

**THE JOHN F. HENNING INSTITUTE  
AND  
THE BISHOP JOHN S. CUMMINS INSTITUTE  
FOR CATHOLIC THOUGHT, CULTURE AND ACTION**

**AN EPISCOPAL LECTURE SERIES**

**INAUGURAL LECTURE  
BY  
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**What Makes a Catholic Higher Education Distinctive?**

Dear Brothers, Administrators, Faculty, and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen:

***Introduction***

Thank you for your kind and generous introduction. It is an enormous pleasure for me to be with you this afternoon – back on “home ground” of a college campus where I spent so many happy years in Houston, Texas. I am especially grateful – and honored – for the kind invitation of Brother Donald, issued to me on behalf of the John F. Henning Institute and the Bishop John S. Cummins Institute for Catholic Thought, Culture and Action here at St. Mary's College of California. Although I have never been here before, I do have a sense of knowing something about you. While serving in Rome as Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic

Education, I was fortunate enough to meet with, and address, a group of administrators and faculty members from Lasallian institutions in the United States and, on another occasion, a similar international group gathered at the Brothers' mother house.

Your ambitious lecture series is a courageous and farsighted undertaking in the world of American Catholic higher education at this critical juncture. I applaud your initiative in striving to mark out with intention the kind of institution of higher learning you want St. Mary's College to be in the next few decades. How will all of you express your Catholic identity in the year 2025? By then, there might well be a new papal document which would build on the foundation laid by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Although we are far from absorbing, yet alone implementing, the current apostolic constitution, a Roman intervention – or better, a Roman stimulus – once every 35 years is not, I think, overkill.

At the outset, I would like to express my disagreement with those who would exile the Church from the world of the academy. The history of higher education in the West clearly demonstrates that catholicity and the rigorous intellectual pursuits proper to the university belong together. No scholar can seriously claim that the great universities of Paris, Bologna, Salamanca or Kraków were

not authentic centers of learning. All of them were, by common reckoning, genuinely Catholic institutions.

That Christian belief itself leads to rational reflection “is the fundamental conviction out of which, historically, all Catholic universities have been born.”<sup>1</sup> While the first universities were established without the direct intervention of either ecclesiastical or secular authority, many of these corporations of scholars and students soon sought and received canonical recognition by the Holy See. Because their degrees were granted by papal authority, they were recognized throughout the Christian world.<sup>2</sup> With every justification John Paul II could affirm that universities – at least those in the West – have developed “from the heart of the Church.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, from a historical perspective, the Church “is due the honorary title of a foundress of universities.”<sup>4</sup>

In my reflections with you this afternoon I would like to outline six characteristics that define Catholic higher education and

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<sup>1</sup> Godfried Cardinal Danneels, “The Dynamics of a Catholic University,” *Origins*, 30:35 (15 February 2001), 559.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, “The University as European Cultural Heritage: A Historical Approach,” *Higher Education in Europe*, 31:4 (December 2006), 370; Thomas E. Woods, “The Catholic Church and the Creation of the University,” *LewRockwell.com* (16 May 2005).

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Catholic University in Lisbon (14 May 1982), 5: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition (28 June 1982), 15.

its tradition. What makes St. Mary's College of California, for example, different from Stanford or UCA or Piperine? I will suggest to you that the following "marks" or distinctive traits provide good guidelines for judging what makes a university more than Catholic merely in name: its communion with the Church; its convictions about the truth; its teaching the harmony between faith and reason; its fostering the integration of knowledge; the fundamental role played by social doctrine in its curriculum and life; and its overall vision of Christian humanism.

### **1. In Communion with the Church**

A first distinctive mark of the Catholic college is its purpose of ensuring, in an institutional manner, an authentically Christian presence in the world of higher education. Its inspiration comes not only from individuals but from "the university community as such."<sup>5</sup> It is precisely as an institution and not merely as a group of like-minded individuals that a college has "a distinctive ethos, a conscience which stands for something even when it is betrayed by individuals in the institution."<sup>6</sup> This institutional commitment is

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<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Francis George, "Catholic Higher Education and Ecclesial Communion," *Origins*, 28:35 (18 February 1999), 611; cf. Donald Wuerl, "The Institutional Identity of a Catholic University," *Origins*, 29:15 (23 September 1999), 234.

located within the communion of the Church, both in its local and universal dimensions.<sup>7</sup>

Catholic colleges and universities are publicly recognizable institutions whose activities of teaching, scholarship and service “are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church.”<sup>8</sup> David O’Connell, President of the Catholic University in Washington, recently remarked that Catholic universities ought to realize that “they aren’t independent contractors, they are part of the Church.”<sup>9</sup> For the ecclesial community, the university constitutes “a privileged field for her work of evangelization and her presence in the cultural sphere.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, General Norms, article 5 §1; cf. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Application of “Ex corde Ecclesiae” for the United States* (Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000), Part One: Theological and Pastoral Principles, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 49: “By its very nature, each Catholic university makes an important contribution to the Church’s work of evangelization. . . . Moreover, all the basic academic activities of a Catholic university are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church . . . Precisely because it is more and more conscious of its salvific mission in this world, the Church wants to have these centers closely connected with it; it wants to have them present and operative in spreading the authentic message of Christ.” Cf. John Paul II: *Ecclesia in Africa*, 103; *Ecclesia in America*, 71; *Ecclesia in Asia*, 37; *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 33; *Ecclesia in Europa*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Jacqueline L. Salmon and Michelle Boorstein, “Catholic College Leaders Expect Pope to Deliver Stern Message,” *Washington Post* (14 March 2008), A1.

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture (15 January 1988), 5: *Insegnamenti*, 11/1 (1988), 102-103.

It is this institutional relationship with the concrete Church that is the lifeblood and sure guarantee of their Catholicity. “There is no Catholic identity apart from affiliation with the Church.”<sup>11</sup>

### ***Role of the Bishop***

That affiliation entails a particular bond with the local bishop.<sup>12</sup> A sign of a college embracing its responsibility to the Church is its willingness to serve the local diocese, to which it has an essential relationship. Through its teaching and research a Catholic college helps “the Church respond to the problems and needs of this age.”<sup>13</sup> In order to offer this assistance, the institution must pay attention not only to questions of ecclesial interest – such as adult faith formation, the preparation of teachers, health care and pastoral workers – but also to those that might be neglected or marginalized elsewhere. These means that its curriculum and research agenda will include, again to cite *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, “a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for

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<sup>11</sup> John C. Cavadini, “Open Letter to the University Community” (4 April 2006), 1: [www.ndscmobserver.com/home/index](http://www.ndscmobserver.com/home/index) etc.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ad Limina* Address to the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Regions of Chicago, Indianapolis and Milwaukee (30 May 1998), 6: *Origins*, 28: 5 (18 June 1998), 77: “The Catholic identity of a university necessarily includes the university’s relationship to the local Church and its bishop.”

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 31.

peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level.”<sup>14</sup>

In much of the discussion both before and after the publication of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, many commentators suggested that the institutional autonomy of Catholic universities, except perhaps those erected by the Holy See, required that the pope and the bishops sit on the sidelines of the academy. The critics wanted to divorce the university's Catholic identity from any juridical bond with the visible Church.

But John Paul proposed the opposite view. He insisted, for example, that the local bishop is not an “external agent” but a participant in the university's life,<sup>15</sup> as he is in all Catholic institutions under his pastoral care, including those sponsored by a Religious Institute. Moreover, the designation “Catholic” cannot be used unless authorized, explicitly or implicitly, by episcopal or papal authority.

Bishops, for their part, have a particular responsibility to promote Catholic colleges and universities, and especially to foster

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<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Academic Community at Xavier University, New Orleans (12 September 1987): *Origins*, 17:15 (1 October 1987), 269.

the preservation and strengthening of their Catholic mission.<sup>16</sup> While occasional cases might be cited to the contrary, bishops around the world neither want to, nor can they, assume control of the Catholic universities over which they exercise episcopal oversight. On the other hand, to help universities fortify and “own” their Catholic institutional identity has been their principal concern since the promulgation of the apostolic constitution and their own *Application* in 2001.

### ***Fidelity to the Magisterium***

Besides the commitment to teaching, research and service common to every university, a Catholic one brings to these tasks, we read in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, “the inspiration and light of the Christian message.”<sup>17</sup> It has Jesus Christ and his Gospel as its center. Consequently, it carries out its primary activities in communion with the whole Church and hence, with the teaching of the Successor of Peter and the college of bishops. As Benedict XVI has affirmed, “it can never be stressed enough that faithfulness to the *depositum fidei* as presented by the Church’s Magisterium is the premise *par excellence* for serious research and

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 14.

teaching.”<sup>18</sup> Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles should therefore appropriately inform *all* university activities.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Interlocutor with Secular Culture***

Distinctive, too, for a Catholic college is its responsibility to ensure that the role of faith in public discourse is attended to in the wider academy and society at large. In ways which require creativity, courage and prudence, Catholic colleges like St. Mary’s and the others in the Bay Area are called to see to it that a conversation between the Gospel and culture is taken up between them and their public counterparts. While the task is daunting, Catholic institutions of higher learning, regardless of size and available resources, are to “be at the forefront of the Church’s dialogue with culture,”<sup>20</sup> where its future and that of the world are being played out.

## **2. Convictions about the Truth**

To this dialogue between faith and culture, the Catholic college brings a particular perspective. Our tradition is convinced,

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<sup>18</sup> Benedict XVI, *Ad limina* Address to German Bishops (10 November 2006): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 48 (29 November 2006), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 14; Congregation for Catholic Education, Pontifical Council for the Laity and Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1994), II:2, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, Discourse to the Cardinals (9 November 1979), 6: *Insegnamenti*, 2/2 (1979), 1096; cited in John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 3.

wrote Pope Benedict in the address he was intending to give at the University of Rome, *La Sapienza*, this past January, that “the human being wants to know what everything around him is. He wants truth. In this perspective, one can see Socratic questioning as the impulse that gave birth to the western university.”<sup>21</sup>

### ***Challenge to Seeking the Truth***

According to the Holy Father, among the major challenges to the Church of the twenty-first century and one which presents “a particularly insidious obstacle in the task of educating” is the massive presence of relativism in society and in the halls of higher learning. All too often relativism is the academic’s creed. Indeed, relativism has become a sort of dogma, and “it is considered dangerous and ‘authoritarian’ to speak of truth.”<sup>22</sup> This “dictatorship of relativism,”<sup>23</sup> as expressed by Benedict XVI, manifests society’s profound crisis of truth.

Whereas for centuries the pursuit of truth was extolled as the goal of all education, we can no longer take such a quest for granted. Long gone are the days when public institutions of higher

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<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, Address Prepared for the University of Rome, *La Sapienza* (17 January 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Convention of the Diocese of Rome (7 June 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Homily at Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice* (18 April 2005): *Origins*, 35:45 (28 April 2005), 720.

learning take seriously what is carved over the entrances of so many campus buildings: “You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). In fact, seeking truth is often considered a hopelessly impossible, even naive, undertaking. The prevailing cultural climate makes people suspicious, if not hostile, to any claim to know the truth. Today we are confronted by “the widespread conviction that the possibility of attaining truth is an illusion of traditional metaphysics.”<sup>24</sup> In all but the scientific realm there reigns a cultural and moral relativism that recognizes nothing as definitive.

Catholic institutions have the mission of meeting such relativism head-on by insisting on the pursuit of truth as their noblest purpose. Their intellectual life is grounded in the conviction that truth can be pursued and, to a limited but real extent, attained by the human mind and communicated to others. Catholic universities are called to remain faithful to this conviction about truth on which all institutions of higher learning were originally founded.<sup>25</sup> They are to show a confidence in reason that

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<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, Message to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (5 May 2000), 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 21 (24 May 2000), 9.

<sup>25</sup> According to Benedict XVI, “[u]niversity institutions have always been distinguished by love of wisdom and the quest for truth, as the true purpose of universities” (Address to the Participants of a Seminar on European Higher Education [1 April 2006]: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 17 [26 April 2006], 5).

is integral to the Catholic intellectual tradition, a confidence seriously undermined “in the face of widespread and doctrinaire doubt about our ability to answer the fundamental questions: Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?”<sup>26</sup> When the question of truth is no longer even raised, Bernard Lonergan remarked on the need to see to “the reestablishment of truth as a meaningful category,” because it “is also a liberation of intelligence and reason.”<sup>27</sup>

Consecration without reserve to service of the truth is the responsibility of every Catholic college, which “is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God.”<sup>28</sup> Its vocation, therefore, is to be open to the truth in every field – to truth wherever it may be found in the material or spiritual world – and to see everything in relation to the supreme Truth, who is God. A Catholic university witnesses to the cultures of our day to the

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<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *Ad Limina* Address to a Group of American Bishops (24 October 1998), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 10 (Toronto, 1993), 65.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 4.

necessity – essential for the future of man and his dignity – of cultivating truth without exclusion.”<sup>29</sup>

Teaching and research, then, are to take “the truth as their constant point of reference – their pole star. . . . This is the heart and soul of the university, because it is the source of life for human reason.”<sup>30</sup> If this search for truth is abandoned, then a Catholic university’s mission – indeed, that of any university – will inevitably flounder.

### **3. Harmony between Faith and Reason**

A third distinctive mark of Catholic higher education is its affirmation of the harmony between faith and reason. In addressing the University community at Leuven in 1985, Pope John Paul II clearly affirmed the importance of this harmony to our intellectual tradition:

The whole living tradition of the Church teaches us this: faith seeks understanding, and understanding seeks faith. Both the need to understand and the need to believe are deeply rooted in man’s heart. It is for this reason that the Church herself was the point of

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<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, Address to the University Community of New Louvain (21 May 1985), 4: *Insegnamenti*, 8/1 (1985), 1600.

<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Third International Meeting of Catholic Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning (25 April 1989), 4: *Insegnamenti*, 12/1 (1989), 939.

departure for the creation of universities, in the deep conviction that the effort to seek the truth, which is at the heart of the human spirit, far from being hindered by the reception of the truth in its fullness is on the contrary enormously stimulated by it.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Reasonable Discourse***

Early Christians did not conceive their faith in a positivistic manner, nor as a way of escape from unfulfilled desire. They opened the door to reason. They understood faith “as dispelling the mist of mythological religion in order to make way for the discovery of the God who is creative Reason, God who is Reason-Love.” Reasoned inquiry concerning God and the true nature and meaning of the human being did not strike them as showing a lack of religious sentiment: “rather, it was an essential part of their way of being religious. Hence they did not need to abandon or set aside Socratic inquiry, but they could, indeed were bound to accept it, and recognize reason’s laborious search to attain knowledge of the whole truth as part of their own identity. In this way, within the context of the Christian faith, in the Christian world, the university could come into being – indeed it was bound to do so.”<sup>32</sup> The

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<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, Address to the University Community of Leuven (20 May 1985), 2: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition (22 July 1985), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Benedict XVI, Address Prepared for the University of Rome, *La Sapienza* (17 January 2008).

university as a place of reasonable discourse has its roots in a Catholic understanding of the relationship between faith and reason.

As heir to an age-old tradition, the Church-related institution of higher learning is a beacon of trust in the power of reason. In serving the truth, it bears public witness “to the dignity of human reason, to its requirements and its capacity for seeking out and knowing reality, thereby overcoming epistemological skepticism, the ideological reductions of rationalism and the nihilistic dead ends of weak thought.”<sup>33</sup> This emphasis on reason is at the forefront of Benedict XVI’s view that the university is an institution entrusted with the “apostolate of intellectual charity.”<sup>34</sup>

On more than one occasion the Holy Father has noted the tendency to consider as true only what can be experienced. This limits human reason and produces a terrible schizophrenia, which has led to the coexistence of rationalism with materialism, hyper-technology and unbridled instinct. The Pope then says that “It is urgent, therefore, to rediscover anew human rationality open to the

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<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, Message to the 6<sup>th</sup> National Meeting of Italian Catholic University Professors (4 October 2001), 5: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 42 (17 October 2001), 4.

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, *Ad Limina* Address to the Bishops of Ontario (8 September 2006): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition (27 September 2006), 5.

light of the divine *Logos* and his perfect revelation which is Jesus Christ, Son of God made man.”<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Benedict thinks that the Catholic university should be “a vast laboratory where, in accordance with the different disciplines, ever new areas of research are developed in a stimulating confrontation between faith and reason that aims to recover the harmonious synthesis achieved by Thomas Aquinas and other great Christian thinkers.”<sup>36</sup> While this could be done outside Catholic institutions, there is little basis to think that it is. That’s why you have the obligation of ensuring that reason open to faith and faith open to reason maintain their proper place as central to academic life. Only in this way will Catholic colleges be able to build the bridges of dialogue with contemporary culture that is so vital to society’s well-being.

### ***Harmony***

Consequently, every institution in our tradition should pay particular attention to the profound harmony between “the two

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<sup>35</sup> Benedict XVI, Angelus (28 January 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, Address at the Inauguration of the Academic Year at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (25 November 2005): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 49 (7 December 2005), 7.

wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.”<sup>37</sup> Faith and reason are engaged in a dialectic:

[T]he Catholic tradition has always valued a close nexus between the life of reason and the life of faith. The same tradition reacts as negatively to those who cling to faith at the expense of reason as it does to those who rigidly insist that autonomous reason has sufficient power to explain everything about the nature and destiny of individuals and humanity in general. . . . To upset the balance between our gift of reason and our response to faith can bring woeful consequences.<sup>38</sup>

The distinctive feature of the Catholic intellectual tradition is this conviction: knowledge through reason and knowledge through faith are both valid and ultimately compatible, even if not identical. In a Catholic institution, thinking critically and believing devoutly are mutually supportive.

#### **4. Integration of Knowledge**

Assuring the harmony between faith and reason as vital to the university’s vocation also needs to be accompanied by its striving to integrate the various branches of knowledge. This, too, is a

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<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Cunningham, “Faith and Reason: A Vision of the Catholic Intellectual Life,” *Notre Dame Magazine* (Spring 2000), 30.

distinctive characteristic of the Catholic college. It confronts the modern academy's tendency to compartmentalize information and its indifference to synthesis.<sup>39</sup> As you well know, there is a real danger that faculty and students will close themselves within narrow and specialized spheres of knowledge, thereby limiting the horizon of study to only a fragment of reality. In the words of John Paul II, "we now face the possibility that the university will be reduced to a complex group of academic areas which produce only factual results which are, in the end, inarticulate and unrelated."<sup>40</sup>

Since the rise of the German research university in the nineteenth century, with its emphasis on the importance of the "specialized professor,"<sup>41</sup> the number of academic disciplines studied has increased enormously. All contemporary colleges and universities are organized into faculties, schools, departments, institutes and other units devoted to a particular discipline or sub-discipline. This arrangement encourages a high degree of

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, Pontifical Council for the Laity, and Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1994), I:2, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Third International Meeting of Catholic Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning (25 April 1989) 4: *Insegnamenti*, 12/1 (1989), 939.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Derek Bok, *Beyond the Ivory Tower: Social Responsibilities of the Modern University* (Cambridge, 1982), 61.

specialization which, in turn, controls the reward system for faculty and the curriculum for students. In many instances, the faculty is now made up of specialists whose professional success and standing depend largely on their mastery of a sub-discipline in which they are recognized as experts. Consequently, the curriculum has been balkanized into specialties without any order or sense of coherence.

*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* calls Catholic institutions of higher learning to offer an alternative to this fragmentation. They can propose the thrilling task of integrating knowledge, an ever more difficult endeavor, given contemporary skepticism about the possibility of such an undertaking coupled with the explosion of information now so readily available. To the growing popularity of competency-based curricula in specialized areas, institutions such as your own can respond by proposing a curriculum built on the principle that knowledge can be ordered and integrated.

Alasdair McIntyre has commented on the deplorable state of core curricula and lays bare the challenge before us:

whatever pattern of courses is taken by an individual, it is unlikely to be more than a collection of bits and pieces, a specialist's grasp of this, a semi-specialist's partial understanding of that, an introductory survey of something else. The question of how these bits and

pieces might be related to one another, of whether they are or are not parts that contribute to some whole, of what, if anything, it all adds up to, not merely goes unanswered, it almost always goes unasked. And how indeed could it be otherwise when every course, even when introductory, is a course in a specialized discipline taught by a teacher who may be vastly ignorant of everything outside her or his own discipline. Each part of the curriculum is someone's responsibility, but no one has a responsibility for making the connections between the parts.<sup>42</sup>

At all costs, it is necessary that our Catholic universities “not to lose sight of the *raison d’Atre* of the university as a center for integrating knowledge, a center which proposes the search not for the ‘narrow truth,’ but for the ‘whole truth’ of which Newman spoke, with an ‘accurate vision and comprehension of all things’.”<sup>43</sup>

In this search for integration the Catholic university has a distinctive and irreplaceable role to play. It can propose a synthesis more freely than can secular ones because it has

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<sup>42</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, “The End of Education,” *Commonweal*, 133:18 (20 October 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “The Jesuit University in the Light of the Ignatian Charism,” *Educatio*, 6 (November 2001), 12.

philosophers and theologians on its faculty. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* affirms that the specific contributions of philosophy and theology help other scholars “to determine the relative place and meaning of each of the various disciplines within the context of a vision of the human person and the world that is enlightened by the Gospel, and therefore by a faith in Christ, the *Logos*, as the center of creation and of human history.”<sup>44</sup> Theologians, in particular, assist their colleagues in other disciplines to reflect on the effects of their discoveries on individuals and society.

Theology, then, belongs to the university’s curriculum<sup>45</sup> because it offers a viewpoint which can prevent the shortsightedness that inevitably creeps into scholarly discourse when it neglects the insights provided by divine revelation. With its philosophers and theologians, a Catholic college bears the responsibility of enriching the academy by insisting that religion cannot be dismissed from public discourse as a matter of emotion

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<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 19; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10: “In Catholic universities where there is no faculty of sacred theology there should be established an institute or chair of sacred theology in which there should be lectures suited to lay students.”

without any cognitive content.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, these disciplines also convey to students the impression that the world is ordered.

## **5. Catholic Social Teaching in the University**

For many years now, Catholic colleges have been fostering the knowledge and practice of social doctrine as integral to their distinctive contribution to American higher education. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* requires that students combine their academic and professional education “with formation in . . . the social teachings of the Church.”<sup>47</sup> In this way, an institution can both provide for the human development of students and faculty and, at the same time, “contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works.”<sup>48</sup>

As an institution dedicated to developing the intellect, a Catholic college ought to *teach* social doctrine. What a course of study requires in a disciplined and systematic way – and not merely recommends – in the study of the Church’s social teaching is one measure of how seriously the academic community takes its commitment to the whole sweep of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. James R. Stoner, Jr., Stanley Hauerwas, Paul J. Griffiths and David B. Hart, “Theology as Knowledge: A Symposium,” *First Things*, 163 (May 2006), 21-27.

<sup>47</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, General Norms, article 4 §4.

<sup>48</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 34.

It is especially important that the teaching of a moral vision, enlightened by Catholic social doctrine, not be limited merely to interested faculty or select departments. Rather, such teaching should take place in every course of study, including at the graduate level.<sup>49</sup> In our Catholic tradition, learning is aimed at awakening in all students “a genuine passion for justice and a desire to be moral and responsible citizens of the world.”<sup>50</sup> To deprive students of a solid formation in social doctrine would be to stunt their human and spiritual growth and call into question the university’s Catholic identity.

Besides teaching, faculty scholarship in Catholic colleges is called to foster creative ways for the Church’s social teaching to have a bearing on all academic disciplines. Researchers should strive “to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions.”<sup>51</sup> Nor can we forget, as *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* reminds

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. James Heft, “Catholic Education and Social Justice,” *Catholic Education*, 10 (September 2006), 18-19: “To provide just a few examples, political science courses that include the idea of the common good; law courses that distinguish the legal and the moral and include courses on jurisprudence; business schools that have courses on corporate ethics as well as the social and moral consequences of globalization; . . . and science courses that place their findings in the larger context of the historical evolution of science, awareness of its sources of research funding and the populations that funding neglects.”

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Joseph M. McShane, “The Heart of the Matter: The Core and the Task of Core Revision,” *Conversations*, 15 (Spring 1999), 22-23.

<sup>51</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 32.

us: “if need be, a Catholic university must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society.”<sup>52</sup>

Consequently, in developing, funding and rewarding its research programs, a Catholic university ought to be fully aware of its “growing responsibility for verifying what is authentically moral and human”<sup>53</sup> in its scholarly activities. When an institution takes the Church’s social doctrine seriously into account in concrete ways such as ensuring that its fostering is taken into account in its promotion and tenure decisions, it ratifies its Catholic identity, confirming its distinctive mission.

Finally, the Catholic university’s traditional concern for the underprivileged and vulnerable members of society, “especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it,”<sup>54</sup> is an essential dimension of its living the Church’s social doctrine in practice.

## **6. Christian Humanism**

Now I would like to identify a sixth – and final – distinctive mark of a Catholic college: its capacity to confront the increasingly

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<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Third International Meeting of Catholic Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning (25 April 1989), 8: *Insegnamenti*, 12/1, 943.

<sup>54</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 34.

widespread view that education is a market commodity in which faculty and students are primarily producers and consumers of services. Higher education, in particular, is increasingly valued only for its contribution to economic prosperity. There has been a shift from concern for wisdom to a preoccupation with information, and from the study of the humanities and liberal arts to an emphasis on technical and professional training. Such an understanding of higher learning, observed John Paul II, “tends to reduce the human person to a market variable, to a piece of merchandise.”<sup>55</sup>

In the United States, many – if not most – tertiary-level institutions have abandoned the goal of forming the whole person as part of their mission. Instead, they accept the view that education should be seen principally as an investment in “human capital” or “human resources.” A market-dominated approach to learning not only emphasizes job training but also replaces the dispassionate search for truth with the cult of competency. At the same time, commercial interests unduly intrude on the university’s research priorities. Many educational institutions are being tempted to sponsor certain kinds of activities solely because of

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<sup>55</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Sixth Public Session of the Pontifical Academies of Theology and of St. Thomas Aquinas (8 November 2001), 3: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 50 (12 December 2001), 8.

their economic benefits, disregarding their moral implications or contribution to the common good.

The good news is that Catholic colleges have the resources to resist this trend. Building on the intellectual, moral and artistic tradition, authentically Catholic colleges are in the position to dedicate themselves to “creating a new authentic and integral humanism,”<sup>56</sup> if they choose to do so. Such a Christian humanism, which has been nourished in Catholic institutions for centuries, “offers an effective answer to the thirst for values and for a truly human life which burns in the soul of every person concerned about his destiny.”<sup>57</sup> It acknowledges that men and women are created in God’s image and strives to help them live in a way consistent with that dignity.<sup>58</sup> Rooted in love for the truth, especially the truth about the human person, Christian humanism entails an openness to the transcendent.

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<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, Homily for the Jubilee of University Professors (10 September 2000), 4: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 37 (13 September 2000), 6.

<sup>57</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academies (3 November 1997), n. 3: *Insegnamenti*, 20/2 (1997), 735; cf. John Paul’s Message to the Participants in the International Thomistic Congress on “Christian Humanism in the Third Millennium” (20 September 2003), 6: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 42 (15 October 2003), 6: “Christian humanism, as St. Thomas demonstrated, has an ability to preserve the meaning of man and his dignity. This is the exalting task entrusted to his disciples today!”

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 30.

During the Jubilee Year, John Paul II explained to a group of professors his understanding of a new twenty-first century Christian humanism that universities should foster:

The humanism which we desire advocates a vision of society centered on the human person and his inalienable rights, on the values of justice and peace, on a correct relationship between individuals, society and the State, on the logic of solidarity and subsidiarity. It is a humanism capable of giving a soul to economic progress itself, so that it may be directed to “the promotion of each individual and of the whole person” (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, 14; and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 30).<sup>59</sup>

By enshrining integral humanism as a value in their teaching and research, in their curriculum and scholarship, a Catholic college can fulfill its mission of forming students and scholars who can harness for the common good the tremendous potential now available because of scientific and technological progress. When a college’s educational vision is steeped in the Catholic intellectual tradition of integral Christian humanism, it can resist the inroads of the market in higher education and can offer an open space for

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<sup>59</sup> John Paul II, Address to University Professors (9 September 2000), 6: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 37 (13 September 2000), 2.

critical thought and a research agenda based on humanity's authentic needs.

### ***Conclusion***

As your conversation moves forward in the coming years, I would encourage you to return time and again to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and some of the great discourses on university education proposed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI. They are rich and challenging sources of guidance. Moreover, they bring to the table the wealth of the Holy See's long experience in the area of higher education and the distinctive perspectives of a worldwide community. Both can prevent us from becoming too narrow, too inward looking and too – dare I say it? – provincial. The creative work of the John F. Henning Institute and Bishop John S. Cummins Institute for Catholic Thought, Culture and Action is to be commended for its contribution to the renewal of Catholic higher education now underway, if not yet fully realized, in this country.

Thank you for your very kind attention this afternoon.

+J. Michael Miller, CSB

Coadjutor Archbishop of Vancouver