

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY AS PROMISE AND PROJECT: REFLECTIONS IN A JESUIT IDIOM

MICHAEL J. BUCKLEY, S. J. GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1998.

Reviewed by Vincent Duminuco, S.J.

The extraordinary development of the Catholic university in the United States has raised serious questions about its identity, its promise, and its academic programs. Michael J. Buckley, S.J., explores these issues as they have been experienced in the history and current challenges facing Jesuit higher education.

The author asserts and develops the thesis that much of Catholic higher education takes its originating inspiration not primarily from an antecedent philosophy of education, but from one or another form of Christian spirituality. The central thesis of this work is that the academic and the religious are intrinsically related. Research, academic reflection, and inquiry encourage processes of questioning that lead to issues of ultimate significance, while experience of faith moves toward the understanding of itself in relationship to every other dimension of human life. The mutual involvement of faith and culture thus defines the unique purposes of Catholic higher education. It is this core identity that is crucial rather than any form of extrinsicism, e.g., campus ministry, presence of Catholic faculty, or requirements in religious studies or theology.

The thematic development of the book proceeds from issues of identity to those of recent growth to those of constituent components. Current matters discussed include benefits and risks from various possible outcomes of the debate about regional norms for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in the United States, the meaning of liberal education, and contextual issues. The university controversy involving academic freedom and education for justice is discussed at some length. Each side has its solid arguments, but how to put the two together is challenging. Buckley calls upon Church documents as well as recent developments in the mission of the Society of Jesus to resolve the paradox. He offers a valuable path forward by detailing ways that a revised liberal arts curriculum can satisfy needs of open discussion while meeting the humane, Christian insistence that higher education engage in the universal challenges to build a more just world.

The final chapters of this book consider the two disciplines with the traditions of Catholic higher education which have functioned as "architectonic wisdom," i.e., the far-reaching learning that gave integration and coordination to other fields of serious inquiry. Typically, for centuries philosophy

could draw the various disciplines into a coherent unity, as complementary aspects of reality or as their engagement as an ethical or political imperative for integral human development. Catholic theology, on the other hand, assumed the *results* of inquiry from other disciplines which furnished the questions that inevitably bear upon the self-revelation of God upon the faith in which this is received. The question raised of both philosophy and theology is precisely whether they can perform an architectonic role in the contemporary world. Buckley suggests that both a "philosophical grammar" to examine the assumptions within every form of disciplined inquiry and a set of "theological arts" to strengthen contemporary theological inquiry are necessary.

This book raises many of the serious issues confronting Catholic higher education today. It provides understanding of historical origins and development of these issues, and it suggests possible ways to address the ongoing challenges in the real context of a postmodern world. One may disagree with one or other suggestion offered, but only after serious reflection upon the author's cogent presentations. Scholars of contemporary Catholic higher education should not ignore this book.

Vincent Duminuco, S.J., is director of the International Jesuit Education Leadership Project.

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