

## The Open Circle: The Culture of the Catholic University

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**Abstract:** *Reflecting on the culture of Catholic universities ought to be a fundamental and professional concern for each of us, although this is made challenging by the pervasive and therefore elusive nature of any “culture.” I will therefore begin my remarks by reflecting on the wider culture of my own country, and then the more specific culture of the American university. With descriptions of those two cultures as a background, I will then turn to what I believe ought to characterize the culture of a Catholic university. Third, I want to return to the first part of my presentation, my description of the dominant US and academic cultures, and isolate some of the challenges and opportunities they pose to us who are committed to building a Catholic culture in our universities. I will finally move to a Catholic vision of the university, with its current challenges.*

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**Key Words:** Catholic universities; Catholic culture; American culture; academic culture; individualism; tolerance; privatization of religion; religious indifference; moral formation

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### *The Dominant Cultures*

I know that quite a few of you are familiar with various descriptions of our dominant North American culture. I wish to single out only three of its characteristics: individualism, tolerance and private religion. I am well aware that there are some subcultures in the United States — for example, the rapidly growing number of Hispanics — that do not reflect these characteristics — or at least do not reflect them to the extent that the majority of the population does. Nevertheless, all Americans can be described accurately, I believe, as deeply affected by individualism, an attitude of tolerance and the privatization of religion. How much this is your own situation is really what we are aiming to discuss.

I begin with individualism.<sup>1</sup> Over 170 years ago, a French visitor to our country, Alexis DeTocqueville, wrote extensively of the rugged individualism he saw everywhere he traveled. About a decade later, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote his famous 1841 essay, “Self Reliance,” which celebrates individualism and describes religion as a personal choice best kept hidden in the private lives of individuals. He applauds people who can think for themselves, who do not depend on clergy or politicians to tell them what and how to think. Not everyone applauded this development. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the brilliant religious thinker and convert to Catholicism, John Henry Newman, singled out what he called

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<sup>1</sup> In the following paragraphs I draw freely from a section of a recently published article that I co-authored with the Purdue sociologist of religion, Jim Davidson, “The Mission of Catholic High Schools and Today’s Millennials: Three Suggestions,” in *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 6.4 (June 2003).

“liberalism” as the fundamental problem facing Christians. In his own words, liberalism is an anti-dogmatic principle that teaches

that truth and falsehood and religion are but matters of opinion; that one doctrine is as good as another; that the Governor of the world does not intend that we should gain the truth; that there is no truth; that we are not more acceptable to God by believing this than by believing that; that no one is answerable for his opinions; that they are a matter of necessity or accident; that it is enough if we sincerely hold that we profess; that our merit lies in seeking, not in possessing.<sup>2</sup>

In the wake of the cultural revolution of the 1960s, this individualistic approach to religion, or “liberalism” to use Newman's word, is more widespread now in Western society than when Newman described it in 1845. Contemporary sociologists such as Robert Bellah, Robert Wuthnow and Wade Clark Roof — all of whom have described at length the individualistic nature of religious life in America today — confirm my judgment about how widespread individualism is. Deep-seated individualism also makes it more difficult for a faith tradition to present itself as a source of knowledge and truth, resources indispensable for the foundation and formation of communities. We will return to the separation of knowledge and faith later. How much is this individualism the case in your own country? I sense that there are already parallels, at least. Billboards dot the highways of Middle America and in some parts of your own country, e.g., the Gold Coast, proclaiming that we ought to go to the Church of our own preference. The question is not about what is true, but about what is preferable, or, about what is most comfortable for us. Growing numbers of people in the North Atlantic countries describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” as “believing but not belonging.”

The Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor delivered the prestigious *Gifford Lectures* in 1999. Though not yet published, the theme of these lectures is summarized nicely in a short volume entitled *The Varieties of Religion Today* (Harvard University Press, 2002). Taylor shows why the Harvard religious psychologist and pragmatist philosopher, William James, whose own classic on religious experience was also presented as the *Gifford Lectures* a century earlier, remains so contemporary.

For James, authentic religion resembles the “I’m spiritual but not religious” approach. He has little use for churches and organized religion; instead, he focuses on the religious experience of individuals, “the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude.” Those who seek God through churches experience God, James tells us, “second hand,” as a “dull habit.” Thus, the real locus of religion is the individual, not the community. To be sought above all are first-hand experiences instead of reciting traditional formulas or performing boring rituals.

Needless to say, James, who attends not just to the experience of individuals, but to “individuals in their solitude,” has trouble appreciating any emphasis on community, tradition and liturgy. As Taylor explains, “what James can't seem to accommodate is the phenomenon of collective religious life, which is not just the result of individual religious connections, but which in some way constitutes or is that connection.”<sup>3</sup> And at the heart of that connection is the realization that the Church is a sacramental communion. It should be obvious that James, whose thought embodies so much of American culture, is tone deaf to much that is characteristic of Catholic religious traditions. James, it should be recalled,

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<sup>2</sup> *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame Press, 1989), 357-358.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *The Varieties of Religion Today*, 24.

was a major influence in the formation of pragmatism, America's only distinctive contribution to philosophy.

If individualism is a pervasive characteristic of contemporary culture, a second pervasive characteristic is the practice of tolerance. The first European settlers of my country fled Europe to secure religious asylum from the oppression of the Catholic Church. They immigrated to America precisely to secure religious freedom. They themselves came from different Protestant traditions. Representing a considerable religious pluralism within Protestant Christianity and embodying a strong sense of self-reliance among themselves, these immigrants learned to practice tolerance in order to avoid the bloody repression they had experienced in Europe. Religion would have to be viewed as "private" or at least as "non public," and certainly not established. In a quite different way, given the brutality of Australia's origin, religion was even more foreign and more private – the conventional Anglicanism of the British establishment, or the strange folk religion of the troublesome and Gaelic speaking Irish!

A very large percentage of people in the United States, unlike in Europe, continue to describe themselves as religious. However, observers debate how deep that religion is. One person rather flippantly observed, religion is like "a swimming pool in which all the noise comes from the shallow end."<sup>4</sup> Whatever the noise level, tolerance is the rule.

American sociologist Alan Wolfe's 1998 study, *One Nation After All*, explores what the American middle class thinks about public morality. There is good news and bad news. The good news is that instead of a war between cultures, Wolfe found something close to a consensus on what is most highly valued by the middle class. The highest good is now tolerance. That's the good news. The bad news is that the highest good is tolerance. Wolfe says that an 11<sup>th</sup> commandment should be added to the biblical decalogue: "Thou shalt not judge."<sup>5</sup> From what I can gather this is the case here, though a kind of anti-Catholic and anti-Christian attitude seems pretty well established: there are in fact limits to tolerance.

In describing individualism and tolerance in the ways that I have, little needs to be said about the third characteristic, the privatization of religion. It is easier for an individual than an entire community to be private, especially a community that numbers thousands of people who perform public rituals. The first Christians worshipped in catacombs and private homes. Once Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, Christians built basilicas and churches. At the center of the still existing medieval towns of Europe cathedrals dominate the skyline. The new cathedrals of our cities are office buildings and banks. These tall buildings now dwarf the cathedrals, like St. Patrick in New York City, making them practically invisible. I notice this is the case here as well, though in Sydney and Melbourne, because Catholics did not have the first pick, their cathedrals are less swallowed up by the surrounding city. But even less visible in our society than those nearly invisible cathedrals are the external personal practices of religion. In any major city, one can pass on the street thousands of people and never know what religion, if any, they profess and practice. Religion is now an individual and private matter, its most sacred words known only as oaths!

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Coakley, "Deepening Practices: Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology," in *Practical Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Wolf and Dorothy C. Bass (Eerdmans, 2002), 81. Coakley is citing the remark of Anglican Theologian W.H. Vanstone who was referring to the Church of England.

<sup>5</sup> See David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge, 2002), especially 24-30.

Newman had said that “liberalism” reduced religion to just a matter of opinion. For a growing number of persons in North America and similar places, religion is not only a matter of personal opinion, but also largely a matter of indifference. An *Atlantic Monthly* correspondent by the name of Jonathan Rauch recently wrote that “apatheism” — which he defines as “a disinclination to care all that much about one’s own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people’s” — is in its “modern flourishing” in our countries. He insists that many “apatheists” are people who believe in God, but they just don’t care that much about God. The author is very pleased with this development. He celebrates the rise of “apatheists” as nothing less than “a major civilizational advance.” Why? Because, according to Rauch, when people care too much about religion, be they atheists or theists, they do not control their passions, and do harmful things to others. The privatization of religion has now morphed into apathy about religion.<sup>6</sup>

Allow me now to turn to universities and their culture. I note that unlike the wider US culture which is quite religious (even though in largely privatized forms of uneven depth), the culture of the academy, like that of the media and the ruling elite, is quite secular. I am sure you know what I am speaking about, otherwise there would be no Catholic university in this country. Distinguished sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, recently looked back over his long career and noted that of the two key ideas he had had about the shape of Western culture—the social construction of knowledge and secularization—that only one of them had turned out to be true. He once wrote that if India is the most religious country in the world and Sweden the least, then the United States is a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes.<sup>7</sup> What about Australia?

In the United States, religion in higher education is not only privatized, it simply is not an object of serious study; it is, for all practical purposes, simply absent in the curricula and hardly an object of scholarly research. Those few religious studies departments that now exist at some of our nation’s secular universities are typically small, under-financed, and without prestige. Whether Catholic colleges and universities now stand where mainline Protestant universities were at the turn of the twentieth century — that is, just on the brink of a rapid movement towards secularization — is a topic I will consider in the fall of this year in a lecture I will give at the University of Dayton. This is a matter which I know exercises yourselves at this moment.

In the meantime, given that there are only two Catholic Universities in this country, and only one public one – in a sense that is simply inconceivable in the US – it might be helpful at this point to sketch for you the immense diversity among colleges and universities in the United States. Among the nearly 4,000 of them, one finds all kinds and shapes, from colleges to community colleges to technical institutes to comprehensive universities to research universities to various Church-related colleges and universities. Most of the published criticisms of the state of higher education in the United States seem to me to be aimed at secular research universities, which constitute at most 10% of the total number of institutions, but produce 75% of the doctorates awarded annually. By now, the criticisms of these institutions are well known: research is more valued than teaching; undergraduates are taught mainly by graduate students; faculty prefer as few classes as possible and to be left alone to do their research; faculty care about their discipline, not their institution; and administrators are bureaucrats and fund-raisers,

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Rauch, “Let It Be,” *Atlantic Monthly*, May 2003.

<sup>7</sup> See my review of George Marsden’s three books on the secularization of the academy in *The Journal of Law and Religion*, 16.2 (2001), reprinted in *Catholic Education*, 6.4 (2003): 516-529.

rarely intellectual leaders. I take some consolation in noting that few of these criticisms would apply to the Catholic colleges and universities with which I am most familiar, but I must defer to your own assessment of your own University in these matters. However, other criticisms might apply, as we shall see when we confront several challenges described in the last part of this presentation.

The general attitude of students coming into American universities does not make our task any easier. Most students are more interested in being financially well-off than in developing a meaningful philosophy of life. Furthermore, more faculty than we would like to admit are disappointed with what they have found in the academy. A recent article reports that even in smaller institutions like our own two disturbing trends stand out: first, the growing corporatization of the university; and second, the increasing autonomy and individualism of the faculty.<sup>8</sup> Add still one other factor — the lack of money and the consequent absence of various opportunities for both faculty and students — and we have described some of the major strains and disappointments of the institutions in which we serve.

### *The Vision of a Catholic University*

It is best not to dwell too long on the downside of American culture and its universities. A careful diagnosis, nonetheless, needs to precede any effective prescription for a cure. I now turn to a description, if you will, of one educational prescription for what ails our dominant culture: the vision of a Catholic university, at least as I have come to think of it. Many of us may believe that we know that mission already. Samuel Johnson once remarked that we need to be reminded more often than instructed. Consider the next few minutes as salutary reminders of the distinctiveness and importance of the mission of a Catholic university.

In 1999, a two-year process of consultation and discussion at our three Marianist universities resulted in the publication of *Characteristics of Marianist Universities*.<sup>9</sup> The introduction of the publication forges close relationships between four realities often left separate, or worse, opposed: spirituality and education, and faith and the intellectual life. The authors of the booklet were rightly convinced that in a Catholic university, how we conceive of the spiritual life shapes how we approach education. They also believed that the Catholic faith and the intellectual life can and should nourish each other. In the meantime, many academics, especially since the amazing growth of modern science over the last two centuries, drive a wedge between what they presume can be confidently known through science on the one hand, and what we can only be asserted through religion on the other. Science, they would have us believe, produces reliable and useful knowledge, whereas religion relies on personal opinions about mostly invisible things.

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<sup>8</sup> Lawry Finsen, "Faculty as Institutional Citizen: Reconvincing Service and Governance Work," in *A New Academic Compact*, 71.

<sup>9</sup> The Marianists, by the way, are often confused with the Marists. Founded by William Joseph Chaminade in Bordeaux France in 1817, the Marianists are now an international community of mainly brothers and some priests who live and work together and meet several times a day for prayer. Brothers who are ordained must first receive the approval of the brothers with whom they have lived the previous three years. The first obligation of the Marianist priest is to serve the brothers. Our provincials and directors and novice masters can be brothers or priests. Members of our community enjoyed the privilege of serving in the Melbourne area for about twenty years after Vatican II.

John Henry Newman argued that no such wedge should divide science and faith. He once said that the truths of revelation and those of science can not contradict each other, since both come from the same source, namely God who both creates and redeems. Second, however, he also said recognized that the truths of revelation and the truths of science often do seem to contradict each other. Third and finally, he said that sometimes science is wrong and sometimes revelation is not understood properly, and that scientists and theologians therefore need the time and the “elbow room” to continue their research and deepen their conversation so that they can arrive at a clearer understanding of the full truth. This “catholic approach” to knowledge, if I may call it that, is quite different from that espoused by the fundamentalist preacher Billy Sunday who proclaimed, “When the Word of God says one thing and scholarship says another, scholarship can go to hell!”<sup>10</sup> The authors of the CMU booklet wrote about the complementarity of faith and the intellectual life precisely to confront this false opposition.

The booklet highlights five characteristics of the Catholic universities: they educate in order to form people in their faith; they provide an education that is integrated; they carry out this mission in the spirit of a family; they help people learn how to serve and work for justice and peace; and finally, they teach people learn how to deal with and even effect change. Given these characteristics, let us look more closely at the kind of campus culture they ought to create.

This evening, I will describe only three things about that culture: it supports, it integrates and it challenges. It supports when it genuinely welcomes all who are a part of the community. Our various Marianist campus communities – and there are further subdivisions of this relevant to you with your six campuses in the one ACU National – enjoy different degrees of diversity among students, faculty, academic programs, financial resources, geographical location and size. Despite these differences, it is not uncommon for visitors to our three campuses repeatedly to observe a strong community spirit, a welcoming spirit that makes most people feel at home immediately.

Second, I stress the importance of meeting the very difficult challenge of offering an integrated education. This means that on our campuses we do whatever we can to overcome what typically in higher education is found to be separated, and sometimes even opposed. I have already mentioned spirituality and education, and faith and the intellectual life. To them I add the unfortunate division between academics and administration, academic and general staff, students and their teachers, the humanities and the sciences, study and service, research and teaching, the liturgy and the laboratory, the campus and the wider community, and finally, the head and the heart. We could explore each of these unfortunate “disconnects,” but that would take more time than we have. I will return briefly to five of them in my concluding section.

Third, in my experience, education flourishes when challenges are embraced. The document I refer to strikes a note of realism when it warns against romanticizing the idea of community. “It must be...recalled that friendliness and hospitality are genuine expressions of a process that necessarily includes conflict, division, and all manner of human suffering and failure” (par. 38). Parker Palmer distinguishes between competition and conflict. He describes competition as secretive zero-sum game played by people determined to win. Conflict, on the other hand, is “open and sometimes raucous but

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Joseph Loconte, “Faith, Dogma, and Academic Freedom,” in *Books and Culture* (May/June 2003): 31.

always communal, a public encounter in which it is possible for everyone to win by learning and growing.”<sup>11</sup>

I used to think that a peculiar weakness of Catholic culture was its fear of conflict. I now see that fear almost everywhere, and not just among us. Nevertheless, a real danger persists within cultures that emphasize acceptance, community and love. Such cultures typically marginalize if not exclude people who challenge and disagree. Just as deep friendships weather periods of strain and disagreement, so strong communities do not fear challenges. Even more, healthy communities welcome challenges, especially when they ultimately strengthen the mission. And for university communities, an essential part of that challenge must be an integral part of the intellectual life. Dialogue, about which so much is written today, is impossible and pointless unless there are at least two meanings: *dia-logos* (two way communication). When dialogue is carried on as it should be, those who think differently are not ‘diabolic’, i.e., ‘thrown apart’ (*dia-bolos*, to be thrown apart), nor do they necessarily come together in agreement, but they do grow in real understanding of and genuine respect for each other.

### *Five Challenges*

In the first part of this talk, I spoke of individualism, tolerance and the privatization of religion. In this concluding section, I want to return to these characteristics of the dominant culture and draw from them five key challenges to the Catholic culture of our universities.

First, we have the challenge of individualism. It is not to be confused with individuality. One acquires individuality in and through one's relationships. In that sense, individuality and community depend on each other. Individualism is thinking only in terms of oneself, apart from the community. Individuality provides the necessary identity to be a part of a community without being swallowed up by it. Catholics must think for themselves, but never by themselves.

Our Catholic identity and mission is often seen as an obstacle to creating a greater diversity on our campuses. It appeared normal and acceptable fifty years ago that vowed members of a religious order occupied all the leadership positions at their university. Now it would seem to be not only an exclusion of the gifts of lay colleagues, but also intolerably sexist. With lay presidents now leading all three Marianist universities institutions and also with more women assuming key positions in them, we now are less vulnerable to those criticisms, though other challenges remain. I realize that in Australia the founding orders included the Mercy Sisters, the Dominicans and Josephite Sisters, the Marists, the Christian and De La Salle Brothers. Perhaps they have experienced similar transitions in their institutions.

While these transitions introduce more variety in our institutions than heretofore, we must admit that the public image of Catholicism, often portrayed unfairly by the media, is hardly positive when it comes to supporting diversity. It appears to be by nature unduly authoritarian. The Jesuit Thomas Reese, now editor of *America* magazine, quoted a Vatican employee who offered five “don'ts” for surviving there:

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<sup>11</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 103.

*Don't think  
 If you think, don't speak  
 If you think, and if you speak, don't write  
 If you think, and if you speak, and if you write, don't sign your name.  
 If you think, and if you speak, and if you write, and if you sign your name, don't be surprised.<sup>12</sup>*

But seriously, let's think quite concretely about our Catholic universities. I have had access to the excellent papers you recently read concerning values-based education. In the light of them, I ask the following questions. How many of our faculty and students should be Catholic? Some say that it doesn't matter. Some caution that this question is not the one to be asked. Some may think the fewer the Catholics the greater the flexibility and openness. Others speak of a 'critical mass,' or claim that even a majority the faculty should be Catholic. Then there are those who remind us that some Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and non-believers on our faculties contribute more to the Catholic and spiritual mission than do disaffected Catholics. Having said all that, I still believe that one of the questions we have yet to face squarely is how our different forms of Catholic identity and mission ought to qualify the diversity of the entire community we welcome and sustain. In other words, how important is it that all members of the community, whether they are Catholic or not, identify, at least in some ways, with the Catholic faith and tradition, with Catholic approaches to general education and the linking of the humanities with the professions?

As some of you may know, I have frequently used the image of the "Open Circle" for a Catholic university — a "circle" that constitutes the core beliefs and principles that embody the distinctive religious and intellectual mission of the university, and "open" so that people of other faiths and traditions are welcomed into that community, challenging it and supporting it in the process. Among those who constitute the circle are those for whom Catholicism is not only a rich intellectual tradition, but also a faith for which they would lay down their lives. We need not just professors but also witnesses. Intellectuals who are committed to the faith which sets church-related institutions apart from secular institutions.<sup>13</sup>

My reference to a "process" leads me to my second challenge. I earlier discussed the widespread practice of tolerance in our culture. In its most deplorable form, it appears to be indifference, as in the case of the author who praises "apatheism." Some students utter the single word "whatever" to indicate either that they do not care about something or are simply annoyed. The Harvard political theorist Michael Sandel speaks about "deliberative" tolerance, that is, an attitude of engagement rather than indifference, or the "whatever" refrain. Sandel bases his preference for "deliberative" tolerance on his conviction that "we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone."<sup>14</sup> I prefer the word "engagement" to the somewhat clumsy "deliberative tolerance."

So, my first challenge is that we need to confront squarely the individualism in our culture and despite it find ways to promote the common good, a process that deepens the sense people have of themselves as members of a caring community. My second challenge is that we need to go beyond mere tolerance, and face squarely how knowledge and faith

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Reese, *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*, (Harvard University Press, 1996), 164.

<sup>13</sup> See my article, "Academic Freedom: American and Catholic," *Origins* 28.35 (February 18, 1999): 614-623.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 183.



need to be related to each other.<sup>15</sup> In other words, we need to recover the intellectual dimensions of our faith. For almost one hundred years most Western academics have separated knowledge from religion. They effected this separation because, among other reasons, Christian scholars did not do a very good job of meeting the challenges posed by liberalism as described by Newman. He saw the problem clearly, but few followed his efforts to challenge engage it; mostly, the Church simply condemned it. In the United States, this separation of faith and knowledge, potentially fatal to Christianity, began to take shape after the Civil War, and became more prevalent in the 1880s and 1890s in the universities that were founded as (or grew into) our major research universities.

For Catholic universities to have a future, we need to have Catholic intellectuals on our faculties. If knowledge and religion remain separated, it is impossible for a Catholic to be an intellectual. And indeed, there are those in the academy who believe that not only is a Catholic university an oxymoron, but so also is a Catholic intellectual. Without Catholic intellectuals, we will have no Catholic universities. Catholic intellectuals, however, are guided by certain habits of thought. For example, they know that the more deeply one gets into what it means to be human, the more inescapable are ethical and religious questions; the more deeply one gets into any form of knowledge, the more necessary it is to make connections with other areas of knowledge; the more intellectually vibrant a religious culture is, the more it will learn from and shape the wider culture. The Catholic intellectual is a believer, one who is nourished by the Word and the Sacrament. Without Catholic intellectuals, we have no distinctive academic experience to offer in our universities.

Let me illustrate this challenge of the separation of knowledge and faith with one example. I have been privileged to work with the *Lilly Endowment* on one of their latest initiatives. Lilly wants highly talented students to think theologically about their lives as vocations, and is giving millions of dollars to help Christian colleges and universities do this. The response from the colleges and universities has been enthusiastic. But a number of the participating institutions tend to do three things that reflect the separation of knowledge and faith. First, while they put great emphasis on service programs, they had difficulty ensuring that theological reflection was done on the service rendered. Second, they tend to locate the administration of the grant in campus ministry and student services (both important contributors to the mission of a Catholic university), not sufficiently in the academic sector. And third, they shy away from focusing on “highly talented” students and from theological reflection. Could it be, I ask myself, that we assume that focusing on “highly talented” students is elitist, or that such students would not be interested in theological reflection but would rather study science and engineering. Do we assume that “theological reflection” will attract only the pious and not also the “highly talented”? Are we afraid that most faculty will think that theological reflection is too personal, too subjective, or even inevitably too ideological to qualify as an appropriate form of academic activity? It seems clear to me that we have a yet to overcome the split between knowledge and faith.

The third challenge is related to the second: how can we be more publicly Catholic as a university, and still avoid on the one hand sectarianism and on the other secularization? This is a question your Vice Chancellor, Prof. Peter Sheehan, recently

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<sup>15</sup> In developing this second and the fourth challenges, I draw freely from my article, “The Gentleman and the Christian,” *The Cresset* (2003) *Special Issue: Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts*, published by Valparaiso University in Indiana.

addressed in his thoughtful reflection.<sup>16</sup> I would only add here that too often in the States, Catholic administrators and academics tend to emphasize what is called the “small C,” that is, themes that in themselves might well be found on any good university campus — social justice, inclusiveness, spirituality, opposition to the death penalty, service-learning opportunities, and that all-encompassing but non-specific word, “values.” My view is that without a strong “capital C”, that is, without a strong intellectual tradition rooted in the living Catholic tradition of faith, those institutions that attach their identity only to the “small C” will soon lose it.

Those charged with public relations and selling the university to prospective students — I am thinking here mainly of enrolment management people and university relations and development people — feel the tension between the capital and small C's in a particular way. While they want to communicate accurately the religious dimension of the university, they also don't want to turn away from the university people who could become wonderful contributing members once they become a part of it. I remember overhearing an undergraduate tour guide at the University of Dayton say to a group of visiting students and their parents, “This University is Catholic, but don't worry, they won't bother you. You can ignore them if you want.” I am sure nothing like that would be heard at ACU. Certainly we have religious freedom on our campuses; students can ignore, if they want to, the outreach of campus ministry and take no more than the required courses in theology and ethics, and among them only those that appear the least Catholic. Would it not be better if the tour guide had spoken of the special opportunities that a Catholic university offers, such as an opportunity to explore major religious and ethical questions from perspectives of a two thousand year old tradition of living, loving and sustained reflection, or had explained the opportunity to explore thoughtfully many religious traditions, or had suggested that attending such a university would allow them to deepen and critique their own understanding of God and God's role in their lives?

The fourth challenge we face is moral formation. A good student is dedicated to the discovery of truth, to virtues of honesty and integrity, to not cooking the corporate books or skipping the scholarly footnotes. There are, after all, the intellectual virtues of attentiveness, honesty, and just plain old personal discipline — virtues that carelessness, drunkenness and promiscuity diminish if not destroy. Such intellectual virtues constitute a form of morality; they shape the way academics do their work. And here is one area where the academy not only should, but also must, stress moral formation — in a sphere of its clear competence.

To meet the need for moral and ethical formation, some universities rely mainly on courses that teach about morality. Such courses typically compare several moral systems and emphasize the importance of personal choice, responsibility, and autonomy; sometimes they also mention the importance of discerning right from wrong. But this is not enough. The first concern of the ancient philosophers, and particularly Aristotle and those influenced by his approach, is not discernment or even less choice, but rather the development of the ability, the habit if you will, the personal discipline to do what is right. The development of good habits will likely do more to help students perceive moral truths than teaching moral truths will lead to the development of good habits. We need to think much more than we have about the development of good habits as a key component for doing thoughtful discernment and making right decisions.

Fifth and finally, we need to meet the major challenge of creating a theology and philosophy of the Catholic university. I am not speaking here about the roles of philosophy

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<sup>16</sup> “On Being a Public and a Catholic University at One and the Same Time”, (unpublished).

and theology within the university; that is, I am not speaking of the roles they play as isolated disciplines or as a number of loosely connected schools doing their own sometimes esoteric thing. Rather, I am speaking of them as disciplines that have special roles to play as sources of wisdom in the creating of a vision of a Catholic university.

These two disciplines have a long history in two areas relevant to this fifth challenge. First both have lived through the different demands of history: Jewish thinking entering into the Greco-Roman world; the rise of patristic thinking; the collapse of the Dark Ages, and the incredible creativity of the early monastic centers; the Middle Ages and the rise of the universities in dialogue with patristic, Greek, Arabic and Jewish thinkers, the breakdown that led to the Reformation; the onset of the Enlightenment and secularism; the rise of science and its amazing technologies; the unemployed self of modernity, and now the searching relativity of the postmodern period: a new dark age, in the somewhat grim words of Catholic philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre, looking for a new enlightenment, one more hospitable to both faith and reason.

Second, these disciplines have an inherent sympathy with a cross disciplinary approach: they cannot speak of ultimate mystery of God without being open to the range and depth of the human, as it is revealed not simply in “human nature,” but as it is also accessible in the explorations of history, anthropology, psychology, physical science and art, economics and political science. You have evidence of excellent philosophy and theology in your university. Yet I must ask whether and to what extent these disciplines have been promoting that holistic vision that is central to a Catholic university, that is, in putting the “holic” back into the “Cat-holic.” It may well be that this question is now both urgent and important for you. Your university, being undeniably Catholic in its origin, had to spend its first decade proving it was a genuine university, and that being Catholic was not a drawback—an experience we have had and continue to have in the United States. May I be so bold as to suggest that perhaps the challenge now for you in your second decade as a university is to prove yourselves to be creatively Catholic and to show that being a Catholic university makes an important difference. I have come here to encourage you in the work of this second decade.

### *Conclusion*

In summary then, we need to overcome individualism, but not crush individuality; learn how to engage our differences in a spirit of genuine respect for each other; and to rediscover the dynamic and ever expanding relationship between the capital and small C's of Catholicism. Moreover, we must attend to moral formation and learn once again what it means to do theology in a way that integrates not only the work of other disciplines, but contributes to a greater understanding of the university as Catholic. In all of these challenges, I am speaking of avoiding an all too typical “either/or,” and effecting instead a rich “both/and.” Friedrich von Hugel, a historian and theologian of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote at length about the mystical, intellectual and institutional dimensions of the Church. He argued that, when the Church is most healthy, an irreducible creative tension continuously plays itself out among these three elements. I suggest that the culture of a Catholic university is at its best when it keeps in balance the religious (mystical), the intellectual and the institutional dimensions, and it rests upon us all, in our different ways, to integrate them continuously.

These are great challenges. Let me by way of conclusion put these challenges in another way. Locating ourselves in modern American culture, I might express our mission

in still another way.<sup>17</sup> We need to be fighting on several fronts simultaneously. If we do so, we will likely get in trouble on both ends of the political and academic spectrum. If we talk about the importance of moral formation, we worry the left. But if the moral formation we impart includes opposing unjust social structures, we worry the right. If we find ways to bring together knowledge and faith, we raise the specter of indoctrination for the left. But if we take engaging modern culture seriously and admitting that we might learn something from it, we worry the right. Upsetting both ends of the spectrum seems to me to be what a distinctively Catholic university ought to be doing.

These are indeed daunting challenges. To address them we need courage—the courage to believe that our Catholic Universities have a distinctive mission that transcends typical left-right polarizations. We also need to have competence—the competence to overcome in compelling intellectual ways the lack of integration that marks so much of our academic and pastoral work. We must ensure that the expression of the heart of the Catholic faith carries within it saving truth and healing power—deep and strong enough that we can spend our lives exploring it intellectually and confident that that very exploration bears within it a distinctive and deep moral and religious formation.

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<sup>17</sup> Again, I draw freely from “The Gentleman and the Christian” (see note 15).