, in our classrooms, we connect the “great things” to our own stories and to God’s larger story, they come alive in our knowledge. They make a claim on our lives. They challenge us to act. Knowing, ultimately, is profoundly relational, a sacred act that leads to further action. As Palmer suggests in many of his writings, we must learn more deeply about knowing as an act of love, and love as a form of knowledge. In this way perhaps the “hidden divine” reveals itself.¹¹

This task of true integration – connecting our disciplines with a wider vision, binding scholarship and spirituality – is an ongoing challenge for Catholic higher education.

III. Faith, Reason, and the Search for Truth

From a basic theological anthropology and theology of creation follows a third distinctive characteristic that is important for our reflections on the Catholic intellectual tradition. Catholicism maintains that there is a fundamental relationship of compatibility and continuity between faith and reason. Reason is fundamentally trustworthy and ultimately cannot conflict with faith. In the words of John Paul II, reason can be allowed to, indeed should be encouraged to “search for truth wherever analysis and evidence leads.”¹²

The Catholic intellectual tradition affirms the significant role of the human intellect in the search for and discovery of truth. This search is ultimately for God, who is the source and goal of all human desire to know. The tradition affirms that human beings have the ability to grasp and understand truth through rigorous intellectual activity. Through the use of our reason, we can come to significant knowledge of the world. This includes the important task of reflection on experience and

11 PALMER, *To Know as We are Known*, 8.

12 JOHN PAUL II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 17 and 32.

engagement in the world. Critical thinking and reflective action, as well as research, inquiry, and questioning, are cherished values of this tradition and should characterize the intellectual life of a Catholic university in all its dimensions.

For Catholicism, as in Judaism, truth has its origins in God who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Rabbi David Novak has suggested a new role of a Catholic university in our contemporary culture. His notion is provocative, and we quote it at length:

In earlier modernity it could be assumed that the difference between a Catholic university and a secular one was located in the proper object of the spiritual quest for truth. The quest itself was assumed to be common to all, however. Thus it was commonly held that human persons are beings engaged in a search for truth that is proper to both their own nature and the nature of the things they seek to know (*veritas sequitur esse rerum*). Today such an assumption can no longer be made. There are large segments of the university world, especially in the humanities (which is the modern location of the study and teaching of philosophy), who do not believe that there is any real truth, either within humans or within the world, and that the search for it, by whatever means, is therefore quite futile. Human intellect, then, is simply a function of the power interests of the particular group one happens to be part of. Only power, not truth, is real and worth dealing with. In this world, there is no longer any tension between faith and intellect because there is no longer any truth over which they can even quarrel. Without the assumption of the reality of truth, neither faith nor intellect can really desire (*quaerere*) anything. The only thing left then is either at best compromise or at worst conquest. But neither compromise nor conquest is an act of faith or of intellect. Thus we are left today with neither theology nor philosophy but only ideology. And, of course, in this kind of world, there is no need for a university anymore, whether a Catholic university or even a secular one.

Into this empty cultural situation both faith and intellect must forcefully reinsert and reassert themselves. That cannot be by argument, because there is nothing outside of them to argue with anymore. Instead, it must be by demonstration, by showing that human life and culture, as Aristotle said about nature, cannot stand a vacuum, in our case the intellectual vacuum that the denial of truth necessarily entails. For Catholics, this reassertion can perhaps best come through the revitalization and rededication of one of the greatest contributions your tradition has made to our civilization: the university as *universitatis magistrorum et scholarium* (community of teachers and scholars). Such a community seems to be possible only when truth is accepted from one's background and hoped for on the horizon.¹³

13 D. NOVAK, Comment on Michael Buckley's essay "The Catholic University and the Promise Inherent in its Identity", in: Langran, ed., *Catholic Universities in Church and Society*, 99–100.

This principle of Catholicism forms the basis for a strong defense of academic freedom at a Catholic university. It is precisely because there is a fundamental relationship of compatibility and continuity between faith and reason that a Catholic university seeks to ensure the scholar's search for truth. Understood in this context, a denial of a professor's academic freedom would be a failure to affirm the Catholic university's conviction that the source and goal of truth is one.

This distinctive feature also relates to the idea that the Catholic university is the place where the search for truth is cherished and nourished. Since the truth is whole, there is also a fundamental unity and interconnectedness of knowledge. This conviction of the Catholic intellectual tradition is the basis of interest in interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to learning and scholarship. In addition, it is the reason why education in a Catholic context is always interested in the synthesizing of knowledge. Learning is not complete without the students learning how to bring together what they have learned in a variety of places.

IV. Catholicism as "Katholikos"

Towards the end of the Nicene Creed, the community professes its belief in the "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church." The Jesuit scholar Walter Ong has noted that the early Church chose to use the Greek word *katholikos* rather than the Latin equivalent *universalis*. While both words mean universal, *universalis* carries within it the image of turning around a point, describing a circle and hence an area with boundaries. *Katholikos*, on the other hand, means throughout-the-whole. It suggests permeation, a leaven within a larger whole that expands as the larger whole expands.

As Ong pointed out,

"throughout-the-whole," *katholikos*, "catholic," does not suggest a boundary as "universal" does. It is expansive, open, growing. If the whole gets larger, what is "throughout the whole" gets larger too. This concept "throughout-the-whole" recalls Jesus's description of the kingdom of God as leaven, yeast, placed in dough. In Matthew 13,33 (echoed in Luke 13,21) we read, "The reign of God is like the yeast which a woman took and kneaded into three measures of flour. Eventually the whole mass of dough began to rise." Yeast is a plant, a fungus, and it grows. It has no limits itself, but is limited only by the limits of whatever it grows in. The Church, understood as Catholic in this way, is a limitless, growing reality.¹⁴

The Church is more fully catholic when it is *katholikos*. The Church gathered at the Second Vatican Council was a visible manifestation of what Walbert Buhlmann and Karl Rahner have called the "world-church." Gathered together for the first

14 W.J. ONG, *Realizing Catholicism: Faith, Learning and the Future*, Marianist Award lecture, 1989; monograph published by the University of Dayton, 1989, 8.

time were representatives from every continent of the planet, no longer only Europeans or North Americans representing those continents. During the twentieth century, the geographical center of Catholicism has shifted from Western Europe and North America to Latin America, Africa and Asia. Today more than 70% of the 1.2 billion members of the Catholic Church live on these continents, whereas at the beginning of the twentieth century, 90% of Catholics lived in Europe and North America.

The Second Vatican Council recognized that the twentieth century was a period of rapid and profound change. Seeking to understand better the nature and implications of this ongoing change, the Council developed a process of reflection and thinking referred to as "reading the signs of the times" (*Gaudium et Spes*). The Church recognized that it has much to learn from as well as to contribute to the world.

One would expect to find at a Catholic university in North America a commitment to serious study of the Western intellectual tradition. That tradition has been shaped and has carried the Catholic intellectual tradition for two thousand years. However, because of this last distinctive element within Catholicism, an education at a Catholic university should actively engage its students to learn about cultures and traditions beyond their own. Such learning is done in ways that foster synthesis and greater understanding among people. This again calls for teaching and learning that explores the "depth" of things, that opens out from knowledge to mystery and wonder, that challenges learners to move from scholarship to contemplation.

This integrative "way of doing things" does not come naturally or easily, however. Faculty and staff must remind themselves that integration of learning is not solely the task of students; it depends in great measure on the modeling and mentoring of experienced explorers. Faculty and staff alike must ask the questions, demonstrate the potential paths of thinking and living that can lead to outcomes we hope for, graduates with competence, compassion, and conscience.¹⁵

Some concluding thoughts

Two particular challenges face faculty and staff in realizing this ideal. First, it has been clear for some time that undergraduate students now come to Catholic colleges largely ignorant about their own Catholic faith and the intellectual tradition on which it is based. This challenge must be acknowledged and faced forthrightly. Second, it cannot be presumed on any particular Catholic campus that there is a unity of formation goals among groups that used to be more in tune with one another.

15 Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, past Superior General of the Jesuits, speaks of the kind of personal and professional integration that ought to characterize the graduate of Catholic Higher Education: "We aim to form leaders in service, in imitation of Christ Jesus, men and women of competence, conscience and compassionate commitments", in: Themes of Jesuit University Education, an address at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 1989.

other, for example, faculty student activities, extracurricular opportunities, campus ministry, and the like. Consequently, from the perspective of the Catholic intellectual tradition, students come to our campuses more needy and will meet an older adult community not quite so unified as before about the goals of their work.

This situation calls for a long-term investment by Catholic institutions and for commitment by all those who work in Catholic higher education. This investment and commitment must be focused on appreciation and reappropriation of the mission of Catholic higher education. While many institutions have moved forward in developing a clearer sense of corporate identity and mission, this sense of mission must permeate into the teaching, scholarship, service, and professional identity of those who work in the enterprise. This is an ongoing and difficult challenge.

In part, this challenge is becoming the catalyst for examining hiring and promotion practices at Catholic institutions. While some have interpreted this challenge as presenting a mandate for hiring only Catholics, such a strategy would be counter-productive. Many men and women of good will, and of diverse backgrounds and faiths, are willing to explore openly the themes and concerns we've laid out above. The presence of such scholars from different faiths open to exploring the richness of the Catholic tradition, offers a real treasure to Catholic education.

However, a contemporary movement, complementary to the work on institutional identity, must also begin among faculty and staff who apply for work at Catholic institutions and intend to remain on campus. This entails a personal and professional commitment to learning about the Catholic intellectual tradition and integrating the teaching of one's discipline and conduct of one's scholarship with the concerns and sensitivities of the Catholic tradition. In order to mentor students well and to continue the development of the Catholic intellectual tradition, persons of good will who intend to allow their own vision and work to be shaped by Catholic values are needed on campuses. Persons who freely affiliate with institutions of Catholic higher education ought to be committed to this task of personal and professional integration as a matter of honesty and authenticity. Every person who works in a Catholic institution and exercises stewardship within it holds a public trust that is rooted in the institution's public stance. This entails reclaiming a sense of "vocation" or "calling" in the work of education and scholarship, nourished by the common vision offered by the Catholic intellectual tradition.

One way in which such an endeavor of integration might occur is to follow the process of the Second Vatican Council, and from each person's particular discipline attempt to "read the signs of the times."¹⁶ What are the particular chal-

16 Readers are encouraged to consult the document *Gaudium et Spes* for a sense of how such a reading might be conducted.

lenges to human living and meaning that emerge from one's discipline? How are these addressed in one's classroom, in student projects, in one's scholarship? How might these concerns be addressed collaboratively with other scholars from relevant disciplines? How do my work, and the way I conduct myself personally and professionally, relate to the mission of the institution to which I belong?

The reflections in this essay are largely informed by the author's twenty years of continuing experience as the president of Sacred Heart University and more recently with the additional responsibility as president of the International Federation of Catholic universities. As the Catholic Church emerges as a truly global church, Catholic universities have an essential role to play in its mission in the world. The long history of Catholic universities ought to give us confidence in their abilities to assist in that mission.

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