

# A CATHOLIC FUTURE FOR CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION? THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

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*Catholic higher education is prospering, but most colleges and universities exhibit uncertainty about their specifically Catholic mission and identity. For 30 years, these schools have lived with the consequences of separate incorporation, as religious orders passed control to mixed boards of trustees and the institutions sought to improve the quality of their programs. Now their faculty and staffs are lay, highly professional, and religiously very diverse. If the institutions are to be meaningfully Catholic, trustees, faculty, and professional staff must develop programs which foster Catholic intellectual life and influence the work of teaching, research, and service. In doing so, they have reason for confidence, because the tradition is rich and the contemporary Church is filled with resources, but also for modesty, for there are no blueprints for Catholic scholarship and teaching. The keys are commitment, the decision to be constructively Catholic, conversation, willingness to engage the entire community in a dialogue about the religious dimensions of academic life, and competence.*

Catholic colleges and universities in the United States are thriving, with strong enrollments, growing endowments, and increasing quality, at least as measured by the many guides read by parents and prospective students. On visits to campuses and through personal contact, presidents, administrators, and staff consistently communicate energy, enthusiasm, and high morale, along with confident determination to grapple with the universal problems of ever-increasing student expectations, capped tuitions, cultural diversity, or its absence, and curricular fragmentation. In problems and prospects, Catholic colleges and universities have arrived.

At the same time, every school is wrestling with questions of identity and mission, particularly aspects of identity and mission arising from their persistent, perhaps stubborn, determination to declare themselves Catholic. That

word brings nagging questions: some about orthodoxy regularly raised by the Pope, some bishops, and many pious Catholics; and others about integrity, care for Catholic intellectual life, and basic religious literacy, posed with increasing regularity by good friends of Catholic higher education. Neither set of questions has clear answers; even having a conversation about them is complicated by maturing structures of academic self-governance and by the increasing professionalism and diversity of faculty and staff. So, if asked to characterize Catholic higher education in the United States today, we could begin with that phrase—prosperous uncertainty (O'Brien, 1994).

## THE STATE OF THE CATHOLIC DISCUSSION

Not long ago, a lay Catholic educator listened with growing irritation as a usually friendly bishop held forth on the problems of Catholic higher education. Looking my friend in the eye, the bishop told him, "You people are no longer producing committed, generous, and literate Catholics." Without hesitation my friend shot back, "Heck, bishop, neither are you!" That was not one of the better moments in the long discussion of Catholic identity in higher education. Fortunately, there are signs of improvement. After some tension, the dialogue about Catholic responsibility between the bishops and college and university presidents has taken a constructive turn. The presidents know they need autonomy to be universities, and the bishops respect that. The bishop quite properly wants to be more than another potted plant at graduation, and the presidents are sympathetic. Both sides are now listening to one another; both are acknowledging a greater degree of shared responsibility for the life and work of the communion of faith we call the church. Instead of "neither are you, bishop," the mood is now one of asking one another how Catholics in different ministries, with different responsibilities, can work together to help the church be more faithful, more generous, and, in this specific area of responsibility, more intelligent.

But, so far, faculty and professional staff are not very excited. Indeed, aside from points of conflict over theology departments, most remain indifferent to the recurrent discussions of "what is a Catholic university?" One reason is that the conversation remains rather abstract, heavily theological, and preoccupied with questions of ecclesiastical responsibility. Only rarely does it deal with what academic people actually do every day—teaching, research, counseling, providing a variety of services—the daily works of higher education. When, on rare occasions, the topic of Catholic identity intersects such matters, in a retreat on teaching; at a campus lunch discussing *Conversations*; in a Jesuit-produced semiannual magazine designed to promote discussion of faith in relation to academic work; or in a 1996 conference of presidents, professors, and professional staff seeking constructive projects, then the mood changes. The discussion connects with aspirations

that define people's vocations, suggesting that perhaps a college's Catholic heritage and church affiliation can enrich teaching, enliven intellectual life, and give fuller meaning to daily work. Indeed, it opens the possibility that the Catholic aspect of Catholic higher education might be interesting.

In *Contending with Modernity*, Philip Gleason's remarkable history of American Catholic higher education, we learn that for 60 years, from 1900 to 1960, a great many people did *think* a lot about the goal of Catholic higher education: It should create a Catholic culture. Unfortunately, save for an honors program here and there, they were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to do anything very significant, in curriculum or elsewhere, to create that culture. At the same time many people were *doing* all kinds of good work as the colleges and universities grew and prospered. But much of the doing went on without overmuch thinking, especially thinking about what it meant religiously, about its spiritual significance, about its connection to the life and mission of the Church.

Then, the presence of religious orders insured Catholic identity; now, such inattention will not do. Some trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff have to attend to the Catholic factor:

- because of the historical tradition, or saga, of each school, almost always integrally Catholic, which has often given it a distinctive place in the local community, and often sustains its unique spirit;
- because of the support of Catholic alumni, parents, and benefactors, and the presence of significant numbers of students attracted by the Catholic professions of the school;
- because of the continuing, if reduced, support and presence of the sponsoring religious community, whose service has always been on behalf of the Catholic community;
- because of simple integrity: the need to be truthful by translating Catholic professions into concrete practice;
- because there is still a chance that these institutions can draw upon the resources of the Catholic tradition and the contemporary Church to make a real contribution to American culture, that they can serve, in a special way, the common good.

## TEN POINTS FOR CONVERSATION

So, I offer ten points as the basis for a renewed and constructive conversation about Catholic mission and identity in higher education (O'Brien, 1993):

### 1. Catholicism is a good thing.

Several convictions inform any serious discussion of Catholic higher education in the United States. The first and most important, I think, is that

Catholicism, the Catholic Church, is a good thing for the human community. I state it that way deliberately: The standard is the good of the human family. I also make that statement as a historian, fully aware of the bad choices churches and churchmen (I use that word deliberately, too) have made, including, perhaps especially, in our recent history. I state that Catholicism is a good thing, also, as a participant in the life of the contemporary Church. To be a participant is to feel compelled to explain how it is that I remain, by heritage but also by choice, so connected to this Church that I cannot imagine myself apart from it. And I say Catholicism *and* the Catholic Church: What we are talking about are Catholic ideas about God and humanity and salvation and Jesus Christ, but also about an organization, the Catholic Church, for which we, who affirm Catholic as good, must accept responsibility.

So this is no small matter, this statement that Catholicism is a good thing for the human family. But I cannot imagine a constructive conversation about Catholic mission and identity at any institution that did not include at least some people who believe that and are willing to say so. If Catholicism is a bad thing for people, or if it is only a religious good in some way distinct from a fully human good, then we need not continue the conversation. So some of us must make that affirmation, without apology, and hope it will be an invitation to further conversation.

## **2. Catholic higher education is still working out the consequences of the revolution of separate incorporation.**

Catholic higher education lives now in the wake of an authentic revolution. Between 1967 and 1972, amid the vast changes associated with Vatican II, and the massive social transformation of a Catholic community moving rapidly from the margins to the centers of American society, religious orders of men and women made the momentous decision to relinquish control of the colleges and universities they had built to independent boards of trustees. It was really quite a remarkable move, the consequences of which are still not fully clear (Gallin, 1992; 1996).

It is not possible here to review the 30 years since, as the schools pursued academic quality and financial stability. While the sponsoring religious communities declined in numbers and influence, Rome periodically intervened to challenge the institutions' new-found independence. Trustees and presidents successfully defended academic freedom, save in a limited number of theology faculties, and bishops were usually willing to accept the new situation, but Rome always had doubts. Most recently those doubts were the subject of a long dialogue between the Holy See and the presidents of American Catholic colleges and universities which preceded the 1989 publication of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Subsequently, another round of dialogue, this time between presidents and American bishops, arose in connection with implementation

of that document.

The most recent wave of ecclesiastical conflict reached something of a deadlock. The Vatican still cannot understand how an institution can be Catholic if the Pope and bishops are external to its governing structure. The presidents, in turn, rightly insist that their institutions cannot be authentic colleges and universities if any external body compromises their autonomy. Over three decades, American academics, and later university leaders from around the world, have offered careful arguments for a less formal but still vital relationship between the Church and its colleges and universities, a relationship of dialogue and mutual service. But Rome has never been persuaded. For the moment, communitarian affirmations and promises of close communication provide paths around the deadlock, but we have not heard the last of this problem.

Rome's refusal to accept dialogue as a permanent answer has had at least two effects, one arguably positive, the other clearly negative. Positively, recurring questions from Rome have served as a counterweight to the powerful tendency to accommodate uncritically to American academic practice. Vatican pressure keeps the identity question alive, pushes academics to affirm Catholic affiliation, and finds ways to serve the Church. On the other hand, Rome's sometimes heavy-handed interventions threaten to arouse public, academic, and judicial suspicion. Often, as in the case of Charles Curran, they short-circuit efforts to gain a hearing for Catholic ideas and further marginalize theology and indeed all Catholic scholarship, in the end increasing rather than modifying the secularizing trends those interventions are intended to combat.

More worrisome, and a major source of current uncertainty, is that many people identified with neither the Vatican nor the Church's right wing are no longer sure that separate incorporation was a good idea. Influential Catholic theologians and other academics argue that the schools are well along a "slippery slope" on the way to "complete secularization." Critics use George Marsden's magisterial history of religion and American academic life to argue that Catholic colleges and universities are repeating the history of once Protestant and now quite secular institutions (O'Brien, 1994), an argument now unfortunately reinforced by Philip Gleason's history of American Catholic higher education in the 20th century (Gleason, 1995). These arguments ignore some significant differences between older Protestant and recent Catholic experience, and they sometimes trivialize the historic drive of the Vatican II generation of academic leaders for intellectual quality, social influence, and historic impact. But the argument has a legitimate foundation in the uncertainty spoken of above. On many campuses, leaders take pride in the presence of strong theology programs and well-funded campus ministries, but they also seem unsure how to translate sincere Catholic loyalty into academic programs and institutional policies. As a result they find them-

selves on the defensive in responding to the criticism, now from friends of Catholic higher education, that Catholic matters are increasingly marginal to the basic work of teaching and research.

**3. Catholic colleges and universities have not one but three lines of accountability: academic/professional organizations, public/government, faith community/church.**

The revolutionary move of separate incorporation left these colleges and universities located within three intersecting lines of accountability. As institutions of higher education they have professional academic responsibilities, represented by accrediting agencies and the many professional groups to which their faculty and staff acknowledge some form of accountability. As Catholic institutions, they have some sort of responsibility in and for the Catholic community, as the controversies with Rome make clear. And, as American institutions, chartered by the several states and sharing in the equivalent of a voucher plan of student financing, they have important public responsibilities as well.

Each line of responsibility—professional, ecclesiastical, and political—is a source of multiple problems. When the state cuts funding, or pushes accountability, it can endanger the independence, even the survival, of the institution. When accrediting and professional agencies overemphasize professional criteria, they can endanger the religious affiliation, and the social responsibility, of the institution. And when the religious body pushes its claims too hard, it can clearly endanger public funding and professional standing. We need to keep all three in mind, and not treat any one in isolation. The slippery slope argument privileges the Catholic side; many of us academics privilege professional criteria; and state funding strengthens market considerations while exerting pressure towards uniformity.

More positively, most leaders of Catholic higher education refuse to go the route of the confessional schools, giving priority to the religious factor. Nor are they willing to settle for mere sponsorship, giving unequivocal priority to professional and market considerations. Instead they continue their balancing act; at their best, they make important claims about each of the three areas of responsibility:

- It is a Catholic work to promote academic excellence and public service;
- It is a public good to promote academic excellence and to support and strengthen Catholic intellectual life;
- And, hardest of all, it is an academic good to take seriously, to be accountable for, the good of society at large and of the particular Catholic communities closely associated with this school.

Making these arguments, and ensuring their concrete expression in policies and programs, is the agenda before American Catholic colleges and universities.

**4. “We” are the Catholic college or university. The “we” are professional, self-governing, and religiously and intellectually diverse, and the Catholics among the “we” are almost all lay persons.**

Years ago a newly hired economist, a lay Catholic, met a Jesuit philosopher in the halls of a Catholic college. After introducing himself and inquiring about the newcomer’s status, the Jesuit welcomed him. “Good to have you with us,” he said with a smile. “We need a good second team.” The economist never knew whether this designation arose from his status as a social scientist or as a layman.

The story now seems part of Catholic higher education’s ancient history. Once, these institutions were fully identified with their sponsoring religious order, which was exclusively responsible for their Catholic mission and identity. That is no longer true. To the degree institutions share responsibility for their common life, their specifically Catholic responsibilities rest not on the sponsoring religious order alone, but on trustees, administration, faculty and staff, and all who participate in the life of the institution, including non-Catholics.

When Catholic bishops came back from Vatican II to proclaim that “we are the Church,” they were not at all sure what they were getting into. Similarly, when that great generation of Catholic college and university presidents led the way to separate incorporation, they little suspected that their religious communities would shrink and trustees, faculty, and staff would be left in charge. So now who constitutes the academic “we”?

a. They are professional. Academic life is highly specialized, one reason why a common curriculum or even a common language of discourse is hard to find. Academic life is also balkanized: Research agendas dominate university departments; department priorities dominate undergraduate education. As every dean knows, the professionalization of learning has a personal dimension. Success for many scholars is linked to publication within the discipline; that is what enables people to please respected mentors, maintain status among peers, and in many cases preserve relationships to real academic communities. All of this poses enormous, though far from insurmountable, problems for institutional mission. It also shapes a “culture of disbelief”; that is, for the religious professor or staff member, it involves the sharp separation of faith from work so common among other middle-class American professionals.

b. The “we” is religiously plural, far beyond the religious diversity envisioned in the ecumenical era a few years ago. The faculty and staff include

many who are not Catholic, some not Christian, and in many places no one knows for sure because no one asks. This is hardly the fault of non-Catholics, as Catholics themselves usually prefer a policy of don't ask and don't tell. Furthermore, even if they did ask, the answers might not help much. There has been a restructuring of American religion; independent churches and a variety of religious movements probably have more to do with religious identity than standard denominational labels. Even the obvious answer to this diversity—hire more Catholics!—is problematic, as “do-it-yourself Catholicism” is as much a reality on campus as off.

c. There is also a structural dimension to the “we are the university” situation. A professional faculty expects that the school will meet standards of academic freedom; that is one reason why talk of ecclesiastical intervention makes professors so nervous. But less examined is the other important aspect of faculty professionalization, academic governance. A modern faculty expects to bear primary responsibility for academic policy: curriculum, admissions, standards, and, most importantly, personnel. And they expect to share responsibility for other areas of institutional policy, from student life to athletics to budgets. Bishops may speak to trustees and trustees may say what they like to presidents, but little will be done without the participation and cooperation of the faculty and professional staff.

So, if the faculty and staff are professional, religiously and intellectually diverse, and thoroughly professional, then winning their support is far more a matter of persuasion and politics than mandates and mission statements. In the fight between dialogue and self-assertion, on most campuses, dialogue wins.

**5. Catholic intellectual life (the faith makes intellectually defensible claims) is the end; Catholic higher education one important means to that end (the place where the church does its thinking).**

Any discussion of Catholic higher education must also be a discussion of Catholic intellectual life. Without a vigorous Catholic intellectual life, there can be no serious Catholic presence in higher education; without a serious Catholic presence in higher education, vigorous Catholic intellectual life in this period of history is unthinkable. There are a number of areas in need of exploration:

a. Catholicism is serious about intellectual inquiry and artistic creation. Faith has an intrinsic drive for intelligibility, while intellectual inquiry has an intrinsic drive toward ultimacy. In a sense, as Michael Buckley argues, the university and Church are intrinsically joined and the Catholic university is not a contradiction but a redundancy (Buckley, 1993).

b. American Christianity is long on piety, short on learning. American Christians tend to be not anti-intellectual, but a-intellectual, their faith a mat-



ter more of experience than tradition, relationships rather than creed. Astute observers notice the growth of such piety among American Catholics, who in a variety of ways are becoming not more Protestant but more evangelical.

c. Accordingly, if the Church is to think, there must be deliberate strategy and concrete action. Notre Dame Provost Nathan Hatch, an evangelical Protestant, once addressed his fellow evangelicals in these words: "If evangelicals are to help preserve even the possibility of Christian thinking for their children and grandchildren, they must begin to nurture first-class Christian scholarship, first by identifying Christian scholars, then by enabling them to do their work" (Hatch, 1988). The same plea for strategic action can be made to Catholics.

Hatch notes that it has been simpler, over the last generation, to point to important elements of Catholic identity that exist on most campuses: community of faith, well-attended and engaging liturgies, energetic and diverse programs of service. But "a Catholic university must be animated by its intellectual life," even if "in a post-Vatican II Christian community and a post-modern intellectual world it is hardly self-evident what is meant by Catholic learning." Commitment to Catholic intellectual life, in other words, is the beginning, not the end, of the needed conversation.

## **6. Discussion of Catholic higher education would be more productive if attention centered on the laity, today.**

Notice how location of American Catholic higher education coincides with the situation of the laity, particularly the middle-class descendants of European Catholic immigrants. Like the institutions, lay Catholics were once outsiders and are now insiders; once on the margins of American life, now at its centers. Like the schools, lay Catholics wrestle with the responsibilities of citizenship, at work or in the community, and discipleship as they seek to balance religious, political, and professional obligations. As the schools are tempted to concentrate religious responsibilities in campus ministry and Catholic theology, lay people are tempted to confine religion to church, and leave its meaning to experts.

The segmentation which marks campus life reflects that in middle-class culture. Many faculty and professional staff are devout Catholics, active in their parishes. As one report said of many Notre Dame faculty: "Their faith is for them and other Christians on the faculty a private matter. Their beliefs and commitments bear the same relationship to Notre Dame as they would to any corporation that was their employer. The Christian life informs their personal relationships and conduct, but it is completely unconnected with their professional life as teachers, scholars and researchers." John XXIII got it right 30 years ago: "Indeed it happens too often that there is no proportion between scientific training and religious instruction; the former continues

and is extended until it reaches higher degrees, while the later remains at an elementary level" (John XXIII, 1992). Ph.D.s at work settle for pabulum and platitudes at church.

The architects of Catholic higher education, like thousands of people in ministry today, dreamed of bilingual Catholics, able to live their faith in the marketplace and civic center, and able to interpret their culture in terms of their faith. So far achievement of that dream has been limited, those limits evident in lay Catholic life, on campus and off.

## **7. Discussion of mission and identity should be concrete and constructive.**

The *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* debate centers attention on matters of ecclesiastical accountability and theological orthodoxy, posing questions difficult, if not impossible, to resolve. But issues of religious literacy, lay responsibility, and Catholic intellectual vitality have a pressing urgency. A major national gathering of higher educational leaders held at the University of St. Thomas in the summer of 1996 manifested a strong desire to supplement that ongoing debate with a more constructive conversation centered on concrete projects of research and teaching. If a board of trustees and administration decided that they should take decisive action, not only to preserve their Catholic identity, but to pursue a Catholic mission, to enable their local church to have a richer intellectual life, and to provide an education suitable for lay Catholics here and now, what should they do?

Many answers are emerging to this question. At the local level many schools now work closely with the local church in training lay people for diocesan and parish ministries and providing courses, retreats, and, on rare occasions, research support for local church personnel and projects. Academic leaders are working harder to recruit, orient, and support faculty and staff alert to distinctive institutional values and goals. A few national initiatives draw young faculty and student affairs personnel into systematic reflection on the academic vocation. And more and more schools are reaching out to build mutually enriching relationships with the Church's rich array of social ministries in Catholic charities, the Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, and the many projects sponsored by religious communities of men and women.

## **8. Catholic Studies may be the future academic expression of Catholic mission and identity.**

The most interesting "practical actions" proposed recently cluster under the heading of Catholic Studies. In general these are interdisciplinary programs focused on Catholicism in some combination of a) Catholicism as an object

of study; b) Catholicism as a perspective on human experience, a critical voice in many disciplines and programs; and c) Catholicism as a source of inspiration and integration for the academic vocation, be that the learning experience of undergraduate students or the intellectual life of faculty and staff.

Catholic Studies chairs exist at a number of non-Catholic institutions, and about 20 Catholic colleges and universities have committees looking into the possibility of Catholic Studies initiatives. So far, undergraduate programs are in place at St. Thomas University in Minnesota, Georgetown University, the University of Scranton, Gonzaga University, and DePaul University in Chicago.

The St. Thomas program is ambitious, offering students a major and minor, sponsoring summer seminars for interested faculty to foster engagement with the Catholic tradition and encourage the integration of faith with the work of teaching and research. While there is a strong base in philosophy and theology, substantial collaboration has taken place with the arts, sciences, and other humanities. Plans call for undergraduate and graduate programs on "faith and the professions," with special attention to the school's huge M.B.A. program. The university has won a substantial endowment for a Center of Catholic Studies which will oversee these and other curricular and faculty development programs; house a new chair in Catholic Studies; and publish a journal on Catholic intellectual life, *LOGOS*, the first number of which will appear next spring.

Georgetown's major and minor draw on many disciplines, with history and English leading with an interdisciplinary core course on "the Catholic imagination." Eventually, organizers hope to have additional core courses in the physical and social sciences. According to John Ffordresher, the program's rationale is "similar to that which underpins Women's Studies and Afro-American Studies." He continues: "The Catholic Church, regarded as a complex historical phenomenon affecting virtually every aspect of human thought and activity, is a subject worthy of sustained, informed, objective study both by the research scholar and the undergraduate student" (Ffordresher, 1994). Catholic Studies in this model indirectly fosters Catholic intellectual life, and in many cases provides a home for Catholic scholarship, no small matter.

Other programs focus more exclusively on undergraduates. Gonzaga's new program seeks "to introduce students to Catholic intellectual life" while offering faculty a way to "integrate Catholic perspectives into their work." Through a multidisciplinary concentration, Gonzaga wants to offer students the opportunity to develop a more reflective faith while, along with the faculty "consciously appropriating the Catholic tradition and taking responsibility for it." Scranton's program rests on the judgment that "it is appropriate that there be some place in this Catholic university where a systematic

attempt to integrate the many facets of the Catholic tradition with various academic disciplines can be encouraged and critically achieved." Their minor includes a core course, "Inside the Catholic Tradition," a seminar on Christian classics, and a series of electives. DePaul's minor offers multiple student options. An introductory course focused on Chicago-area Catholicism, together with the university's programs in Vincentian Studies, adds unique additional perspectives.

## **9. Catholic higher education, and Catholic intellectual life, like the Church, are for everybody.**

In his 1996 inaugural lecture as Notre Dame Provost, Nathan Hatch listed as one of his priorities "making Notre Dame a center of Catholic intellectual life." He admitted the meaning of that phrase was contested, but his own thoughts turned to:

Vaclav Havel: "Experts can explain anything in the objective world to us, yet we understand our own lives less and less, We live in a post-modern world where everything is possible and nothing is certain"; and Andrew Delbanco's *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*: "We have reached a point where it is not only specific objects of belief that have been discredited but the very capacity to believe."

So Catholic intellectual life is not about reviving Catholic identity as much as enlisting academic resources in an effort to "address an age that aches from a loss of transcendence, shared meaning, and moral responsibility."

Theologian David Hollenbach has argued in a similar vein that Catholic colleges and universities would do well to consider the virtue of solidarity, the common good. There is a social solidarity, he argues, which means that our work must be done within the horizon of the option for the poor. And there is an intellectual solidarity, which means pursuit of the academic vocation in the horizon of the human community's search for meaning and value (Hollenbach, unpublished paper). Taking up the much-discussed issue of diversity, Hollenbach argues that intellectual solidarity requires Catholics to "take pluralism to conversation," to affirm diversity without surrendering the possibility of unity. Hollenbach believes that the most serious conversation-ists are religious communities which uphold substantive notions of human good, and the university is the place for that conversation to begin, its public responsibility if you will. Absent something like this very Catholic solidarity, Catholic Studies will easily become one more reflection of Catholic retrenchment.

Intellectual solidarity draws us to consider that our problems are everyone's problems. It draws us to recovery of a mediating stance which rejects

confessionalism, that is higher education without diversity, and mere sponsorship, higher education without religion. Catholic intellectual life, carried on within this horizon, faces directly the challenge of modernity to religion. "Catholic universities have rarely fostered scholarship that plunges Catholicism into the pluralistic intellectual life of our times," historian James Turner writes. "Catholic colleges have seldom encouraged their students to think seriously and flexibly about the relationship of their faith to the novels they are reading or the chemistry they are studying." But none of this is inevitable: "No Christian people has a richer intellectual tradition. But to activate that tradition in the lives of Catholics, to fulfill its mission to the Church, Catholic higher education needs to make a dual move: back to the intellectual resources of Catholicism and out into the larger world of modern knowledge, so as to bring each to bear upon the other" (Turner, 1992). In the end, that's not a bad assignment for Catholic higher education.

#### **10. The best phrase to summarize the state of the discussion of mission and identity is "confident modesty."**

We began with "prosperous uncertainty" as a phrase to characterize American Catholic higher education. We might end with another phrase: confident modesty. I borrow the phrase from Bryan Hehir, architect of much recent American Catholic teaching on the ethics of war and weapons, who used it to suggest confidence that the Catholic tradition has much to say to critical national issues such as health care, welfare reform, and the place of government in national life, but modesty about applying our rich Catholic tradition to particular policy choices. Similarly, we could say with confidence that making the Catholic university "the place where the Church does its thinking" is an idea whose time has come. Moving from that confidence to specific programs and projects brings the note of modesty; no one knows how best to develop curriculum, research centers, faculty development programs, or cooperative projects with the local church. But that they are needed, now, is very clear.

A generation ago, during another period of tension between Catholic colleges and universities and the Church's hierarchy, historian John Tracy Ellis reminded people of Cardinal Newman's appeal a century earlier:

You will be doing the greatest possible service to the Catholic cause all over the world if you succeed in making the university a middle station at which clergy and laity can meet, so as to learn to understand and to yield to each other and from which, as from common ground, they may act in unison upon an age running headlong into infidelity.

Translate "infidelity" into the problems so many of us (and our children)

have finding the sources of authentic meaning and value in our rapidly changing world, read for "clergy" and "laity" a Catholic community in desperate need of a sense of shared purpose and historic direction, and Newman's words still stand as a fitting statement of our problems and our possibilities in a Church which is, now more than ever, our collective responsibility.

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