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Repository Citation

Kelley, J. T. (2010). Dynamic Diversity in a Catholic Augustinian College. *Journal of Catholic Higher Education*, 26(3), 19-37.

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**Dynamic Diversity in a Pluralistic
Catholic and Augustinian College**

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978-837-5115

Thagaste Symposium

Merrimack College

September 27, 2006

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Dynamic Diversity in a Pluralistic Catholic and Augustinian College

Abstract: Shows how Merrimack's Catholic heritage and Augustinian tradition provide intellectual and spiritual resources for the college's educational responsibility to prepare students for virtuous citizenship in a religiously and ethnically pluralistic society. Uses five major Vatican documents and several basic Augustinian ideas to elaborate principles useful for the guidance of Merrimack's academic community and the direction of its campus culture. Shows Merrimack's "Statement of Augustinian Values for Higher Education" as an expression of its distinctive mission in American higher education.

Introduction

There are about 3,200 colleges and universities in the United States that grant post-secondary degrees, from the associate to the doctorate.¹ About half of these 3,200 are public or state institutions funded by taxpayer dollars. The rest are private, independent institutions. These private schools include liberal arts colleges, major research universities, comprehensive universities, historically black colleges and universities, single-sex institutions, as well as schools of law, engineering, art, business and other professions.²

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, Digest for Education Statistics, 2004, Chapter 3 Postsecondary Education, <<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest>> (March 7, 2006). There are also another 800 or so postsecondary schools that offer specialized training in art, technology, engineering, design and health fields.

² National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), <www.naicu.edu> (March 8, 2006). These 1600 private colleges and universities enroll about 3.1 million or 20% of America's 16.5 million students, and grant 30% of all post-secondary degrees.

About one thousand of these 1,600 private schools are faith-related, the vast majority being Christian.³ Each of these religiously affiliated schools by its founding and mission is an institutional expression of the free exercise of religion.⁴ Americans have wedded the second phrase in the First Amendment—the free exercise of religion—to their creative penchant to form private associations, a tendency noted by Alexis de Tocqueville in the early 1800’s.⁵ The constitutional prohibition against a state sponsored religion, the protected free exercise of religion, and American social initiative and ingenuity have all helped to produce this impressive collection of religiously affiliated colleges and universities unique in the world.

There is great variety in the nature of the religious affiliation of these American colleges and universities. The affiliation of most Christian evangelical and fundamentalist colleges with their church or faith community is typically one of close cooperation and doctrinal congruity. In such cases the clear purpose of the college can be expressed in such phrases as “to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and... to transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth”.⁶ Typically

³ In the United States there are several accredited Jewish colleges and universities, and many Jewish theological schools or seminaries; three accredited Buddhist universities; and, no major accredited Islamic or Hindu universities or colleges.

⁴ “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” *First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*, <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/>> (March 3, 2006).

⁵ “Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society.” Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume II, Section II, Chapter V*, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/toc_indx.html> (March 15, 2006).

⁶ Council for Christian Colleges and Universities’ mission, <www.cccu.org> (March 17, 2006).

in such schools students, faculty and staff are expected to pledge and often to sign statements of faith and morals.

On the other hand many private colleges have only a nominal relationship with the original founding church. In such cases the contemporary religious affiliation is an historical footnote in the course catalog. Zealous founders stare down from their portraits on the walls of the administration building at the latest generation of students. However the fervent faith of these founding fathers or mothers has little or no real influence on the education of students today. Remnants of the institution's original religious affiliation may be found in references to a place for ethics in the curriculum and character development in student life. Explicit faith commitment, however, is usually not mentioned, even though such schools owe their existence to a faith tradition that exercised its right under the Constitution to establish an educational institution.⁷

Catholic Colleges and Universities in the United States

Catholic Colleges and Universities number just over two hundred and comprise the largest individual subset of religiously affiliated schools in the United States.⁸ Post-secondary Catholic institutions range from nationally and internationally recognized universities such as Georgetown, Notre Dame and Villanova, to small liberal arts colleges

⁷ One can still find keystones over arched entrances to Harvard Yard that proclaim "Pro Christo et Ecclesia"—for Christ and the Church: reminders of Harvard's founding by early New England Pilgrims, but hardly part of the university's current mission statement or consciousness. Growing secularism, the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and the reductionism of the scientific method engendered an anti-religious ethos in the academy that has, until recently, made religious or theological dialogue suspect in American higher education. See George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield (eds.), *The Secularization of the Academy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); James Samuel Preuss, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); David Claerbaet, *Faith and Learning: A Bold New Look at Religion in Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2004). I am grateful to the Rev. David Power, OMI, for bringing the last two works to my attention during the 2006 Oxford Round Table.

⁸ Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), <www.accunet.org> (March 19, 2006). ACCU has about 220 members, which includes all but a few of American Catholic colleges and universities. ACCU is affiliated with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

known only in their region. It is by far the largest informal “system” of Catholic colleges and universities in the world, an archipelago of schools that chart the westward movement of Catholic immigrants and their pastors and religious orders across the American continent.⁹

In August of 1990, with the publication of his important reflection on Catholic higher education, entitled *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (From the Heart of the Church), Pope John Paul II called Catholic colleges and universities around the world to assert their unique and distinctive educational missions. The Pope and many American bishops and leaders in American Catholic higher education had grown concerned that Catholic schools not repeat the history of many originally Protestant institutions and lose their affiliation with the church. It was also the Pope’s intent to highlight the distinctive ethos of Catholic higher education, to differentiate it among Christian approaches, and to distinguish it from secular or state institutions. In the United States this had led to a significant, on-going and fruitful conversation both within and across Catholic campuses about what it means to be a Catholic college or university in the twenty-first century.¹⁰ This paper is one example of that kind of conversation.

The “Religion” Question in American Higher Education

Given the wisdom of the First Amendment, not only regarding the freedom of religion but also the freedoms of speech, of the press, of assembly and of redress of grievances, it is important that religiously affiliated colleges of any type address the

⁹ Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Alice Gallen, OSU, *Independence and New Partnership in Catholic Higher Education* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); David R. Contosta, *Villanova University 1842-1992: American, Catholic, Augustinian* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ John P. Langan, S.J., ed., *Catholic Universities in Church and Society: A Dialogue on *Ex Corde Ecclesiae** (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1993).

crucial question that is prompted by the no establishment clause in the Constitution. All American colleges and universities in the United States—Catholic, Protestant and Jewish—that want to retain or deepen the religious-related aspect of their educational mission need to be clear about their role in the life of the republic. How does a religiously affiliated school, with its particular mission and purpose, prepare students for citizenship in a society that cherishes the five freedoms of the First Amendment and also proscribes an established religion? Put more explicitly, how can a college or university founded on the precepts and principles of one, specific religion educate young people for citizenship in a diverse, secular society that recognizes the supremacy of no religion?

This question grows in importance as religious demographics in the United States continue to shift. The number of Americans who identified themselves as Christian declined from 86% in 1990 to 77% in 2001.¹¹ In the same time period the number of American adults who do not subscribe to any religious identification grew from 8% of the total population to 14%.¹²

Another fact of importance for religiously affiliated schools is that many world events today seem driven at least as much by religious fervor as by economic and social factors. The so-called clash of cultures is defined, for better or for worse, along religious lines: a billion Muslims and a billion Christians, for example, struggling—or not—to understand, forgive and tolerate each other. How do colleges and universities that stand in a Christian tradition—Catholic or Protestant—manage these delicate inter-relationships between faith and reason, church and state, doctrine and academic freedom, individual aspiration and the common good?

¹¹ The Graduate Center, City University of New York, “American Religious Identification Survey,” <http://gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris/key_findings.htm> (August 19, 2006).

¹² The Graduate Center.

A Catholic college or university can enrich and distinguish its educational mission by drawing from Catholic theological tradition and institutional wisdom. This tradition and wisdom is expressed in many documents and statements of the Church over the centuries.¹³ This paper will review five recent official documents of the Catholic Church that have special relevance for Catholic higher education. A college's or university's affiliation with the Catholic Church should not be only *de jure* but *de facto*. To call itself Catholic a college or university needs not only a founding charter recognized by the local bishop or by the Vatican. It needs to reflect in its mission statement as well as in its curriculum and campus culture the values and virtues that the Church treasures in its tradition.¹⁴

As a Catholic college Merrimack draws from the Church's collective reflections on higher education and on the intersection of faith and culture. In its Augustinian tradition Merrimack has a further resource to broaden its academic community and deepen its campus culture. In addition to a review of Catholic teachings, this paper will also explore particular dimensions of Augustinian thought that enrich Merrimack's mission. Both the Catholic and the Augustinian dimensions of Merrimack's mission enrich the citizenry of America and of other nations by preparing graduates to advance the social foundations of democracy. The distinctive values and virtues of a Catholic and Augustinian education prepare students to be valued and virtuous citizens whose love and labors can help to transform society in light of Christian values of love and justice.

¹³ Alice Gallen, OSU, ed., *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents 1967-1990* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). This collection of more recent church documents on higher education is an important overview of the subject.

¹⁴ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Part II, General Norms, Articles 1, 2, 3, <<http://www.cin.org/jp2/excorde.html>> (March 20, 2006).

Recent Catholic Teachings that Enrich Catholic Colleges and Universities

The Vatican has spoken and written often about Catholic colleges and universities, especially in recent decades.¹⁵ Among the official pronouncements of the Church there are five seminal documents that provide American Catholic colleges and universities with a rich source of reflection for their educational missions. The first three of these documents come from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965): The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*—Joy and Hope); The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*—In Our Time); and, the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*—Of Human Dignity). The other two are more recent: Pope John Paul II's On Catholic Universities (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*—From the Heart of the Church) issued in 1990; and, Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical God Is Love (*Deus Caritas Est*) issued in December of 2005.¹⁶

Each of these five documents provides the benefit of deep and expansive theological reflection. They also provide the foundations for a practical theology which American Catholic colleges and universities might employ to deepen their understanding

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II: *Sapientia Christiana*, April 1979; Discourse to the *Institut Catholique de Paris*, June 1980; Discourse to the University of Coimbra, May 1982; Address to Intellectuals, to Students and to University Personnel at Medellin, Colombia, July 1986; Address to Leaders of Catholic Higher Education, September 1987; Allocution to the International Congress on Catholic Universities, April 1989. Pope Paul VI: Discourse to the Delegates of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, November 1972; Address to Presidents and Rectors of the Universities of the Society of Jesus, August 1975. Papal documents, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/index.htm> (March 20, 2006). It is also of historical interest to note that John Paul II begins *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* with a footnoted reference to a letter from Pope Alexander IV to the University of Paris, April 1255—a charming example of the Vatican's deep sense of tradition.

¹⁶ An Apostolic Constitution such as *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is any important document, so called, issued by the Pope, or by a Church Council with the Pope's approval. The next highest category, after an Apostolic Constitution, is an Encyclical or official letter, such as *Deus Caritas Est*, to be circulated around the world. The official Latin title of each of the five documents is provided. Throughout this article the Latin titles will be used because of their brevity and telescoped theological significance. The Latin titles of Vatican documents provide a key to a main theological theme of the work.

of the particular role they play in American higher education.¹⁷ These Vatican documents also outline how Catholic colleges and universities prepare their students to be valued and valuable citizens in a social democracy.

Many of the ideas that will be highlighted in this article as specific to one of these documents can be found throughout the other documents as well. Vatican statements and pronouncements reflect Catholic theological tradition by documenting how ideas build upon each other from one generation to the next, from one papacy to the next, from one council to the next. Each document intersects with the others in many ways and each is a complex statement in the on-going theological and pastoral dialogue of the church. Documents and pronouncements include ample references to previous Church teaching and seem to rejoice in overlap and repetition. There is value, however, in lifting main themes from each of these five documents in order to construct a framework within which to understand the particular and distinctive role of American Catholic colleges and universities.

There is unfortunately no space to reflect on the rich and instructive political history and context of each document. Suffice it to say that contrary to popular notions, Vatican documents, especially those from a council like Vatican II, are the products of discussion, debate, compromise, and—in the perspective of faith—of the spirit of God moving amidst the often confusing and contentious political realities that suffuse even the noblest of human conversations.

Each of these five documents will now be explored for its contributions to the educational mission of Catholic colleges and universities.

¹⁷ The field of practical theology attempts to analyze contemporary society in order to: identify current questions, issues, and needs; suggest various practices that might embody the Church's strategic responses; and, interpret the contexts which shape those potential practices.

The Church in the Modern World

(Gaudium et Spes—Joy and Hope)

Of the five Vatican documents proposed for contemporary reflections by American Catholic colleges and universities this is the most important. The other four, drawing both inspiration and content from this foundational text, more or less elaborate various aspects of it. *Gaudium et Spes* serves as a kind of *magna carta* for the modern Catholic college or university.¹⁸

Gaudium et Spes was promulgated on December 7, 1965. It emerged as the last and in many ways the culminating work of the Second Vatican II. While earlier documents of the Council focus on the inner life of the Church and doctrine, *Gaudium et Spes* expresses the Church's reflection on its relationship with the contemporary world.¹⁹ The document proclaims that the proper role of the Church is one of engagement with the world in its diversity of cultures, of peoples, and of political systems. The Church should "focus its attention ... on the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; that world which is the theater of human history, and the heir of human energies, human tragedies and human triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as a created and sustained by its Maker's love...."²⁰

¹⁸ Pope John Paul II uses this same analogy of *magna carta* to describe his hopes for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #8. Other authors addressing the topic of Catholic higher education might select a different list of Vatican documents than the one proposed here. For example, one of the early major texts to emerge from the Second Vatican Council was *Lumen Gentium*, a long, introspective, theological reflection on the nature of the Church as the People of God and the Body of Christ. A more conservative or traditional approach to the questions raised in this paper might add *Lumen Gentium* to the list or even substitute it in place of *Gaudium et Spes*. However, *Lumen Gentium* says little about the Church's interaction with the world and relationship with the diversity of human cultures, both of which are crucial and defining questions for Catholic colleges and universities.

¹⁹ The opening words are: "The joys (*gaudium*) and hopes (*spes*), the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ (#1)."

²⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* #2. Documents of the Second Vatican Council, <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm> (March 25, 2006). Vatican II

In contrast to the defensive tone and isolationist stance of much of Vatican rhetoric and writing throughout the previous century, *Gaudium et Spes* is remarkable because of its call for open engagement with the world. It calls Catholics and all Christians to an optimistic but realistic dialogue with all peoples, with the goal of transformation of societies and cultures in light of Gospel values.²¹ The document speaks eloquently of the Church's "solidarity with, as well as its respect and love for the entire human family with which it is bound up," and of the need to work with all persons for the renewal of human society and new solutions to common problems.²²

Like the Church which founded them, the campus culture of many American Catholic colleges and universities prior to the mid-twentieth century could be described as parochial and defensive. Even though as academic institutions they engaged the wider intellectual communities of the arts and sciences, their educational missions were generally restricted to serving the Catholic male population in a country where most other private institutions of higher education refused to admit Catholics.²³ There were few non-Catholics enrolled or teaching in Catholic colleges and universities before 1950.

Gaudium et Spes calls the Church as a whole, and Catholic colleges and universities in particular, to a new kind of engagement and dialogue with the world. It is a challenge to the whole Church and, by extension, to its educational institutions to plunge

documents are also found in Walter M. Abbot, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966). Documents are comprised of numbered paragraphs for easy reference.

²¹ This document is in many ways the Catholic Church's official reflection on what Richard Niebuhr described as "the many sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization" in Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1951), 1. *Gaudium et Spes* would generally fit into Niebuhr's theological category of "Christ the Transformer of Culture" (*Christ and Culture*, pp. 190—229), while many earlier Vatican documents of the nineteenth and twentieth century would fit into his category of "Christ Above Culture" (*Christ and Culture*, pp. 116—148).

²² *Gaudium et Spes* #3.

²³ See David Contosta, *Villanova*, for charming details of such history at Villanova University during its first century.

into the critical questions and controversies of the contemporary world as full partners in on-going dialogue about civilization and its problems.²⁴ The document discusses the importance of “the various disciplines of philosophy, history and of mathematical and natural science, and... the arts” as ways of elevating “the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and to the formation of considered opinions which have universal value.”²⁵ The importance of the academic disciplines as ways of enriching and advancing human dialogue and of solving human problems is stressed throughout the entire text. Not only the liberal arts (#62), but the physical sciences (#5), and the social sciences in general (#63) and economics (#64) and political science (#73-76) in particular are advanced as ways of bringing people together in the search for truth (#59) and for solutions to persistent and troubling human problems (#5). Of particular interest to the academy is the document’s call “to harmonize the proliferation of particular branches of study with the necessity of forming a synthesis of them, and of preserving among men the faculties of contemplation and observations which lead to wisdom.”²⁶

The common ground for this continuous dialogue is the dignity of the human person. This is the foundational theme of the entire document and the specific topic of chapter one. The Christian affirmation of the dignity of each person is based on the scriptural belief that humans are created in God’s image.²⁷ Catholic colleges and universities receive this cornerstone of their educational mission from *Gaudium et Spes*. The human dignity of each and every person in the academic community is the *sine qua*

²⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* #3.

²⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* #57.

²⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* #56. See also *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #15, 16, and Genesis 1: 26-27.

²⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* #12.

non of Catholic higher education. All other dimensions of the person: the intellect (#15), conscience (#16), freedom (#17), and the goal of human life (#19)—all derive from this basic understanding of and commitment to human dignity. While members of other religions or persons of no particular religious belief may affirm human dignity for different philosophical reasons, this respect for every person can serve as the shared starting point for ecumenical, inter-faith and cross cultural discourse and debate on a Catholic campus.

In several paragraphs that are especially relevant for the academic world, the document calls for serious dialogue with those whose life experience and philosophical convictions leave them doubting God’s existence.²⁸ Christians are called to sincere and prudent dialogue with all persons, even with those whose deeply held beliefs may be profoundly different, so long as the dignity of the person, the integrity of the intellect, and the freedom of conscience are respected for and by all. Such dialogue is essential for the betterment of the world that we all share together.²⁹ Christians should not presume that they have a monopoly on God’s Spirit, but that “the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every person the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery” of Christ.³⁰

Such language sets the direction for how a Catholic college or university can develop an ethos of intellectual hospitality and an attitude of welcome for all of the diverse members of its academic community into the very center of its educational mission and purpose. *Gaudium et Spes* offers a theological model for how a Catholic college or university can be specific about its Catholic nature and yet at the same time

²⁸ *Gaudium et Spes* #19-21.

²⁹ *Gaudium et Spes* #21.

³⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* #22.

embrace faculty, students and administrators who are not Catholic, or who may be disaffected Catholics. The key is a profound respect for human dignity based on the biblical belief that we are all created in God's image.

The document then turns in chapter two to the theme of the "Community of Humankind".³¹ The foundational idea in this chapter is the importance of mutual respect for all persons, in light of the Christian commandment of love.³² This commandment applies even and especially to our relationships with those who are different from ourselves.³³ Basic human equality is an imperative that derives from the deeply held assumption of basic human dignity.³⁴

Many Catholic colleges and universities mention in their mission statements the centrality of the common good as a core value. *Gaudium et Spes* provides a helpful description of the common good. It is "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment...."³⁵ In today's complex world the common good involves the rights and duties of the whole human race. "Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family."³⁶

The document mentions certain general principles that apply to how the Church should address specific problems in the world, keeping the common good in the forefront. Among the most important of these principles are human rights (#41), the unity

³¹ *Gaudium et Spes* #23-32.

³² *Gaudium et Spes* #24; see also Romans 13:9-10; I John 4:20

³³ *Gaudium et Spes* #27-28.

³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* #29.

³⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* #26.

³⁶ *Gaudium et Spes* #26.

of the human family (#42), the responsibilities of citizenship (#75-76), and peace among the community of nations (#77-93).

One cannot overestimate the richness and importance of the theological themes and practical suggestions in *Gaudium et Spes* for how contemporary Catholic colleges and universities can understand and define their unique and distinctive place in American higher education in general. The document challenges Catholic colleges and universities to open engagement with the world in a continuous dialogue for the transformation of societies and cultures. The document stresses the importance of academic disciplines as ways of enriching and advancing that dialogue for the critical evaluation of human problems and the development of solutions. It establishes basic human dignity, equality of all persons, and the common good of the entire human family as foundational principles for Catholic higher education. In sum, in its institutions of higher learning the Church enjoys a precious opportunity to engage in on-going, structured and critical dialogue with the many cultures of the world and with the diversity of academic disciplines.

Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

(Nostra Aetate—In Our Time)

This document was also promulgated during the last session of Vatican II, in October of 1965, two months before *Gaudium et Spes*. It is a very brief statement of only a few pages, in contrast to the sixty plus pages of *Gaudium et Spes*.

However, the two documents promote the same openness to the world and both call for dialogue and mutual respect. *Nostra Aetate* focuses specifically on the Church's relationship with other religions, in particular with Hinduism, Buddhism, and in a special

way with the other two Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Islam. At most contemporary American Catholic colleges and universities one finds representatives of all the world's major religions among faculty, students and staff. This document provides a theological guide for how the Catholic and Christian members of the academic community should relate with their colleagues from different religions.

Part of the mission of the Catholic college is to promote “unity and love among men, indeed among nations,” emphasizing “what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.”³⁷ A Catholic institution of higher education is the ideal venue for realizing the document’s exhortation “that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, [Christians] recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these peoples.”³⁸

A special, heartfelt exhortation—noteworthy in that it was written over forty years ago—is made to Christians and Muslims to move beyond the quarrels and hostilities that mark their shared histories, to work for mutual understanding, and to cooperate together for social justice and human welfare in the world, as well as for peace and freedom.³⁹

The longest section of *Nostra Aetate*, however, is devoted to the Church’s relationship with members of the Jewish faith. Christians are reminded that their faith is inherited from the children of the patriarchs and Moses, and that the two religions share a “common patrimony”.⁴⁰ The Council “wants to foster and recommend that mutual

³⁷ *Nostra Aetate* #1.

³⁸ *Nostra Aetate* #2.

³⁹ *Nostra Aetate* #3.

⁴⁰ *Nostra Aetate* #4.

understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.”⁴¹

The theological foundation of inter-religious dialogue promoted in *Nostra Aetate* rests on the same major theme found in *Gaudium et Spes*, namely, the dignity of the human person. No matter a person’s religion, all of us are created in God’s image.⁴² “No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between person and person or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.”⁴³

It is in this area of inter-religious dialogue that Catholic colleges and universities have a special contribution to the wider community of American higher education. Christian or evangelical colleges and universities have mission statements that call all their members to explicit faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.⁴⁴ While they may be open to some levels of inter-religious dialogue—more typically with Jews—they may often shy away from the more radical and extensive dialogue recommended in *Nostra Aetate*, dialogue founded on the Catholic natural law insistence on the dignity of all persons.⁴⁵

At the other end of the spectrum, private, non-sectarian schools and state schools tend to reflect the wider American cultural discomfort with religious dialogue. Misinterpreting or over-interpreting the First Amendment has led to a cultural avoidance of sustained and meaningful inter-religious dialogue for fear that such conversation may

⁴¹ *Nostra Aetate* #4.

⁴² *Nostra Aetate* #5.

⁴³ *Nostra Aetate* #5.

⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, such statements typically describe the mission as one “to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and... to transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth”. Council for Christian Colleges and Universities’ mission, <www.cccu.org> (April 1, 2006). One might describe such schools as examples of what Richard Niebuhr called “Christ Against Culture” in *Christ and Culture*, chp. 1.

⁴⁵ Padraic O’Hare, *Spiritual Companions: Jews, Christians and Interreligious Relations* (New London: Twenty-third Publications, 2006) offers a rich paradigm for inter-religious dialogue.

infringe on the constitutional rights of faculty and students. In light of both *Gaudium et Spes* and to *Nostra Aetate* Catholic colleges and universities should promote more vigorous, sustained, mutually respectful and academically rigorous inter-religious dialogue and debate. All religions have their proper place in the intellectual and communal life of a Catholic college. Students' experience of and involvement in such inter-religious dialogue is crucial for the United States as its population grows more and more religiously diverse.

Declaration on Religious Freedom
(*Dignitatis Humanae*—Of Human Dignity)

The third document that significantly shapes the self-understanding of American Catholic higher education was promulgated on the very same day as *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, as the Second Vatican Council was drawing to a close.

It was largely through the efforts of an American Jesuit priest, Fr. John Courtney Murray that *Dignitatis Humanae* began to take shape and form in the mind of the Council. It is remarkable that such a document could emerge from a Church long suspicious of liberal democracies and of other political and seemingly anti-religious offsprings of the Enlightenment. "Americanism" had even once been branded as a kind of heresy and American theologians who spoke for religious liberty were castigated by their peers or silenced by the Vatican.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Robert W. McElroy, *The Search for an American Public Theology: The Contribution of John Courtney Murray* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

Murray was a champion of the cause of religious liberty and in post World War II America constantly put forward the importance of freedom and conscience.⁴⁷ During the first session of the Council in the fall of 1962, Murray was a *persona non grata* in Rome. However, the openness of Council debates slowly moved the Church away from its defensiveness and suspicions, and toward the new openness of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Nostra Aetate*. By the fall of 1963 Fr. Murray was recognized by the Council as a *peritus* or theological expert.

There are three main ideas in this document that enrich American Catholic colleges and universities with theological ideas to enrich their distinctive educational mission and from which to launch their institutional vision. They are themes that we have already seen featured prominently in *Gaudium et Spes*: profound respect for the dignity of each person, respect for individual conscience, and attention to the common good.

Murray's theology of religious liberty rests on freedom of conscience. This theme is present in *Dignitatis Humanae*. Every person is "bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God;" no one should "ever be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience;" the "exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts where by a person sets his or her life course directly toward God."⁴⁸ In its treatment of religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* reads in many places like a theological corollary to the First Amendment. It proclaims that both individuals and communities have the right to exercise religious choice and that this right should never be hindered "either by legal measure or by administrative action

⁴⁷ Murray developed and publicized his views on religious liberty in the American Jesuit magazine entitled *America*, as well as in the more scholarly journal *Theological Studies*. He served in an editorial capacity for both.

⁴⁸ *Dignitatis Humanae* #3.

on the part of government...⁴⁹ “Government is therefore to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means.”⁵⁰

The title of the document, however, reveals that the theological foundation upon which the Council builds its argument for religious liberty is not primarily Murray’s quintessentially American theme of freedom of conscience. As in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Nostra Aetate* it is the dignity of the human person (*dignitatis humanae*), derived from the biblical anthropology of “in the image of God”, that grounds religious liberty.⁵¹

Following the spirit of *Dignitatis Humanae* one can easily argue that the American Catholic college and university has an institutional responsibility to protect and defend by all reasonable measures the dignity of all its members who are seen to be in God’s image, no matter of what religion or conviction. This includes honoring the sanctity of individual conscience and respecting the religious liberty of all members of the academic community.

The themes of freedom of conscience, inviolable human rights, and religious liberty are balanced by another theme as prominent in *Dignitatis Humanae* as it is in *Gaudium et Spes*: the common good.⁵² In a typically Catholic theological fashion, the document situates the rights and freedom of the individual in the wider context of community and society. “In the exercise of their rights, individual people and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all. All people are to deal

⁴⁹ *Dignitatis Humanae* #4.

⁵⁰ *Dignitatis Humanae* #6. In these and similar statements the Church also has in mind theocracies around the world where Catholics and other Christians are minorities.

⁵¹ *Dignitatis Humanae* #9.

⁵² *Dignitatis Humanae* #7.

with their fellows in justice and civility.”⁵³ Here again there is a direct application to the educational mission of the Catholic college or university which should promote the notion of the common good in the development of its campus culture.

This value of the common good translates directly into the virtue of citizenship and its responsibilities for the commonwealth. A student’s education at a Catholic college or university should include learning and mentoring that advances a young person’s experience of basic human dignity, of respect for the sanctity of conscience, and of civic responsibility for the common good.

On Catholic Universities

(Ex Corde Ecclesiae—From the Heart of the Church)

Pope John Paul II, himself a former university professor, took special interest in Catholic colleges and universities.⁵⁴ The text of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* emerged from a remarkable dialogic process. In the late 1980’s John Paul’s initial drafts of the document were circulated among the presidents and deans of Catholic institutions around the world.⁵⁵ The leaders of American Catholic higher education especially provided ideas and comments which helped to form the final draft of this important Apostolic Constitution on Catholic colleges and universities, promulgated by the Pope on August 15, 1990.

All the major themes highlighted from the three Vatican documents previously cited in this paper are found in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and are specifically applied there by

⁵³ *Dignitatis Humanae* #7.

⁵⁴ John Paul II taught philosophy at The Catholic University of Lublin in Poland beginning in 1954. He assumed the chair of ethics in 1956, even while he continued his pastoral work as a priest. After he became archbishop of Krakow in 1963, his duties limited the time he was able to spend teaching in Lublin, and his students often commuted to his lectures in Krakow. All of his philosophical works were published in Lublin.

⁵⁵ Alice Gallen, OSU, ed., *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents 1967-1990* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 189-437.

Catholic schools should be “more attentive to the cultures of the world of today, and to the various cultural traditions existing within the Church in a way that will promote a continuous and profitable dialogue between the Gospel and modern society.”⁶²

The Pope called for a special emphasis on “dialogue between Christian thought and the modern sciences.... Such dialogue concerns the natural sciences as much as the human sciences which posit new and complex philosophical and ethical problems.”⁶³

In these ways *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* draws from the themes and directions set by the documents of the Second Vatican Council previously cited here. However, there is also a topic of special emphasis in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. This topic was of particular interest to John Paul himself as a philosopher, and it offers a distinctive contribution to the mission of Catholic colleges and universities. He expresses it in the very first paragraph of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. A Catholic University’s privileged task is “to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth.”⁶⁴ The two orders referred to are the order of faith (“the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth”) and the order of reason (“the search for truth”).⁶⁵ The whole introduction to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (#1-11) is dedicated to this relationship between faith and reason as elaborated by John Paul, and to the central role of this relationship in the intellectual life and academic culture of a Catholic college or university.

⁶² *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #45. This is another example of the contemporary Catholic paradigm of “Christ the Transformer of Culture” in *Christ and Culture*, 190-299.

⁶³ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #46.

⁶⁴ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #1.

⁶⁵ This is the theme of John Paul’s major encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Faith and Reason, promulgated on September 15, 1998, <http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0216/_INDEX.HTM> (April 30, 2006).

The creative tension between faith conviction and the continued search for truth is a complex dynamic. When a person becomes convinced of the truth value of a particular faith, or—to put it philosophically—when a person is clear about his or her basic assumptions or philosophical starting point, then what is the relationship between that faith or that set of presuppositions and the believer's continued use of reason and intellect to explore both the implications as well as the contradictions of faith. Once converted, once convinced of the truth claims of Christianity, what becomes of unfettered intellectual inquiry? Can the true believer put aside dearly held assumptions or profound convictions, and engage with non-believers or believers from other faiths in a truly free and open dialogue?

The question is perhaps less problematic when one is speaking of search for discernable facts in science, or in the interpretative and imaginative pursuits of literary exegesis. It is, however, in the areas of theology, philosophy, and ethics where the creative tension between faith and reason, as well as difficulties about truth and the search for truth arise. Are students and faculty who believe in Christ less engaged, by virtue of their faith, in a true, open and continuing quest for truth? Are scholars and teachers who do not believe in Christ, or in God, by virtue of their positions or opinions, on an endless and fruitless search until and unless they eventually discover God in Christ? How can colleagues in a Catholic college or university continue together on the search for truth within an academic community that includes everything from conviction to agnosticism to atheism?

John Paul quotes Saint Augustine on this point. "*Intellege ut credas; crede ut intellegas* (Seek to understand in order that you may believe; believe in order that you

may seek to understand [my translation]).”⁶⁶ Augustine and John Paul posit that it is only “the united endeavor of intelligence and faith that enables people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God....”⁶⁷ Both also claim that it is only this “united endeavor of intelligence and faith” that equip us to move forward in an impartial search for truth.⁶⁸

Catholic colleges and universities contribute to the academic universe and the scholarly life by institutionalizing this teaching that human intellectual endeavor is more complete and fulfilling when both our capacity for conviction and our capacity for questioning are held in a continuous, creative, and heuristic tension, supported by a profound respect for colleagues engaged in the same arduous endeavor. The intellectual ethos of a Catholic college or university should honor both faith and reason by challenging members of the academic community to be forthcoming about their most basic religious and philosophical assumptions, and also by encouraging open, respectful and continuing dialogue on important religious, ethical and political concerns and questions.

St. Augustine’s own conversion to Christianity can serve as a model for this seeming contradiction between believing one has found the font of truth, even while continuing to search for truth. Augustine’s early life had been an intellectual odyssey and existential journey, not unlike that of many of today’s college students and professors. He examined and explored various schools of thought such as Manichaeism, Aristotle’s

⁶⁶ Saint Augustine, Sermon #43, paragraph 9. See St. Augustine, *Sermons II (20-50)*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: New City Press, 1990), 241. John Paul includes this quote from Augustine in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #5.

⁶⁷ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #5.

⁶⁸ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #5.

categories, academic skepticism, astrology, and neo-Platonism.⁶⁹ At the same time he longed for a teacher or mentor who might show him the way.

Augustine's conversion at age thirty-two was a discovery of Christianity as a convincing system of belief, thought and ethic. After his baptism Augustine, ever the restless searcher for truth, found within himself a new source of confidence and curiosity, a new font of love and learning that intensified his intellectual journey and deepened his spiritual search. He explores the soul, studies the Scriptures and critiques religion, philosophy and society with this new inner confidence, a confidence built upon Christ his "Inner Teacher".⁷⁰ After his conversion Christ becomes for Augustine that teacher and mentor, an inner compass, a Virgilian companion that guides him as he ventures forth into new territories of the soul and new vistas of Christian faith and philosophy.

It is clear that conversion to Christ did not mean the end of intellectual activity for Augustine. Christian faith for him rather inspired a return to a life dedicated wholly to study, reflection, and prayer. Faith and reason were not only compatible; they were both necessary and reliable guides in Augustine's continuing intellectual journey. It is the latter, Christian Augustine, firm in faith but persistent in questioning, that John Paul holds up as the model for a Catholic college or university.⁷¹

The contemporary Catholic college or university should be a place where Christians can freely explore faith and philosophy, theology and science in the context of a community of faith. Such a college, however, should also be a place where persons of

⁶⁹ Augustine's *Confessions* chronicle his restless search. For a superb contemporary translation see Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*. trans. Maria Boulding, OSB (New York: New City Press, 1997).

⁷⁰ Saint Augustine, *The Teacher (De Magistro)*, trans. Robert P. Russell, OSA., (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 51, 54, 59.

⁷¹ For an incisive and original take on Augustinian skepticism, watch for the introduction and notes to a forthcoming new translation of Augustine's *Contra Academicos* by George Heffernan, trans. (New York: New City Press).

other philosophical persuasions or religious commitments can, as full members of the academic community, follow their search for truth in ways that remain faithful to their best selves. In a Catholic college or university this free and open dialogue which is at the heart of the intellectual life requires both the risk of mutual honesty about diverse convictions of faith and philosophy as well as the exercise of respectful reason as the vernacular of debate.

Christian faith can never, in its best understanding, foreclose any avenue of truth. The Catholic intellectual must cherish and nurture freedom and openness in intellectual, scientific or professional research, writing or teaching. This continuing search for truth, however, involves a creative tension for the Christian intellectual, a dynamic interplay between faith and reason. The question of how a believer continues the search for truth after conversion to Christ, Whom believers hold to be the Truth, is a crucial, open-ended and existentially fruitful one in the modern Catholic college or university with its great diversity of opinions, religious traditions, and philosophical schools.

To be faithful to Catholic teachings on the dignity of every human being, on the freedom of conscience and of religious conviction, on human rights, on the common good, and on engagement with all human cultures, Catholic colleges and universities must protect intellectual freedom and respect all sincere adherents to truth. In light of the documents of Vatican II and of John Paul II's reflections in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Catholic colleges and universities should be regular venues for vital debates, conversations, disagreements and passionate engagement. Such interchange should be a hallmark of the intellectual life on these campuses that entertain, enjoy and engage all seekers of truth.

God Is Love

(Deus Caritas Est)

The most recent major statement to come from the Vatican this past year was the first Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI. *Deus Caritas Est* was promulgated by the new Pope on Christmas Day, 2005.⁷² The topic and tone of Benedict's first major pronouncement surprised many who had expected a more dogmatic and even disciplinary document. Instead, the Pope has written a long, philosophical and scriptural reflection on the nature of love and the vocation of individual Christians and of the Church as a community to love.

It may seem that there is no direct application of *Deus Caritas Est* to the educational mission of Catholic colleges and universities, beyond a certain campus atmosphere or environment that promotes community among members of the academic institution. However, one must remember that of all recent Popes, Benedict is the most scholarly and had the most university experience before his election to the papacy.⁷³ Even during his twenty-five years in the Sacred Congregation for the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger remained active as a scholar, continuing to write, edit and lecture.

It is appropriate, then, to mine his thoughts in *Deus Caritas Est* for implications or applications that might enrich the mission and ethos of Catholic colleges and universities. It is also germane to note that Benedict's favorite theologian is St. Augustine.⁷⁴ The theme of divine love is prominent throughout Augustine's writings, especially in his

⁷² Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love)*,

<http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/index_en.htm> (May 5, 2006).

⁷³ Father Josef Ratzinger held faculty positions at the Universities of Bonn (1959-1963), Munster (1963-1966), Tubingen where he held the chair in dogmatic theology (1966-1969), and Regensburg (1969-1977). He was appointed archbishop of Munich in 1977.

⁷⁴ Stephen Mansfield, *Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 39-61.

commentaries on the writings of the Apostle John. Benedict's first encyclical letter surely draws from Augustinian teachings on love or *caritas*.⁷⁵ Benedict's essay on love, influenced by his "master" Augustine's teachings on divine love, provides the context for the following reflections on the proper role of love in the academic community.⁷⁶

It may be counter-cultural in contemporary American academic circles to suggest, as the Augustinian scholar Saint Giles did seven hundred years ago at the University of Paris that learning should be ordered to love.⁷⁷ An Augustinian vision of the academy is founded on the primacy of love. It understands the academic community to be, above all else, a scholarly fellowship of friends.⁷⁸ Those friends, from very different backgrounds, disciplines, persuasions and beliefs, can nonetheless be united by *caritas*. *Caritas*, or love as Augustine understood it, involves a profound respect for and acceptance of one's fellow searchers for truth. It is the practical virtue that incarnates the theological principle of the dignity of every person.

Caritas exercises the important and sometimes difficult self discipline that is necessary if we are to engage each other with respect and intellectual openness. *Caritas* is willing to practice humility, that is, a realistic assessment of one's own intellectual and personal strengths and limits in light of the common search for truth. All members of the academic community should be afforded this respect and acceptance, as they engage one another in the important and sometimes difficult search for truth. Catholic colleges and

⁷⁵ Throughout *Deus Caritas Est* Benedict quotes from Saint Augustine's major works, including *Confessions*, *On the Trinity*, *City of God*, and *Sermons*.

⁷⁶ It is a point of interest that in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* John Paul appeals to Augustine's integration of faith and reason, and that Benedict, in his first Encyclical, appeals to Augustine's meditations on divine love.

⁷⁷ Adolar Zumkeller, OSA, *Theology and History of the Augustinian School in the Middle Ages*. ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1996), 17-23.

⁷⁸ Donald Burt, OSA, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 55-76.

universities can themselves thereby demonstrate a very specific practice and focused exercise of the call to respect of every person's human dignity.

From an Augustinian perspective the academic community is called to grow together through knowledge to wisdom.⁷⁹ Learning is valued because it opens opportunities for personal and societal transformation. Passionate learning, supported by a compassionate community of students and scholars, can be the beginning of life long transformation of self, and through ones service to others, of society. This is wisdom in the Augustinian tradition within Catholicism: knowledge put to work in the building of a new society, a society whose outlines and blueprints can already be found in the respect and acceptance, in the *caritas* of the collegiate community itself.

This Augustinian theology of love can also have an influence on the curriculum or course of studies in higher education. In an age of specialization, of isolated and esoteric academic disciplines, students need help to make connections and integrate knowledge they gain from different fields of study.⁸⁰ The emphasis of Augustine on the primacy of love provides a principle of integration and of connection across the curriculum. The respect and acceptance of one's academic colleagues includes, in an Augustinian approach, a respect for and acceptance of their particular disciplines and methodologies, different from one's own. Augustinian education calls for the exploration of ways to invite and engage students and faculty from different disciplines and majors into sustained and meaningful conversations on civilization and its many and diverse aspects.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Saint Augustine, *On the Trinity*. trans. Edmund Hill, OP (New York: New City Press, 1991), 334-337.

⁸⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* #56.

⁸¹ This emphasis on the integration of academic disciplines as a special distinction of Catholic colleges and universities is stressed in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* #15, 16. See also Gary N. McCloskey, OSA, "Threads to be

The medieval Augustinian School of philosophers and theologians asserted that theology has as its final purpose not only love of neighbor or *caritas*, but also love of God or *affectio*.⁸² All members of the typical contemporary college or university may not believe in God or in the reality of a transcendent being. An Augustinian approach to Catholic education, however, considers the possibility that human learning, in its many and diverse particulars, is ultimately a participation in the divine. Teaching, research, writing and study are sacred activities, containing within themselves the seeds of transcendence. The life of the student and the scholar are filled with a thirsting for knowledge which knowledge alone cannot quench. As theology is ultimately directed to the experience of God's love, all learning in its proper way is directed to awakening within the student and the teacher an experience of self-transcendence that leaves one open to the possibility of the eternal. Indeed, for St. Augustine, those who search for the true and the good are on the way to a discovery of God.⁸³

In addition to sustaining the creative dynamic between faith and reason highlighted by John Paul II, Catholic colleges and universities are also called to cultivate a scholarly fellowship that sustains and promotes mutual respect and attentiveness among all members of the community. The Augustinian theological elaborations of *caritas* and *affectio* provide the beginnings for further explorations of the personal, interpersonal, inter-religious and intercultural nexuses that are the domain of teaching and learning. Those who promote the educational mission of Catholic colleges and universities must go

Woven: Characteristics of Augustinian Pedagogy.” (Paper presented at The Augustinian Educators International Conference in Rome, Italy, July 2005.)

⁸² Adolar Zumkeller, OSA, *Augustinian School*. ed. John E. Rotelle, OSA (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1996), 23.

⁸³ This is perhaps the major theme of Augustine's *Confessions*. Results of the 2005-2006 survey “Spirituality and the Professoriate: A National Study of Faculty Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors” by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, point to a surprisingly strong interest in spirituality among the professoriate. See <www.spirituality.ucla.edu> (August 21, 2006).

beyond the scope of the Vatican documents presented here and, with the aid of theology, philosophy and the social sciences, develop an anthropology, that is, an understanding of the person—student and teacher—who inhabit the heart of learning. Such a project is beyond the scope of this paper. Augustine’s theology, however, with its distinctive emphasis on community and open-ended learning, on *caritas* and *affectio*, can enrich that effort immensely.⁸⁴

The Distinctiveness of Catholic Colleges and Universities

The sources of Catholic teaching as expressed in these five Vatican Documents (*Gaudium et Spes*, *Nostra Aetate*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and *Deus Caritas Est*) provide theological concepts with which to elaborate the distinctive contribution that Catholic colleges and universities enjoy in American higher education. Each Catholic college or university develops its own educational mission in light of the circumstances of its founding and the particular needs of its students. However, in light of these five Vatican documents it is clear that the mission of any Catholic college or university must also take into account the various elements highlighted by these documents.

In the mission statements of Catholic colleges and universities, and in the lived reality of these campuses, certain values and virtues will “brand” the institution as truly Catholic in nature and spirit. These include an engagement of human culture and knowledge that springs from and promotes a profound respect for every person’s dignity. It includes a respect for individual conscience and religious freedom that is always in balance with a respect for the rights of others and for an active concern and care for the

⁸⁴ Tarcisius J. van Bavel, OSA, “The Double Face of Love in Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* (17: 1986): 169-181.

common good of ever widening circles of society and culture. It includes openness to the metaphysical truths, the ethical wisdoms, and the human ingenuities of other religious traditions where the Spirit of God is also to be found. It includes a willingness to engage in reasonable and respectful dialogue with philosophical persuasions different from ones own. It includes fostering pedagogical methods throughout the college or university that help students integrate the many and diverse academic disciplines that make up their curriculum of studies. It includes developing a campus culture, both in and outside the classroom and laboratory that helps all members of the academic community struggle together to deepen their mutual respect in ways that dare to describe and define their shared intellectual engagements as works of *caritas*. Finally, it is open to the possibility that such an academic community is itself an occasion of grace that sometimes, at its best, provides a faint glimpse of *affectio*, that is, of the eschatological goal of Christian faith.

Such values, drawn from the Catholic tradition, can promote a campus culture that engenders civic virtues in graduates. Catholic higher education, at its best, should prepare students to be open, engaged and active citizens in a social democracy where person of many and diverse backgrounds and religions make their home together.

Catholic colleges and universities must also attend to other dimensions of their educational mission. Such dimensions, not discussed here, would include campus ministry, liturgical worship, pastoral care of all members of the academic community, mission-related research, and the relationship of the institution with the local and universal Church. This article has highlighted only those dimensions of college or

university mission that prepare students for membership in the wider civic societies from which they come and in which they will live and work after earning their degrees.

The Catholic and Augustinian Dimensions of Merrimack College

The majority Catholic colleges and universities in the United States were founded by religious orders of priests, brothers or sisters. In most cases the particular spirit, ethos or charism of the founding order was imprinted onto the educational institution by these founding priests, brothers or sisters of religious congregations. Originally the majority of administrators and professors were members of these religious congregations. They could not help but bring their spiritual life and personal commitment to their educational ministries. Today, even though the numbers of priests and religious are significantly reduced, one can still sense different sub-cultures among colleges and universities founded by various Catholic religious orders of men and women such as the Augustinians, Dominicans, Franciscans, Benedictines, Jesuits, Christian Brothers, and others.

Prompted by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* American Catholic colleges and universities have devoted much time and energy over the past fifteen years to exploring and expressing what exactly is "Catholic" about their educational missions. In addition to the Catholic elements of mission, they study how the particular history and spirituality of the founding order provides a further distinctive character to the institution, its intellectual life, and its educational goals.⁸⁵

Merrimack College in North Andover, Massachusetts, was founded in 1947 by the Order of St. Augustine. Members of the Order traveled to Massachusetts from

⁸⁵ Thomas M. Landy, ed., *As Leaven In the Word: Catholic Perspectives on Faith, Vocation, and the Intellectual Life* (Appleton: Sheed and Ward, 2001) elaborates these various spiritualities and their implications for the intellectual life..

Villanova College in Pennsylvania, also an Augustinian College, founded in 1842.⁸⁶ As in most Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, the presence of many Augustinian friars on campus in faculty and administrative positions provided the distinctive stamp of the Order on the college.

With the growth of the college and the diminishing number of Augustinian friars available for active service, Merrimack, like so many other Catholic colleges and universities, experienced some “mission drift”. With fewer friars to bring their personal witness to the academic community, questions slowly arose about the meaning and relevance of the descriptors “Catholic and Augustinian” in the college’s mission statement.⁸⁷ The national discussion prompted by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, together with the desire of the Order that the Augustinian heritage of Merrimack not be lost, led to a sustained dialogue and debate on campus about these issues over the past ten years.

The parameters, venues and spirit of this dialogue were intentionally structured in light of the theological principles from the five Vatican documents elaborated above. Care was taken to respect the dignity of all participants. Constant invitations to participate were extended to all members of Merrimack’s academic community, no matter their religious affiliation. Academic freedom and respect for individual conscience were valued as essential for this process, even while the common good and the Catholic, Augustinian heritage of the college were affirmed as essential to Merrimack’s identity.

⁸⁶ The Augustinians were founded as an Order in 1244/1256. Members of the Order joined the University at Oxford by 1266. See Michael Benedict Hackett, OSA, *The Austin Friars. A History of the Augustinian Friars in Britain from their foundation to the present day* (Clare Suffolk: Augustinian Press, 1998).

⁸⁷ Mary Catherine Grant and Sister Patricia Vandenberg, CSC, *After We’re Gone: Creating Sustainable Sponsorships* (Mishawaka: Ministry Development Resources, 1998) note similar developments in other Catholic colleges and universities, and suggest ways of responding.

Faculty, administrators and students were asked to read and study Augustinian history and theology, using the works of Augustine and of the Augustinian School of the Middle Ages. They were also asked to familiarize themselves with the 750 year history and mission of the Augustinian friars. Then, over a two year period, a committee of twenty-five persons slowly composed a document entitled “Augustinian Values for Higher Education”.

It was important that all members of this committee, very diverse in their religious, philosophical and academic backgrounds, had buy-in. The document, to be meaningful, had to belong to them as full members of the academic community. It took a full year to complete this process of writing. The statement then circulated across the entire college for another year for further input and comment. Finally it was taken to the three governance bodies of the college for endorsement: the Faculty Senate, the College-Wide Council, and the Student Government Association, all of which endorsed it. This process was completed in the fall of 2004.

Any such statement can end gathering dust on some campus shelf. The key is to use it to help guide the governance, the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the culture of the campus in ways that are appropriate to the nature of each. That is an on-going process.

One could do a content analysis of Merrimack College’s “Statement of Augustinian Values for Higher Education,” studying it for evidence of the ideas drawn from the five Vatican documents outlined above. One could also critique it in light of the Augustinian theology of love. The school should also eventually develop ways of evaluating how effectively this expression of the mission and vision of Merrimack College is realized in the work and experience of its students, faculty and administrators

and graduates. However, such content analyses and assessment of learning outcomes are tasks for another time and topics for another article.

Conclusion

We end with the statement which members of the Merrimack academic community produced together in an attempt to understand the Catholic and Augustinian nature of their college. This statement also expresses how their academic institution inspires and prepares all its members to transform what Augustine calls the “City of Man,” that is, a self-centered and selfish society afflicted by power struggles and violence, into the “City of God”, that is, a society based on human dignity, freedom, human rights, the common good, and a love that is expressed in justice and that points to our common goal in God. If the faculty, administration, students and staff at Merrimack College manage to create and sustain in some small ways, and by God’s grace, such a collegiate community of teaching and learning, then students of the college will certainly help to enrich and transform the wider society into which they graduate.

We end with the document produced by dialogue, discussion and debate. As the Merrimack community continues to understand and express its educational mission, this document serves not so much as a *magna carta* for the college. Rather it embodies a kind of bill of rights and responsibilities for all members of the school as they continue their catholic and Augustinian journey through knowledge to wisdom.

Augustinian Values for Merrimack College

The life and thought of Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) serve as a foundation for the Catholic intellectual humanism of Merrimack College. The educational and spiritual traditions of the Order of Saint Augustine (1244 CE) also enrich our academic community. Merrimack College celebrates its Augustinian mission and affirms the following values that are ours by heritage and grace.

Before all else our college is a community of scholarship and service whose members support and challenge each other in a wholehearted pursuit of knowledge, holding one another to the highest intellectual and ethical standards.

Knowledge grows into wisdom when we recognize the limits of reason and of our individual perspectives, attend to the common good, and fashion the changes inspired by learning.

The pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning requires diligent study, freedom of thought, dedication to dialogue, and collegial respect for each person's experience.

The contemplation and reflection encouraged by the intellectual life inspire an ethical sensibility as well as a prophetic critique of social structures in light of justice and peace.

The great texts of human history, including sacred scriptures, call us to continuing dialogue as our varied religious and philosophical convictions enrich our Catholic mission.

Our lifelong pursuit of truth and understanding can be for Christians an expression of the inner pilgrimage with Christ the Teacher, for adherents of all faiths part of the search for God, and for everyone a journey of hope amidst the ever-expanding horizons of human experience.

These values invite all members of our community to learn, teach, work and study in ways appropriate to their discipline and their service, and in a manner that makes Merrimack College a vibrant Augustinian academic community.

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