

Summary of Roundtable Conversation

Following the remarks by Aurelie Hagstrom and Marc Muskavitch, members of the Roundtable focused their conversation on the metaphor of hosting a party. Who, at Catholic colleges and universities, are the hosts? Who are the guests? What responsibilities do the hosts have to seek out guests and to invite them effectively?

One respondent called to mind the parable of guests at the wedding feast (Matthew 22: 1-14), whom servants of the king had to summon from the highways and byways. Members of the panel articulated a number of relevant questions about how Catholic colleges and universities undertake an analogous task. Examples included the ways that welcome is extended to students of differing socioeconomic classes, races, and genders. Some raised questions about hospitality toward Muslim and Jewish students, as well as the many students who profess no relationship to a religious congregation.¹

Extending the analysis outward from this question of the host-guest relationship, Professor Hagstrom recalled that different charisms within the church are represented by the different religious orders or bishops that sponsor schools. (Marianists, Augustinians, Dominicans, Josephites, the Congregation of the Holy Cross, Jesuits, and bishops are represented by the members of the Roundtable.) A neuralgic question that remains for many of these groups is how they will continue to offer hospitality as their numbers decline. The strength of their various models may well be measured by the extent to which they can invite lay colleagues into deeper sharing of them.

There is yet greater complexity in addressing this question, as a number of Roundtable participants observed. If, to paraphrase the central claim of Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), that Catholic universities arise "from the heart of the Church,"² then in some way the Church as a whole shares in the role of host. This role is by no means static, for, as one participant observed, there are always tensions in the extension of hospitality. Hosting provides community in an otherwise fragmented world, but that community itself may have its own internal fragmentation, a point widely observed by participants. Changes in university leadership, in particular, may

1. The question of extending hospitality to the religiously "other" is taken up by Chester Gillis and Sr. Amata Miller in *Integritas* 1.3 (Spring 2013).

2. "Born from the heart of the Church, a Catholic University is located in that course of tradition which may be traced back to the very origin of the University as an institution." *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 1, on the Vatican website at www.vatican.va.

signal change in attitudes toward who is “in” and who is “out.” Long-serving members of a community—tenured professors, for one example—may recognize at some point that they will never truly be insiders if they are not members of the founding order, or if they are not practicing Catholics. Leadership is central to the question of how a university iterates hospitality.

Hospitality is not, then, a univocal and universal good. One participant called to mind that Biblical examples of the limits to hospitality are ample. For instance, even some of those whom the king invited from the highways and byways were thrown out of the wedding banquet because they did not come prepared for the celebration (Matthew 22: 11-14). Hospitality, another observed, necessarily implies a power relationship between guest and host. And as the story of Telemachus from Homer’s *Odyssey* reminds us, sometimes what begins as a display of hospitality can turn into an overthrow of the host.

There is another dimension to the question of hospitality within the Catholic context: namely, the fact that Jesus himself often upended prevailing assumptions about the relationship between guest and host, between God’s hospitality and people’s willingness to come to the wedding banquet. One participant identified the reflections of John Haughey, in his book *Where Is Knowing Going?*, as helpful.³ Haughey identifies several instances of this divine role-switching: Mary’s motherhood, Joseph of Arimathea’s offer of an empty tomb, Jesus’ willingness to be the guest of sinners (e.g., Zacchaeus, Luke 19: 1-10), and the upending of master-servant expectations (the foot washing, the Last Supper, the Parable of the Dives and Lazarus). Perhaps most centrally, the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd suggests seeking the lost, even at the expense of the sheep in the fold (Matthew 18:12). The model of Jesus’ hospitality is love.

The implications of Jesus’ model of hospitality are many. Perhaps the most comprehensive is that the university modeled on such a model will, like the church as a whole, strive for familial communion. One Roundtable participant called to mind the examples of the missionaries Matteo Ricci, S.J. (1552-1610), the first European in the court of the emperor of China; and Sébastien Râle, S.J. (1652-1675), who ministered to the Abenaki people of what is now Maine. Both provide more contemporary models of hospitality, at least to the extent that they sought to promulgate the Gospel by entering into friendship with people far removed geographically and historically from the Church. Both manifest the ways that hospitality stretches both guest and host.

On a final note, one observer of the Roundtable suggested that it is important to recall that if the Catholic university is a ministry of the Church, it unfolds in the face of a more distant horizon, an eschatological one. Learning may be a good end in itself, but no university (and no individual congregation) need stop there. During this period of change within Catholic higher education, the fact that there are many neuralgic questions about the guest-host relationship need not challenge the larger conviction that wrestling with these questions is itself a form of service to the mission of the Church.

3. John Haughey, S.J., *Where Is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009).