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A Qualitative Review of the Boston College Roundtable

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In the spring of 2013, the Division of University Mission and Ministry at Boston College undertook a new initiative. Launched by James Burns, then a researcher in the Division (now Dean of the Woods College of Advancing Studies at Boston College), and Jack Butler, S.J., vice president for University Mission and Ministry, the Boston College Roundtable began with the hope of drawing scholars from different disciplines into a common conversation about the distinctiveness of a Catholic approach to higher education.

The Roundtable brought together fourteen scholars from different Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, representing different types of institutions as well as different founding religious orders, dioceses, or bishops. Members of the first cohort were mid- to late-career tenured faculty from different disciplines who in some cases also held administrative appointments. They were active researchers and writers in their respective fields. While there is no specific requirement that participants be Catholic, all voluntarily responded to our invitation because of a love for Catholic higher education. All had a nuanced, theologically informed understanding of mission that deepened the substance of the conversation. Participants' experiences of the Roundtable were enhanced, they report, by the sharing of meals, liturgies, and libations in an environment of warm hospitality at Boston College's Connors Retreat and Conference Center in Dover, Massachusetts.

Participants were invited to discuss the mission of Catholic higher education in the modern/postmodern context: to inquire how institutions rooted in the Catholic

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tradition stand to enrich academic freedom and scholarly inquiry, student learning, and social development, ultimately leading to the formation of the wholly integrated human person and a better world. Meeting twice a year over two years, the first cohort addressed themes determined in advance of each meeting: first, a theme chosen by the hosts; subsequently, by suggestions from participants. The participants gave papers and offered critical responses examining the theme through the lens of their particular disciplinary approaches and epistemological frameworks.

The papers published in *Integritas* were then disseminated to the presidents, chief academic officers, and mission officers of all Catholic colleges and universities in the United States and Canada as well as to all bishops. We have received a good deal of positive feedback and requests for more information, particularly among administrators interested in replicating the Roundtable model on their campuses. A dean at a large Catholic university hopes to use the model for his faculty, asking about the cost (which can be modest, depending on the extent of hospitality). A mission officer at a small Catholic college uses *Integritas* for faculty conversations. A faculty member at a mid-sized Catholic college has sent *Integritas* to members of her religious order. Several bishops have expressed their thanks for this initiative. Moreover, the *Integritas* web site, www.bc.edu/integritas, has received over 17,000 page views from nearly 5700 users in its first two and a half years.¹ We are finding that the Roundtable is a compelling model for fostering important interdisciplinary academic conversations that have impact among those interested in the future of Catholic higher education.

At the conclusion of the term of the first cohort, we who were involved in the Roundtable wondered what the outcomes of this initiative might be. What ideas emerged from the Roundtable, and what do they suggest should be the focus of future cohorts? How do these ideas interrelate? How might they be drawn upon to articulate a coherent, systemic strategy for the future of Catholic higher education? How ought Catholic higher education change to foster more exploration of mission across disciplines? When are systems transformed, and what factors contribute to transformation? Our hunch was that inviting faculty to consider mission questions was important, since the nucleus of any university is the intellectual life that unfolds among faculty and students; but we wanted to know whether the model that we proposed advanced faculty conversation about mission in ways that might have a ripple effect across the institutions represented.

We asked two researchers from the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, Patrick McQuillan and Michael James, to undertake a qualitative research study of the Roundtable, using the published papers, a survey of the participants, and follow-up interviews. We are deeply grateful to the generosity of the members of the first cohort, listed by name and institution on page v, for the time they gave to our collection of these valuable data. McQuillan and James will publish the full results of their study in a peer-reviewed journal in the coming months.

¹ Source: Google Analytics

*How might our experience with the Roundtable
inform efforts on other campuses to engage faculty in
conversations about mission?*

This essay will take an approach that draws from McQuillan's and James's findings, focusing on larger questions of what they suggest for leaders in Catholic higher education. How might our experience with the Roundtable inform efforts on other campuses to engage faculty in conversations about mission? What might a two-year, sustained conversation about the distinctiveness of Catholic higher education suggest for curricula, for faculty formation, for student life? Substantively, what did the cohort talk about, and how might their conversations inform future conversations about the academic mission of Catholic colleges and universities?

The essay has three parts. First, it provides an overview of the four volumes of *Integritas*, highlighting the ways that the interdisciplinary conversations raised exciting new questions for curricula, research, and service. Second, it presents qualitative analysis of the initiative. Third, it presents conclusions, including suggestions about how the Roundtable model might inform efforts at mission integration on other campuses.

A. Overview of volumes 1–4

The first cohort of the Roundtable addressed the following themes.

Volume 1 (Spring 2013): Charism and Hospitality in the Academy

Volume 2 (Fall 2013): The Transcendent Value of the Liberal Arts

Volume 3 (Spring 2014): Science and the Person

Volume 4 (Fall 2014): The Role of the Academy in the World

This section will offer an overview of the papers and conversations on these themes, and go on to offer reflections on challenges and opportunities that participants named over the course of the four sessions.

Volume 1: Charism and Hospitality

I.1

Theologian Aurelie Hagstrom's opening paper explores the "hospitality of God" in the gospels in the wider context of ancient Greek and Old Testament sources. She shows how Jesus' hospitality provides an originating impulse for the Church's mission. Recalling *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution on Catholic universities which calls them to participate in the mission of the Church, she suggests that to consider the Catholic university as the place where we practice intellectual hospitality offers us a fruitful way of considering our contemporary challenges. She offers the Dominican model, drawing from her experience at Providence College, which emphasizes a conviction that truth is one and is discoverable by reason.

Biologist Marc Muskavitch recognizes in Hagstrom's exhortation an approach that provides fertile ground for the virtues of scientific inquiry, among other university endeavors. He writes that "academic scholars are actually called to be open and to be hospitable to wrestling with uncertainty and to exploring error in seeking encounters with truth, both with those who are like-minded and those who are other-minded." Scientists are rooted in a method that demands objectivity; still, researchers are human and are thus themselves subject to the personal dynamics of trial and error, confidence and failure, openness to correction and generosity toward those who disagree about unsolved questions. Hospitality, he agrees, is a virtue for the scientist.

Conversation focused on questions of who extends hospitality to whom; how our campuses welcome significant numbers of non-Catholics; what exemplars of hospitality are in Catholic tradition; different models of hospitality from different religious orders in the Church; how lay people are invited into the center of college mission as religious numbers decline; leadership; and how welcoming others to share Catholic mission aims toward an eschatological horizon.

I.2

In the second paper of the gathering, Paul Mariani asks us to dwell for a moment on what made the formative experience at a Catholic college in the mid-twentieth century so powerful. His answer, in a word, is great literature. With John Henry Newman, Mariani reminds us that great literature is great not only because it is eloquent, but also because it draws the beholder into contemplation of what is good, true, and beautiful. Education in literature and the arts, by extension, serves to cultivate a desire for beauty so that a person will recognize it in the words of the poet, the brushstrokes of the painter, or the phrases of a great composer. Mariani's essay is a meditation on his own formation in appreciation of beauty, and his desire to broker that work of formation with his students.

Thomas G. Plante's response to Mariani focuses on the formative experience that Mariani narrates in his paper. Plante, a psychologist, is interested in questions of how to share such a formative experience with students, given the parameters within which university professors today do their work. On the one hand, he notes, we want to help our students develop as persons; on the other hand, we are training them for professions. We want to show that it is possible to live as persons of faith while engaging in the highest levels of academic and professional activity. We want to cultivate imagination, but also help them to understand the concrete world within which they will live after they graduate. His question is how to find the right balance while being motivated by love.

The fruitful discussion that followed Mariani's and Plante's papers elicited a great deal of appreciation for the opportunity to dwell in the richness of the Catholic literary imagination. Many agreed that the tradition does not receive sufficient attention or emphasis in our curricula, particularly in light of the fact that it has shaped later elements of Western culture up to the present day. Perhaps offering students the gift of such beautiful imagination can help transform a world often beset by ugliness.

1.3

Chester Gillis discusses how Georgetown has sought to rise to the challenge of navigating a religiously plural world, rooting itself within Catholic tradition while inviting religious others to participate in the enterprise of teaching and research. In particular, participants found Georgetown's use of the term "centered pluralism" to be thought-provoking. Gillis explores the meaning of that term, emphasizing that it suggests a balance between fidelity to Catholic tradition and welcome to people of many faiths, following the initiative of Archbishop John Carroll, founder of Georgetown.

Sister Amata Miller's essay explores the way that St. Catherine University similarly strives to be welcoming of the religious other in the communities served by the University. She observes that St. Catherine's unique mission to women, and its location in the twin cities of Minnesota, has positioned it to reach out to new immigrant communities. Grounded in the Catholic heritage of intellectual inquiry and the pursuit of social justice, St. Catherine's has unambiguously reached out to many communities of diverse religious traditions.

The Roundtable's conversation highlighted some of the challenges facing institutions that seek to be both centered and pluralistic. What, participants asked, does it mean to be centered in the Catholic tradition, in terms of hiring and curriculum and all the complexities of modern university life? And what then does it mean to be pluralistic, in the sense of welcoming others to join in the project of learning within the context of the Church's mission?

Volume 2: The Transformative Value of the Liberal Arts

2.1

Psychologist Thomas G. Plante addresses the question of the value of liberal arts education in the contemporary world amidst pressures on colleges to ensure that education increase earning potential. He argues that they have perennial value, even in an age of economic insecurity and professional specialization. Drawing from contemporary research, he suggests that the habits of mind cultivated by the study of the liberal arts are still of value in the contemporary workforce. Further, he points to alumni of Catholic universities as representing the kind of transformative impact of a Catholic liberal arts education. Plante and his colleagues seek to demonstrate empirically that liberal arts programs, and in particular those with a focus on "faith that does justice," enhance students' ability to show compassion and deal with stress.

Theologian Kevin Hughes challenges the idea that the study of the liberal arts is the most apt preparation for skills to be used in the professional world. Rather, he emphasizes that they help a student develop habits of living appropriate to the wise person. The liberal arts are foremost about living well, not only working well. Understanding this point, he suggests, means thinking carefully about the structure of university education as a whole. The liberal arts are important, he says, but they cannot compete with professional disciplines in the development of skills for the workforce. It

will be necessary, he suggests, to consider what an integration of liberal arts disciplines with professional training might look like in order that graduates of our universities are both competent professionals and lovers of wisdom whose lives are ordered toward great goods.

A liberal arts core is central to Catholic universities in the United States, but is not characteristic of all Catholic universities around the world. Conversation addressed three directions: liberal arts as foundation; liberal arts as a source of conflict, especially with professional education; and liberal arts as integrative in student formation.

2.2

Theologian Marian K. Díaz addresses the question of how the study of the liberal arts helps cultivate the virtues of friendship and contemplation. She wonders how Catholic universities seek to cultivate these basic human goods in the context of all the other (potential) goods that members of a university community seek in their shared work. She begins by placing the goods of friendship and contemplation squarely within the crosshairs of university life. Her argument is straightforward: our networked, globalized world requires friendship for the development of other goods, both personal and professional; and the liberal arts provide the fertile soil within which practices of friendship and contemplation can take root. She draws from Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas to develop an understanding of friendship, and goes on to explore obstacles to authentic friendship rooted in unjust structures on our campuses.

Theologian William C. Mattison III reminds us that “as much as we all strive to make our universities forces for good in the world, for our students and other community members, that ‘project’ is born from, reflects a grasp of, and is ultimately servant to the truth.” Echoing Díaz’s enthusiasm for a shared pursuit of understanding through the liberal arts, Mattison goes on to ask what this shared pursuit means on our campuses when we welcome those who do not share Catholic faith. He argues that “self-giving loving communion of persons is the heart of our faith,” and that the university rooted in Catholic faith thus has a missionary summons to friendship as a virtue of university life.

Some observed that friendship among students can be lacking on campuses due to social or economic factors as well as competition. It can also be lacking among colleagues competing for scarce resources, though there are various efforts to cultivate a greater attitude of friendship. Even the curriculum can manifest such an attitude, with the liberal arts helping people to consider friendship with the dead and with the marginalized other. Technology presents new challenges to cultivating friendships.

2.3

Historian David Quigley addresses the question of how core curricula at Catholic colleges and universities reflect a commitment to the liberal arts. He first looks at the history of the modern core in Catholic institutions in the United States, pointing out the variety of approaches that have emerged over generations. He goes on to reflect upon the process of core curriculum renewal at Boston College.

Physicist John Cunningham raises questions about the different ways that students and faculty view the core. As a scientist, he is aware of the explosion of knowledge in the twentieth century, and yet he observes that some of the more fundamental questions facing human beings today are not all that different from a century and a half ago. Even as his own students raise questions about advanced scientific research, he shows an appreciation for the importance of thinking critically about the liberal arts.

Many participants in the Roundtable have been part of core renewal discussions, and shared some of their reflections on the neuralgic questions underneath these discussions. What is evident is that any discussion of the liberal arts in the context of the core curriculum raises fundamental questions about the nature and purposes of university education as a whole. Catholic colleges and universities are in a unique position in the landscape of contemporary higher education, able to draw from the strength of their historic commitment to the liberal arts as a preparation for life in a complex globalized world.

Volume 3: Science and the Human Person

3.1

Geneticist Marc Muskavitch raises a question unlikely to be found in genetic textbooks or journals: namely, whether grace has an influence on our biological destinies. He examines how growth of understanding of the human genome has engendered a kind of new deterministic framework, reminiscent of older determinisms such as those found in various philosophical and theological traditions. Yet he finds room for the “state of grace,” understood at the very least as the perception of being loved by a benevolent God, in the burgeoning science of epigenetics—the science of how environmental factors impact genetic inheritance from one generation to the next. This growing body of knowledge opens further windows into basic theological questions.

Theologian William Werpehowski points to the deleterious fruits of earlier forms of determinism as well as the ultimately destructive self-absorption that can result from the desire to control our destinies. In contrast, he points to Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* and its countercultural call to go out from the self toward the other in love. Such a posture, he avers, challenges the desires underneath all forms of determinism, for it acknowledges that there is a dynamism in a person’s life that trumps whatever genetic or epigenetic factors influence one’s biological destiny: namely, a love willing to enter into self-sacrifice in service to Christ.

The conversation focused on the question of determinism, perception, and the reality of grace. Participants raised questions about the relationship between science and broader philosophical and theological questions, and the opportunity for Catholic universities to broker interdisciplinary approaches to these broader questions.

3.2

Physicist John Cunningham’s paper offers a brief history of Catholic views on scientific thought, pointing out both positive and negative responses. While the contributions of

many Catholic thinkers to that history are indisputable, still the Church—and Catholic universities of the past two centuries—have been slow to reap the benefits of a robust commitment to scientific inquiry. Today, that early reticence means that Catholic colleges and universities in the United States face an uphill climb if they seek to compete for grant moneys and researchers committed to cutting-edge science. On the other hand, these institutions are in the right position to place commitment to science against the backdrop of a commitment to the person, as explored through studies in the liberal arts. The way forward, Cunningham proposes, is to embrace both positive contributions to science from the Church's history—its scientists and its world-embracing theology—and this larger commitment to the human good.

Psychologist Thomas G. Plante highlights the critical importance of people like Cunningham, who embody a commitment to science within the more fundamental commitment to the life of Catholic faith. More than any abstract argument, Plante avers, a person who lives a vowed religious life while working to answer basic questions about the building blocks of the physical universe manifests a vibrant dual commitment to good science and authentic faith.

Roundtable participants raised questions about the practical and philosophical challenges facing institutions that seek to promote the sciences. Observing the daunting costs, some wondered whether in this age of technology it is possible to consider a collaborative effort among Catholic institutions, especially in training scientists committed to raising difficult moral questions with their peers in the liberal arts.

3:3

Theologian William C. Mattison III makes the claim that theology without the sciences would not be possible: it both deputizes and is accountable to the findings of scientists. Catholic theology—one of the (preeminently?) distinctive dimensions of Catholic university education—is intimately bound to the direction of human knowing opened up through the methodologies of scientific inquiry. Mattison explores how in his own theological training he came to an understanding of this science-theology relationship, and goes on to inquire what such a relationship might suggest for the way we conceive of the task of Catholic higher education. He pays particular attention to the appreciation of the human persons who are researchers, thinkers, teachers, and learners; and he also raises important questions about the undergraduate curriculum, reflecting conversations from the Fall 2013 Roundtable (*Integritas*, volume 2).

David Quigley, in his response to Mattison, reflects on his role first as the dean of the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences and later as provost and dean of faculties at Boston College. He affirms Mattison's conviction about the central place of the sciences in the integrating wholeness prized in Catholic university education: "To achieve a kind of wholeness, to construct a contemporary self of integrity, deep and sustained engagement with our scientific age seems increasingly essential." He pays particular attention to the people and the relationships cultivated on campus, recalling that the aim is not only knowledge per se but also wisdom, understood as living well one with

another. If such is the case, it is increasingly critical that mentoring relationships model a shared pursuit of wisdom. Undergraduates, especially, often lack an imagination about what a training in the sciences can mean for their lives, myopically seeing such training only as a pathway to medical school. He points to the need for larger questions about vocation and human flourishing.

The conversation focused on the theme of integrating wholeness in education, both for students and for the adults who work at a Catholic university. Participants raised questions about wisdom, friendship, care for one another, and spirituality.

Volume 4: The Role of the Academy in the World

4.1

Ethicist William Werpehowski asks what it might mean for Catholic colleges and universities to be places that teach nonviolence. He traces the development of thinking about nonviolence among Catholics of the twentieth century, and notes a growing commitment in Magisterial teaching on the topic. He wonders what an institutional commitment to nonviolence might mean today in our complex colleges and universities in terms of not only what is taught but also how people choose to act, and what institutional structures encourage or discourage ways of acting.

Theologian Aurelie A. Hagstrom amplifies the questions that Werpehowski raises in his essay, pointing to addresses by Pope Francis and Pope Paul VI. She uses a phrase from the latter's address to the United Nations in 1965, asking how the university might be an "organ of peace" in the world. Together, these two essays offer a provocative beginning to a conversation about a distinctive dimension of a Catholic college or university mission, rooted in the teachings of one called the Prince of Peace, who died a violent death.

There were four levels of questions raised about nonviolence: the personal, the institutional, the ecclesial, and the global. How does the Catholic university iterate commitments to peace reflective of the Church's commitment, especially in the wake of 9/11 and more recent anti-Muslim sentiment? How can we demonstrate a "preferential option for love"? What might that mean for our approaches to student life and specifically our care for the person?

4.2

Katarina Schuth, O.S.F., shares her deep knowledge of the Catholic Church's mission to the world through the lens of a sociologist who is also a member of a religious order in the Church. Her paper offers a historical overview of the ways that the Church has sought to balance its mission to preach the gospel with listening to the voices of people of different cultures. It begins with a scriptural and theological account of cultural difference and goes on to explore what appreciation of culture means for Catholic colleges and universities today.

Theologian Chester Gillis pays particular attention to a theme that lies at the heart of much of his own scholarship, namely the question of interreligious dialogue. He describes one program at Georgetown that invites students and faculty to engage in

a dialogue of cultures, showing how the trajectory of the Church's self-understanding (ecclesiology) has led to a deeper appreciation of non-Western cultures and the theological questions that intercultural encounters can raise.

The conversation began with questions about technology and the narrowing of cultural differences, but with the concomitant concern about "rootless cosmopolitanism." In this context it is important for Catholic colleges and universities to develop practices of friendship, but also to commit to a more firm grounding in the liturgical practices of the Church. Further, attention is needed to global questions of poverty and, to quote Jon Sobrino, taking crucified people down from their crosses. We must create an authentic place of encounter with others.

4.3

Economist Amata Miller takes up the question of poverty, and the responsibility that Catholic colleges and universities have in helping to address it. She offers a panoramic view of Catholic engagement with what she calls "the greatest obscenity of our times," extreme poverty amidst unprecedented wealth. She points to recent efforts to eradicate poverty, and offers the tradition of Catholic social teaching as a resource. She concludes with reflections on the role that Catholic institutions of higher learning can take in shaping responses to poverty.

Poet Paul Mariani highlights the prophetic nature of Sr. Amata's call to responsibility. Pointing to the biblical, theological, and Magisterial roots of this call, he hopes that Catholic colleges and universities will heed the cry of the poor. Together, these two essays, and the moving discussion that followed, point to an important theme in the heart of the Church, and in the heart of Christ.

The response turned to questions of how Catholic colleges and universities share an expansive vision of Catholic reflection on economics, lamenting that many researchers have abandoned the humanistic foundations of the discipline. Participants went on to critique contemporary perspectives on economic questions in the political landscape, focusing more on money than people, especially the poor. There is a rich history of Catholic women's orders doing works of mercy; the call to renew charisms in light of Vatican II was an important recovery of this tradition. One thread of conversation had to do with Catholic outreach to Hispanic/Latino students in particular.

4.4

Theologian Kevin L. Hughes wonders how Catholic colleges and universities can be part of the phenomenon of globalization: helping to shape students' understandings of others around the world; forming relationships with scholars and students of different cultures; and leveraging the resources of a global Catholic Church to heal injustices in an imbalanced world. He points to the ambivalence in globalization, and goes on to highlight the positive and negative lessons of the Church's history of engagement in different cultures. He points to Matteo Ricci, the 16th–17th century Jesuit who spent

decades in China, as a model, and wonders how Catholic colleges and universities today might draw from his example in modeling friendship and hospitality.

Theologian Marian K. Díaz points to Catholic social teaching, the work of Milton Bennet on the development of ethnorelativism, and Kathryn Tanner on a relational model of culture. She highlights Pope Francis's "third way" of approaching globalization, rooted in the gospel call to love the neighbor and especially the poor neighbor. Together, these two essays suggest a vigorous challenge to Catholic higher education to foster greater cooperation in our complex world.

The conversation began with a focus on *encuentro*, which Díaz described as a shared discernment process. The challenge is developing a robust model of conversation. It is important for students and faculty to develop cultural fluency; such a goal requires thinking about pedagogy and curriculum. It is important to actively discourage a kind of cultural tourism, but rather to develop a deep engagement with another culture. Various "x studies" programs (African, women's, Islamic, etc.) may help. A key challenge is negotiating differences among international students, who may be "full pay" students, and domestic students, some of whom are underresourced. What is needed is a Catholic cosmopolitanism, rooted in authentic friendship.

Challenges and opportunities

Fundamental to the initiative of the Boston College Roundtable is the conviction that a university exists for the sake of shared learning among scholars: faculty and students. It is ultimately about people—not subjects, budgets, campuses, or strategic plans. What emerged in the course of our conversations at the Roundtable was a renewed sense of that community of shared learning, and excitement about what such a renewal might mean for our various institutions.

There are many pressures currently facing Catholic colleges and universities. There are economic pressures, as explored by Thomas Plante (2.1). There are pressures related to fostering authentic conversations amidst pluralism, as explored by Chester Gillis (1.3 and 4.2). There are pressures to serve the changing demands of the workforce while still seeking to balance commitment to a liberal arts core, as the contributors to volume 2 considered. There are pressures to adapt the curriculum or research budgets in light of the cost of cutting-edge scientific research, as John Cunningham noted (2.3 and 3.2). There are pressures to cultivate authentic relationships among faculty, staff, and students, as Marian Díaz and William Mattison considered (2.2). There are challenges facing our institutions as they grow from relatively local institutions into increasingly global ones, as articulated by the contributors to volume 4.

Perhaps the most significant and most broad challenge, however, had to do with the question of what makes our community of scholars unique. What is it about a community of scholars gathered under the auspices of a Catholic religious order, bishop, or diocese that distinguishes its conversations? For Paul Mariani (1.2), one important answer was that it is a community rooted in an imagination of the good, the true, and the beautiful, as explored through great literature. For Kevin Hughes (2.1), the answer had to do with

wisdom: forming students to be wise people, resisting the temptation to reduce all learning to questions of utility. Amata Miller (4.3) and William Werpehowski (4.1) point to ethical considerations, namely helping the poor and peacemaking, as characteristic concerns of the followers of Jesus. Marc Muskavitch (3.1), John Cunningham (3.2), and William Mattison (3.3) suggest that scientific research is a good in itself, but that there are opportunities at Catholic institutions and networks to bring that research into dialogue with questions of meaning and ethics that benefit the human family. Aurelie Hagstrom (1.1) focused on the biblical summons to hospitality as foundational to the work of a university, and Katarina Schuth (4.2) paid attention to the ways that the Church's history of missions might help foster relationships among the many different members of a university community today.

All these reflections are suggestive of the contours of a robust, integrated Christian humanism that constitutes the project of the modern/postmodern Catholic university.

All these reflections are suggestive of the contours of a robust, integrated Christian humanism that constitutes the project of the modern/postmodern Catholic university. The tenor of our conversations reflected a sensibility that a university is a dynamic organism—that is, an ongoing project borne out of important conversations between listeners and speakers, alive and dead. The life of that organism is conversation: “turning with” (*conversari*) others toward greater appropriation and dissemination of the truth. For some, that turning—that conversion—was toward the poor and marginalized, echoing the call of Jesus in Matthew 25 to serve “the least.” Catholic social teaching, many noted, was an important resource that members of a university must reflect on, critique, develop, and promulgate in curricula, policies, and social outreach. For others, a key dimension of Christian humanism that universities must play a part in promoting is dialogue between cultures and religions. Members of our university communities might foster interreligious dialogue; seek out members of underrepresented ethnic, racial, or religious communities; develop study abroad or immersion programs in places that stretch students’ understanding of others; or reflect on the Church’s history of missionary encounters. For still others, a key dimension of an integrated Christian humanism is interdisciplinarity, recognizing that different methodologies can contribute to a broad understanding and engender cooperation among scholars. All these efforts, though, represent a commitment to fostering communication between human persons irreducible to questions of economic benefit, mindful of an integrated understanding of the human person in community.

B. Qualitative analysis

The initiative that is the Roundtable is predicated upon the belief that the current state of higher education in the United States calls for extended reflection and return to first principles. Reflecting on the initiative, several members of the first cohort reported some hesitation before saying yes: such an undertaking, they averred, involved the risk of wasting a great deal of time and energy. Happily, after four meetings over two years, a number of participants expressed surprise at how much they enjoyed the gatherings, and how much they gained through participation.

This section relies on feedback we gathered from all the participants in one-on-one interviews. Our interest was in learning what they thought of the experience, and how they imagined that it might benefit their professional lives and the institutions in which they work. The answers fell into seven categories which we shall explore below.

1. *The Roundtable provided a replicable model of how to foster mission-focused conversation among faculty.*

A number of the participants spoke of the ways that the Roundtable model enabled them to have conversations that do not otherwise happen on college campuses. First, there was strong agreement that conversations with colleagues from different disciplinary backgrounds were enormously beneficial, as they afforded the participants in-depth opportunities to consider big questions through new methodological lenses. One professor in the humanities reported that he came to understand the curricular demands of the sciences more clearly while one scientist appreciated the opportunity to reflect on the intersection of scientific research with questions of faith and ethics. The experience of hospitality, collegiality, and intellectual discourse led another participant to express a wish to be 30 years younger in order to participate in the Roundtable more.

Several commented on how this model enabled them to see a “big picture” and ask “big questions” that narrowly focused research within a discipline often does not. As a result, one participant noted that the discussion about higher education is a proxy for broader shifts in American society. The collegiality itself was a great benefit: one participant observed that academic life can be lonely while another appreciated the fact that an organization outside of her institution offered her the opportunity to avoid becoming too isolated in her research. Still another remarked that her paper was the hardest one she had ever written, as it forced her to define terms and reach for clarity that is different from what is demanded within the profession; and moreover, the paper condensed a life’s work within the discipline. One administrator noted that the Roundtable experience impacted his administrative work in the ways it helped him understand other scholars’ work. Another wondered whether the Roundtable model might be adapted for junior scholars to cultivate a stronger sense of collegiality and commitment to university mission. But another participant thought that the existing model, inviting mid- and late-career academics, was important, since tenure allows a scholar to ask big questions and be less focused on a particular research imperative.

There was wide agreement among the participants that the Roundtable model was helpful for introducing questions of faith into academic conversation. This model, rooted in practices of hospitality and friendship, can challenge misperceptions of what it means to be a Catholic institution. Rather than proposing Catholic doctrine as superior or unquestionable—a caricature, to be sure, but not absent from our campuses—several suggested that an invitation to consider questions of the good, the true, and the beautiful is an expansive, welcoming, yet faithfully Catholic heuristic for the academic enterprise. Such conversations, one participant noted, are helpful for collaborations between academic and mission/ministry divisions within a university. To the extent that the papers are accessible to nonspecialists, moreover, several pointed to ways they might be used as catalysts for such conversations.

There were several helpful critiques of the existing model. One had to do with the invitations: all the scholars had a strong sense of ownership of Catholic mission in higher education. Convening similar gatherings among faculty who do not share that ownership—or are openly hostile to it—is a very different challenge. The first cohort, while representing different disciplines and institutions, lacked racial and ethnic diversity. Another critique had to do with the balance between papers and discussions. The papers represented a careful thinking through of a neuralgic issue within a disciplinary perspective while the discussions were more spontaneous and therefore less focused. One woman observed that the men were more talkative; one self-described introvert found it difficult to make interventions. In future gatherings, our plan is to moderate the discussions more thoughtfully.

One participant suggested that this approach invited intellectual risk-taking; that is, to think beyond the normal protocols of one's disciplinary methodology in ways that might heal the discipline itself, liberal education, and even the university as a whole.

2. *The Roundtable provided a window into the possibilities of truly interdisciplinary work at a Catholic university, and enables the scholars to consider the ways their work is one cell in a larger organism.*

At various points during the Roundtable, participants noted that their work can be isolated, fragmented, and even in competition over budget lines, majors, faculty, and students. In contrast, they remarked, the invitation to interdisciplinary conversation was challenging and eye-opening. One in particular noted that the conversations were “the most extensive academic interchanges [he has] ever had.” Many saw benefits to

seeing a question addressed through different disciplinary lenses, and began to consider how this model might offer a method for approaching massive cultural questions such as alleviating poverty or addressing the environmental crisis. The image that another participant used was that she saw her work as one cell within a larger organism that is the university. Several people wondered what greater appropriation of that image might portend for other faculty members as they consider the broad mission of the university as a whole.

The sense that emerged from considering the integration of disciplinary approaches to truth was that such integration naturally draws the scholar to consider questions of mission; for example, how hospitality, social justice, and a commitment to the liberal arts are central to the enterprise of Catholic higher education. One participant suggested that this approach invited intellectual risk-taking; that is, to think beyond the normal protocols of one's disciplinary methodology in ways that might heal the discipline itself, liberal education, and even the university as a whole. In this age of crisis in university education, perhaps this kind of approach is exactly what is needed to create a stronger shared understanding of what is essential and what is accidental in university life.

3. *An important question for all Catholic universities is that of hospitality, including who are the hosts and who are the guests.*

Questions about hospitality were not limited to the first gathering of the Roundtable, in which "charism and hospitality" was the theme. Reflecting the growing conviction of the central role of scholars in the university as well as awareness of the changing role of the founding communities, participants observed at many points over the two years that hospitality is both a virtue and a challenge today. Who are the hosts, the very small number of the founding religious order? The board of trustees or senior administrators? The faculty? The Church? Similarly, who are the guests? The students? Lay people? Non-Catholics, or members of underrepresented ethnic or minority groups? In any case, what became clear over the course of the conversations was a growing sense that practicing hospitality was incumbent upon all who work at a Catholic university, reflecting Jesus' mission to the marginalized. It is precisely the shared moral framework and ecclesial understanding that characterize Catholic universities that allow them to prioritize in an explicit way the command to "welcome the dear neighbor, without distinction," as the Sisters of Saint Joseph often recall, or to "welcome strangers like Christ," as the Rule of Saint Benedict exhorts.

In these conversations, there emerged an awareness of both the *content* and *method* of scholarship. Hospitality certainly reflects a certain method of prioritizing relationships on our campuses: developing mentoring programs, establishing protocols for proper behavior, prioritizing service programs, and so on. But there are also elements of a curriculum that are important: our student formation aims toward development of the whole person, capable of service to others in the imitation of Christ. Both elements of method and content provide entrées to the Catholic imagination of the world, reflective of a belief in being loved by God and called to love others in turn. One participant expressed

an appreciation for the way that the Roundtable's focus on hospitality enabled him to develop greater openness to what students had to say, reflecting on their experience at the university.

4. *The role of administration in Catholic universities is to lead with a vision that keeps academic conversation at the center.*

Several of the participants held both faculty and administrative appointments, and so part of the conversation about collegiality and the centrality of scholars in the university focused on what role administrators held. Many participants agreed that while academic conversation is the nucleus of university life—that is, the one element of the university without which it would cease to be a university—still the role of administrators was critical. Provosts, deans, or other administrators who provide leadership have the opportunity to help faculty overcome the tensions which lead to fragmentation. Only they are capable of developing policies and programs that encourage conversations about mission, and to engender a spirit of cooperation that can lead to friendship. One particular area of conversation had to do with the competitive atmosphere that can exist among faculty, and the incentives for prioritizing research at the expense of contributing to collegiality. Perhaps, some wondered, it is time to reconsider the ways that tenure has developed over time and what the existing assumptions about tenure suggest about what is considered most important in a faculty member's work.

5. *The Roundtable was a catalyst for thinking about the relationship between theology, liberal arts, sciences, and the different ways of coming to knowledge.*

While none of the Roundtable meetings directly addressed the role of Catholic theology, the question of how theology related to the other disciplines was a part of several discussions. Theology was represented by several of the participants, moreover, and their contributions to the discussion were fruitful in the subsequent conversations. One nontheologian observed that theology could have an architectonic role among the disciplines, inasmuch as the shared search for truth could revive interest in questions of how the university participates in the larger mission of the Church. Perhaps reflecting on the gathering that addressed the liberal arts, several noted that it was important to understand the evolution of the core curriculum over modern history, and how increasing specialization has led to a difficulty in encouraging students to develop an integrated understanding of truth. One participant called to mind the way that the history of Catholic higher education has manifested a commitment to wisdom and not merely skill acquisition, focusing on the dignity of the human person.

6. *The Roundtable enabled robust conversations about the Catholic understanding of the human person as transcendent and capable of transcendence.*

One particular manifestation of the Roundtable's engagement with Catholic fundamental theology was in the regular consideration of how university structures and policies evinced reverence for human persons as bearing the image of God. Hospitality, as noted above, was one locus of this awareness. Another had to do with beauty, and the desire

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to elicit an awareness of beauty among students and colleagues. More broadly, there were a number of considerations of how our curricula invite students to questions about meaning, mindful that in this postmodern age it is neither easy nor desirable to simply pass on the fundamentals of Catholic doctrine. Negotiating questions of meaning—especially in the liberal arts, philosophy, and theology—was for many an important clue to the distinctiveness of Catholic higher education. Perhaps reflecting the many treatments of failures in moral education among educators in the United States (such as books by Anthony Kronman, Andrew Delbanco, William Deresiewicz, and others),² participants observed that reverence for the person has a long pedigree in both Catholic doctrine and in the Church’s universities—so much so, one participant observed, that in the end there is really nothing new under the sun. There always have been questions about transcendent meaning, and there continue to be today. Catholic universities are uniquely positioned to address them.

7. *The Roundtable surfaced the importance of recruiting and drawing together faculty scholars who share a vision of Catholic higher education.*

Again and again, participants expressed the importance of recruiting, forming, and retaining faculty who share fundamental convictions about the goods to be pursued by Catholic universities. Several times, conversations reflected on St. John Paul II’s *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, his apostolic exhortation about Catholic universities which calls them to have a majority of faculty who are Catholic.³ “Hiring for mission” was a catchphrase that reflects conversations on many campuses; several participants noted the difficulties of doing so. Very few scholars have what would be a double proficiency: a mastery of the Catholic intellectual tradition and a degree in a discipline other than theology. On the contrary, some faculty on our campuses are openly hostile to engagement with that tradition and can be an impediment to the ideals promoted by the Roundtable. What emerged in the conversations was a sense of responsibility to carry forward the tradition in ways that challenge stereotypes and caricatures; to be creative in the ways that the tradition offers resources for addressing contemporary dilemmas.

2 Anthony Kronman, *Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life* (Yale University Press, 2007); Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton University Press, 2013); William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014).

3 Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* II.4.4, online at www.vatican.va.

C. Conclusions

We have found that the Boston College Roundtable is a hopeful model for developing robust interdisciplinary conversations among scholars about the mission of Catholic colleges and universities today. We believe that the model is replicable, and are learning about efforts on other campuses that follow this basic model. In its simplest form, it involves inviting scholars from different disciplines to consider a fruitful theme that reflects the mission of a learning community. In the context of authentic hospitality, those who are invited will have an opportunity to consider fundamental questions about what (or Who) inspires their work in Catholic higher education.

What makes the model work, and how might it be replicated? We consider here seven factors.

1. Who invites

The invitation must come from a senior administrator: a president, chief academic officer, or chief mission officer. Such an invitation signals the importance of the conversation to the mission of the college or university as a whole. Several of the participants in our first cohort reflected that it was important for administrators to be involved in this way. Faculty members are too busy with regular teaching duties and publishing imperatives to prioritize conversations which, according to existing professional expectations, are ancillary.

2. Who is invited

As noted earlier, participants had differing opinions on who ought to be part of a roundtable; there are potential benefits to both junior and senior faculty. A key distinction had to do with the tenure process, and whether the time commitment required for participation was a help or a hindrance to junior faculty. If the model becomes part of an institution's tenure process, it will be a strong incentive to junior faculty. On the other hand, senior faculty are more likely to have the freedom to address topics without concern for professional advancement.

Those invited must have some way to engage questions of Catholic mission in depth. They must be scholars interested in considering how their teaching, research, and service is part of the larger project of the college or university's life, and willing to reflect on the way that Catholic theology serves as an architectonic framework for academic conversation. Both Catholics and non-Catholics can be part of the conversation.

3. The topics

Organizers of the first gathering of the Roundtable chose the first topic, but subsequent ones emerged in conversation with participants. In every case, the topics represented broad questions in Catholic higher education, admitting of a wide range of disciplinary approaches. Participants expressed genuine delight in learning how colleagues from different disciplines approached the themes, illustrating new ideas that helped them bring into focus what may be called "disciplinary assumptions"—that is, basic principles embedded in methodologies which often go unquestioned within intradisciplinary discourse.

4. The process

We asked participants to commit to a two-year project involving four meetings. While some expressed reluctance at such a commitment, they nevertheless reported that there was depth in the conversations that would not have emerged in a single conference. One key, then, is the opportunity to deepen conversation and trust over multiple meetings. Another is the blending of academic and social conversation: friendship provides a nexus for burgeoning creativity and insight. Some of those insights unfolded in conversation late at night, long after the close of the sessions.

5. The cost

A college or university's investment in a roundtable involves both the cost for hospitality and the opportunity cost of a faculty member's time. It is possible to imagine a range of expenses using existing institutional dining services or off-site retreat centers or hotels. Whatever the institution's investment, though, the important factor is that the reality and the perception be that the institution values what the faculty member is doing.

6. The purpose

Theologian Michael Buckley has pointed to a dynamic at the heart of academic inquiry, a first principle which gives rise to the very enterprise of higher learning:

The human intellect moves asymptotically towards the satisfaction of inquiry in this completion. One keeps asking questions—unless this natural drive is repressed—until they lead to questions about ultimate explanation or intelligibility, about the truth of the finite itself, “which all human beings call God.” This relentless inquiry constitutes the natural career of the academic mind unless the culture arrests its progress by dictating the despair of its fulfillment.⁴

What animates the Roundtable is the freedom of scholars to raise such “questions about ultimate explanation or intelligibility,” which they often cannot do in their disciplinary work. In this way, the Roundtable is an exercise in recovery of that dynamic, inviting scholars to reflect on their aspirations for wholeness in their academic pursuits.⁵ Greg Kalscheur, S.J., one of the observers of the Roundtable, articulates relevant questions:

Does the life of the university community witness to the truth that it is possible for one to be both seriously engaged with questions of faith and seriously committed to a rigorous intellectual life, such that the life of faith and the life of the mind are not two radically separate realms? Do we challenge one another to pursue in depth the largest possible questions that can be asked about human life and the world in which we live? Questions about the meaning of life in the face of life's fragility, about where we have come from and where we are going,

4 Michael Buckley, *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Georgetown University Press, 1998), 15.

5 Cf. John Haughey, *Where is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Georgetown University Press, 2009), 81.

questions about what it means to live a good life, to foster life-giving relationships, and to build good communities, questions about what sorts of people we are becoming as we engage in our teaching, research, and study.⁶

One important purpose of the Roundtable is to offer scholars a time and place to connect their work to these larger questions, in the context of friendship and hospitality. By doing this, we are inviting them to experience anew that animating principle—that *Logos*—which gave rise to the very foundation of universities.

7. The outcomes

While it is early to discern the long-term outcomes of the Roundtable, the feedback from participants suggests several directions: increased collaborative work among scholars of different disciplines; development of new avenues for research across institutions, reflective of Catholic theology and anthropology; a deeper commitment among faculty to mission in teaching, research, and service; attention to practices of hospitality toward students, colleagues, and others; a deepened appreciation of the liberal arts and their relation to sciences; critical engagement of Catholic theology and its relation to other areas of study; and others. Overall, participants reflected on the dynamic of the Roundtable as a microcosm of ideal collegiality. That one very concrete outcome is certainly valuable to the work of any college or university today.

One final point is worth observing. The contemporary landscape of higher education, impacted as it is by the many pressures noted above, is not immune from conflict. Higher education today is a secular enterprise, both in the positive sense of being immersed in the reality of the world today (the *saeculum*) and in the negative sense of sometimes remaining focused exclusively on what Charles Taylor calls “the immanent frame.”⁷ One of the important ways that the Roundtable sought to draw together the different contributions of the participants was by celebrating liturgy, stepping outside of the immanent frame (as it were) for the purpose of shared worship. In so doing, members of the Roundtable engaged in a critical practice of an animating faith at the heart of the Catholic college or university. Saint John Paul II suggested that Catholic higher education stands between two poles: on the one hand, the “unfathomable richness of the salvific message of the Gospel” and on the other, “the variety and immensity of the fields of knowledge in which that richness is incarnated.”⁸ Liturgy, as a posture of reverence before the mystery of God, was a fitting practice for finding the right place to stand.

6 Gregory A. Kalscheur, S.J., “A Response to Kenneth Garcia: Healthy Secularity and the Task of a Catholic University,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012), 930.

7 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press, 2007), 542–557.

8 Pope John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 6.