

# **Challenges facing American and European Catholic Universities: A View from the Vatican**

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Nanovic Institute for European Studies  
University of Notre Dame

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Dear Friends and Colleagues:

## ***Introduction***

Thank you very much for your generous introduction and for the very kind invitation of Professor McAdams to be with you this evening as the Terrence R. Keeley Distinguished Vatican Lecturer at the prestigious Nanovic Institute for European Studies, during my first visit to the campus of the University of Notre Dame. To see the golden dome and grotto was a thrilling experience, though I hate to admit my ignorance: I just discovered that the dome was not atop the Basilica! I can assure you, the University's well known hospitality, fierce spirit and commitment to the Catholic intellectual tradition have been evident from the outset. I would especially like to congratulate your new president, Fr. John Jenkins, for his ambitious and inspirational inaugural address in which he pledged to unite academic excellence with religious faith, assuring both the Academy and the Church with his vision of Notre Dame as a "university that combines the highest level of disciplinary expertise with the resources of its moral and religious tradition."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Notre Dame is committed to fulfilling the mission entrusted to all institutions of higher learning: that of being "a primary and privileged place for a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and culture."<sup>2</sup>

Professor McAdams very generously gave me wide latitude in my choice of a topic, but, given my current position as Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education, it seems fitting to offer some reflections on the challenges facing Catholic universities in America and Europe from a Vatican perspective. Because the world of higher education constitutes for the universal Church "a privileged field for her work of evangelization and her presence in the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> John I. Jenkins, Inaugural Address as President of the University of Notre Dame (22 September 2005): "The Role of a Catholic University," *Origins* 25:17 (6 October 2005), 280.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 43.

sphere,”<sup>3</sup> the university’s health is a matter of great concern to every pope, as it was in a particular way to our dearly beloved John Paul II.<sup>4</sup>

This evening I would like to outline some of the challenges which the Holy See thinks must be confronted by American and European Catholic universities if they are to carry out the specific mission of evangelization described for them in the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, one of the less known conciliar documents,<sup>5</sup> whose fortieth anniversary was celebrated on 28 October 2005. According to the Council Fathers, Catholic institutions of higher learning are to ensure that there is “a public, enduring and pervasive influence of the Christian mind in the furtherance of culture and [that] the students of these institutions are molded into men and women truly outstanding in their knowledge, ready to undertake weighty responsibilities in society and witness to the faith in the world.”<sup>6</sup>

## I. Setting the Stage

### *Congregation for Catholic Education*

At the outset let me explain what I mean by “the Vatican” in the world of higher education. In addition to his own discourses and homilies, it is primarily

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Council for Culture (15 January 1988), 5: Insegnamenti, 11/1 (1988) 103.

<sup>4</sup> During his visits to the United States in 1979 and 1987 he gave major addresses to leaders of Catholic higher education (John Paul II, Addresses to Leaders of Catholic Higher Education on 6 October 1979 at Washington: *Origins*, 9 [1979], 306-308; and on 12 September 1987 at Xavier University in New Orleans: *Origins*, 17:15 [1 October 1987], 268-270). In the course of the American bishops’ *ad limina* or five-year visits to Rome, he always devoted part of at least one of his addresses to the subject of Catholic higher education in the United States: 28 October 1983, 15 October 1988, 24 April 1993, 30 May 1998, 24 June 2004. Texts are in *Origins*, 13:22 [1983], 389-391; 18:21 [3 November 1988], 347-48; 22:47 [6 May 1993], 804-807; 28:5 [18 June 1998], 76-78; 34:14 [16 September 2004], 220-222).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966) 117: “One unfortunately has to say that the text wasn’t treated by the Council Fathers with any specific affection.”

<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10.

through the Congregation for Catholic Education that the pope expresses his pastoral concern for education in the universal Church. To discharge this responsibility, he mandates this department of the Roman Curia, with fewer than thirty members on its staff, to act in his name and with his authority.<sup>7</sup>

The origins of the Congregation for Catholic Education go back to the special papal commissions created in the mid-fifteenth century for maintaining vigilance over the universities in Rome and the Papal States. In the 1588 reform of the Roman Curia, Sixtus V established this office, charging it with supervising studies in Rome as well as at Bologna, Paris, Salamanca and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> In 1915 this curial department assumed oversight of seminaries, and in 1967 Paul VI added the responsibility for Catholic schools to its mandate. Today, the Congregation oversees the academic formation in nearly 3,500 seminaries, 1500 institutions of higher learning, and countless Catholic schools around the world with more than 50,000,000 students.

### ***Statistical Data on Institutions of Higher Learning***

Besides the approximately 250 ecclesiastical universities, faculties and institutes, which grant canonical degrees in the name of the pope and are governed by the apostolic constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (1979),<sup>9</sup> there are

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<sup>7</sup> Code of Canon Law, canon 360; cf. John Paul II, *Pastor Bonus*, articles 112-116.

<sup>8</sup> For a history of the Congregation, see Giuseppe Pittau, “Servicio y contribución de la Congregación para la Educación Católica a los centros universitarios y teológicos de la Iglesia,” *Seminarium*, 43 (2003), 1051-1064.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Code of Canon Law, canons 815-821. The 1917 Code of Canon Law did not distinguish between “ecclesiastical” and “Catholic” universities, a distinction now rigorously observed since the former are regulated by the apostolic constitution *Sapientia Christiana* (1979) and the latter by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990). For recent literature on ecclesiastical faculties see: Damián G. Astigueta, “*Sapientia christiana* y la legislación posterior,” *Seminarium*, 44 (2004), 403-457; Giuseppe Baldanza, “La Facoltà teologica di fronte ad alcuni compiti per i nostri tempi,” *Seminarium*, 42 (2002), 969-986; Giuseppe Baldanza, “La teologia fondante e gli elementi costanti di *Sapientia christiana*,” *Seminarium*, 44 (2004), 363-401; Oscar Eone Eone, “Facultés et Universités ecclésiastiques et Universités catholiques: convergences et divergences,” *Seminarium*, 44 (2004), 479-511; Zenon Cardinal Grocholewski, “La facoltà universitaria nell’università,” *Seminarium*, 44 (2004), 513-533; John M. Huels, “The Juridic Status of Catholic Faculties of Theology: Overview of the Universal

about 1,300 Catholic universities throughout the world.<sup>10</sup> 220 of these are in the United States and fewer than 30 in Europe, including 8 in Spain, 5 in France, 3 in Italy and 2 both in Belgium and the Netherlands.<sup>11</sup> The relative scarcity of European Catholic universities must, however, be seen in light of their numerous faculties of theology, often attached to and funded by the State. In Germany, which has only one Catholic university, at Eichstätt, there are 26 faculties of theology; and in Poland, with one Catholic university at Lublin, there are now 14 faculties, 9 of which date from the last twenty years.

Since 1990, the number of Catholic institutions worldwide has grown steadily. For example, 160 Catholic institutions of higher learning have been established in the last fifteen years: 10 in Africa; a whopping 108 in Asia, including 99 in India; 32 in the Americas, including 2 in Canada, 5 in the United States and 9 in Mexico. In the same period, in Europe, 7 have been founded: 4 in Spain, and one each in Hungary, Italy and Slovakia. Moreover, others are still in the planning stages.

While in the United States most Catholic universities were founded by Religious communities, that is not true in Europe. Furthermore, their financing and relations with the government are very different, though there is a wide variety of arrangements in Europe: from the total State funding in Belgium and the Netherlands, to minimal financial support in France and Italy. Moreover, in France, for example, Catholic institutions of higher learning cannot legally be called “universities” (hence the “Institut Catholique” of Paris) and, for their degrees to be recognized, they must strike an agreement with a State university

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Law,” *Studia canonica*, 37 (2003), 301-322; Marc Pelchat, “La confessionnalité et la reconnaissance des Facultés de théologie,” *Studia canonica*, 37 (2003), 483-501.

<sup>10</sup> For the most up-to-date list available of ecclesiastical universities and faculties, Catholic universities, and other Catholic institutions of higher learning, see: Congregation for Catholic Education, *Index: Universitates et lia instituta studiorum superiorum Ecclesiae catholicae* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2005), 464 pp.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, there are 43 Orthodox and 25 Protestant institutions of higher learning in Europe. 44 institutions of higher learning, not all of them universities, are members of the European Federation of Catholic Universities (FUCE). To date, only the episcopal conferences of Spain and Portugal have drawn up application norms or ordinances as required by *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and received approval for them from the Holy See. The American application norms received the *recognitio* in 2000 and the Canadian ordinances in 2004.

which takes them under their wing. Given the Church's institutional investment in both America and Europe, Catholic higher education is of enormous importance to the vitality of ecclesial life, both intellectually and pastorally.

### *Holy See's Oversight of Catholic Universities*

The Holy See's concern for higher education is centuries old. All the great European universities – from Oxford, to Paris, to Cologne, to Prague, to Bologna – were established with close ties to the Church. As institutions where the liberal arts were studied, they prepared students for service to society and the Church, especially in the areas of theology, law, and medicine – the foundational professions of emerging medieval society. The animating force in these universities was love for learning and love for truth.

Despite the common interpretation favored by the Enlightenment, universities were not founded as lay corporations which claimed independence from the Church. Indeed, to guarantee their freedom, very early on these centers sought the Holy See's protection from the undue encroachment of local episcopal and civil authority, and it was generously offered by Rome. At the origin of nearly every university we find a papal bull which either authorizes or confirms its foundation. That is why John Paul II could affirm that universities were born "from the heart of the Church."<sup>12</sup>

It is noteworthy that one of the recent Pope's major innovations in the field of higher education was to relate to the Holy See, by means of legislation, not only ecclesiastical universities and faculties but also all Catholic colleges and universities.<sup>13</sup> In some measure at least this happened because of American input.<sup>14</sup> In March 1982, the Pope received several presidents of American

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<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1. It was only with the Protestant Reformation that the term "Catholic" university came to be used in opposition to the newly-established "Protestant" universities.

<sup>13</sup> Until 1983, no legislation was in place which regulated "Catholic" universities, though the then Sacred Congregation for Catholic education had been entrusted with oversight over them by Paul VI's 1967 apostolic constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, 78, a development foreseen by the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> For much of what follows I am indebted to an unpublished manuscript of Joseph M. McLaughlin, "Homily for the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel," St.

Catholic institutions: Father Ted Hesburgh of Notre Dame, Sister Alice Gallin of Trinity in Washington, and others. They were pressing to have all Catholic colleges and universities, even those without pontifical charters, included in the new Code of Canon Law that was then being finalized.<sup>15</sup> Their meeting with Pope John Paul bore fruit. The 1983 Code of Canon Law included within its legislation canons applicable to Catholic universities and colleges that were not “ecclesiastical” but “Catholic,” such as Notre Dame and the vast majority of American institutions. For the first time, the Holy See embraced virtually all Catholic institutions of higher education as subject to its legislation, considering them to “fulfill a proper function in the name of the Church entrusted to them by a competent ecclesiastical authority.”<sup>16</sup> This was a significant development and later resulted in the first-ever Vatican document promulgated for all institutions of higher learning that were not “ecclesiastical” but wished to be recognized as “Catholic”: the apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

### ***Agent of Evangelization***

In this apostolic constitution, which Pope John II called the “*magna charta*” of contemporary Catholic higher education,<sup>17</sup> he wrote explicitly about the university’s direct relationship to the Church’s mission:

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

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Michael’s College, Winooski Park, Vermont (29 September 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Alice Gallin, “On the Road: Toward a Definition of a Catholic University,” *The Jurist*, 48 (1988), 553-555; Alice Gallin, *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education since 1960* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 144-151.

<sup>16</sup> Code of Canon Law, canon 116 §1.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 8.

operative in spreading the authentic message of Christ.<sup>18</sup> While maintaining all the autonomy proper to its nature,<sup>19</sup> every Catholic university is called to play a particular role at the very center of ecclesial life.

To describe the challenges confronting the North Atlantic Triangle of America and Europe, I will draw principally on the teaching of Pope John Paul II and, to a lesser extent, because his magisterium is still in its initial phases and he has written little on Catholic institutions of higher education, that of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI.

## II. Catholic Identity: The Heart of the Matter

Not surprisingly, of primary concern to the Vatican in all its interventions and initiatives in the sphere of education is the preservation and fostering of an institution's specifically *Catholic* identity. What makes an institution of higher learning "Catholic"? The question is quite simply: what is the difference between Notre Dame and Harvard? between Georgetown and Yale? or between St. Mary's and Smith in their self-understanding as an institution of higher education?<sup>20</sup>

In *Gravissimum Educationis*, the Council Fathers said nothing about the need to foster the Catholic identity of the Church's educational institutions.<sup>21</sup> Only in the wake of the upheavals of 1968 did the Holy See begin to identify

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<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 49; 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>19</sup> 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 Two: Particular Norms, article 2, 1.

<sup>20</sup> See the recent work on Catholic identity of Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 131-161; and a history of the the disengagement of various universities from their ecclesial roots in James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges & Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. n. 10.

this challenge and seek ways to meet it.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the complaint has sometimes been lodged that “on this long journey toward a definition of a Catholic university, the questions from the Vatican side always seem to deal with the ‘Catholicity’ of the institution without previous discussion of the nature of a university which is trying to be Catholic.”<sup>23</sup> While the Holy See certainly has a compelling interest in catholicity, it also calls Catholic universities “to a continuous renewal, both as ‘universities’ and as ‘Catholic’.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in the words of the 1994 Vatican document, *The Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture*:

It [the Catholic university] only achieves its full identity when, at one and the same time, it gives proof of being rigorously serious as a member of the international community of knowledge and expresses its Catholic identity through an explicit link with the Church, at both local and universal levels.<sup>25</sup>

According to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, an institution of higher learning, precisely as Catholic, must have a clear ecclesial identity publicly expressed by certain essential characteristics.<sup>26</sup> To ensure the presence of these “marks” and to strengthen them is undoubtedly the greatest challenge facing the venerable institutions of Europe and America, as well as the newer ones springing up in Africa and Asia. To date, the Holy See’s primary concern at every level is encouraging the fostering and, if necessary, the reclaiming of the Catholic

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<sup>22</sup> See the very important document of the International Federation of Catholic universities, *The Catholic University in the Modern World* (1972), which, in light of Vatican II, outlined the four characteristics of a Catholic university. These four characteristics were integrated *in toto* in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 13.

<sup>23</sup> Alice Gallin, “On the Road Toward a Definition of Catholic Identity,” *The Jurist*, 48 (1988), 558.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> 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* (1994), II: 2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 14-20; Pope John Paul II adapted wholesale these distinguishing traits already identified in the International Federation of Catholic Universities’ 1972 document, *The Catholic University in the Modern World*.

identity of institutions of higher learning. It does this, as we shall see, by insisting, first, on the university's *institutional* commitment to the Church and, second, on its *fidelity* to the Catholic faith in all its activities. To these two major challenges I now turn.

### III. Fostering Institutional Commitment to the Church

According to Pope John Paul II, the purpose of a Catholic university is to assure, in an institutional manner, an authentically Christian presence in the world of higher education. Such a university should manifest “a Christian inspiration not only of individuals but of the university community as such.”<sup>27</sup> He means that a Catholic center of higher learning is more than a collection of individuals who, animated by their faith, work for the renewal of the temporal order.<sup>28</sup> Many, indeed most, Catholic scholars throughout the world do this as individuals or perhaps joined with others in lay associations or movements such as *Opus Dei* or Communion and Liberation. Nonetheless, their good will, commitment and witness remain individual rather than institutional.

But it is precisely as institutions that Catholic universities have “a distinctive ethos, a conscience which stands for something even when it is betrayed by individuals in the institution.”<sup>29</sup> They are more than a group of like-minded people operating with a civil charter to provide higher education. Rather, Catholic colleges and universities are structured expressions of the Church's mission; they are publicly recognizable institutions whose basic academic activities of teaching, scholarship and service “are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church.”<sup>30</sup> As such, they accept the rights and responsibilities of having a visible relationship to the local and universal Church.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 37.

<sup>29</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.

<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> “Every Catholic university is to maintain communion with the universal Church and the Holy See; it is to be in close communion with the local Church and in

In much of the discussion both before and after *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, many commentators suggested that the institutional autonomy of Catholic universities, except those erected by the Holy See, required that the pope and the bishops merely sit on the sidelines. At best they could benignly bless a university's activities wearing, depending on the occasion, a baseball cap or a zucchetto. The critics' point was to divorce the university's Catholic identity from any juridical bond with the visible Church. For them, the pope and bishops were outsiders to the Academy.

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>32</sup> as he is in all Catholic institutions under his pastoral care. Moreover, the designation "Catholic" cannot be used unless authorized, explicitly or implicitly, by episcopal or papal authority. According to John Paul, and this he repeated in many *ad limina* addresses, "bishops have a particular responsibility to promote Catholic universities, and especially to promote and assist in the preservation and strengthening of their Catholic identity."<sup>33</sup> While occasional cases might be invoked to the contrary, bishops around the world maintain that they neither want nor can assume control of the Catholic universities over which they exercise episcopal oversight, unless they were established as diocesan institutions. The recent *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*, published in 2004 by the Congregation for Bishops as guidelines for episcopal duties and responsibilities, confirms the bishop's obligation to remain "vigilant over the university's fidelity to the principles of its Catholic identity," all the while respecting the university's autonomy as an institution with its own statutes.<sup>34</sup> To help universities "own" their Catholic institutional identity has

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particular with the diocesan bishops of the region or nation in which it is located" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, General Norms, article 5,1; cf. *Ordinances Issued by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in view of the Correct Application of the Apostolic Constitution "Ex Corde Ecclesiae"* (2004), article 5; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Application of "Ex corde Ecclesiae" for the United States*, Part One, 2).

<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Academic Community at Xavier University, New Orleans (12 September 1987): *Origins*, 17:15 (1 October 1987), 269.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2004), n. 135.

been a principal concern of the Holy See for the last thirty years.

### ***Pope Benedict XVI and Institutional Identity***

Without doubt, Pope John Paul II will leave a mark on Catholic higher education for generations to come, especially because of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and his two apostolic constitutions, *Sapientia Christiana* (1979) and *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990). It remains to be seen, however, what particular contribution his successor will make. This is still open to speculation, and the commentators have already begun to suggest possible future directions.

On several occasions Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger expressed his views on the role and importance of Catholic institutions. In one place he argued, for example, that it might be better for the Church not to expend her resources trying to preserve institutions, whether universities, hospitals or social service agencies, if their Catholic identity had been seriously compromised. In response to Peter Seewald's observation that the Church "seems fixated on securing her own hereditary fiefs," Ratzinger replied:

[O]nce the Church has acquired some good or position, she inclines to defend it. The capacity for self-moderation and self-pruning is not adequately developed . . . [especially] where we have far more Church institutions than we can imbue with [an] ecclesial spirit. And it's precisely the fact that the Church clings to the institutional structure when nothing really stands behind it any longer that brings the Church into disrepute.<sup>35</sup>

It is possible, then, to imagine that a particular institutions could be considered obstacle to the Church's mission, if the people within it lacked conviction about its ecclesial nature.

To date, Pope Benedict XVI has not yet said very much about Catholic institutions of higher learning. John Allen, the astute American Vaticanologist, offers, however, an insight into his thought in his recent book, *The Rise of Benedict XVI*:

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview with Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 174. In another place he wrote: "[I]t dawned on me that, with their insistence on preserving institutions, [the bishops] in part misread the reality. I mean that merely to guarantee institutions is useless if there are no people to support those institutions from inner conviction" (*Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977*, trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998], 15).

The new pope has on many occasions made the argument that it is a mistake for the Catholic Church to attempt to preserve a sprawling network of institutions if those institutions are no longer motivated by a strong sense of Catholic identity. Quality, not quantity, will be this pope's watchword. . . . Better to have one college that does this convincingly, from Benedict's point of view, than ten that are muddled and compromised, bringing the Church into disrepute. . . . The new pope's conviction is that sometimes the best thing the Church can do under such a set of circumstances is to let an institution go, recognizing that once its vital link with the faith is severed, clinging to it merely fosters the impression that the Church is interested in possessing institutions for their own sake. . . . Under some circumstances, Ratzinger has argued, it's better to become smaller and less socially significant, in order to remain faithful.<sup>36</sup>

Allen's scenario might well prove to be accurate. Elsewhere in his writings Cardinal Ratzinger expressed his opinion that a time of purification lay ahead for the Church, and this undoubtedly would have repercussions on her educational institutions. Indeed, he affirmed: "It seems certain to me that very hard times await the Church. Her own crisis has as yet hardly begun."<sup>37</sup> While this statement dates from more than thirty years ago, Ratzinger's meditations for the 2005 *Via Crucis* at the Colosseum are no less incisive. In them he referred to the Church as "a boat about to sink, a boat taking in water from every side."<sup>38</sup>

For Benedict, I would venture, the measure of an institution's Catholic identity can be judged by the integrity of its Gospel witness to the Church and the world. If this is so, then it could mean that, where secularization in a university proves to be irrevocably entrenched, it might be a matter of

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<sup>36</sup> John L. Allen, Jr. *The Rise of Benedict XVI* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 218-220.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube und Zukunft*, Kleine Schriften zur Theologie (München, 1971), 123. Translated in Robert Moynihan, ed., *Let God's Light Shine Forth: The Spiritual Vision of Pope Benedict XVI* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 144.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Meditation on the Ninth Station of the *Via Crucis*" (24 March 2005): "Lord, your Church often seems like a boat about to sink, a boat taking in water on every side. In your field we see more weeds than wheat. The soiled garments and face of your Church throw us into confusion."

truthfulness and justice for such an institution to no longer be considered officially Catholic.

I bring this to your attention today for one main reason.<sup>39</sup> In recent years, the debate in the United States, and to a lesser degree in Europe, over the Catholic identity of universities has presumed that the pope and the bishops want to preserve all of the Church's institutions of higher education; that she has, if you will, a vested interest in their continuance. But what if that presumption is mistaken? The views previously expressed by Cardinal Ratzinger at least suggest that it might possibly be. Some commentators would conclude from this that, if a nominally Catholic university is no longer motivated by a strong sense of its institutional Catholic identity, it is better to let it go, to end its claim of being Catholic.

Perhaps now is the time to move the debate over the Catholic identity of institutions of higher education to a different level. Instead of sterile arguments over how "Catholic-lite" a university can be and still be "Catholic," the question to be engaged becomes: how does a Catholic university honestly and effectively provide a Christian presence in the world of higher education? The burden of proof now falls on the university itself. The challenge thus becomes whether a Catholic university can develop the institutional arrangements that clearly demonstrate its willingness to participate in the Church's evangelizing mission as well as to serve the common good.

This way of phrasing the question assumes, of course, that an institution truly wants to retain its Catholic identity. No doubt, some might opt for letting it go, as has already happened in a very few instances. It strikes me as essential that all stakeholders in a Catholic university face this fundamental option honestly; they must *decide* on their institution's future direction. Let me also stress that a decision to retain a university's Catholic identity cannot be equated with maintaining the *status quo*. Instead, it involves positive institutional changes which will result in clear witness, where this has not been the case, in teaching and scholarship to Catholicism's rich intellectual, artistic, moral, literary, historical, spiritual, socio-political, and even scientific traditions. Catholicism is a living – indeed a lively – tradition that is being constantly challenged and refreshed by its own saints and sinners, artisans and rogues,

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<sup>39</sup> For much of what follows I am indebted to an unpublished manuscript of Joseph M. McLaughlin, "Homily for the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel," St. Michael's College, Winooski Park, Vermont (29 September 2005).

pilgrims and sufferers, as well as by the rest of humanity who do not share its faith and way of life.<sup>40</sup>

Commentators have no way of knowing whether Pope Benedict will pursue this path of encouraging a kind of “evangelical pruning.” Were he to do so, they point out, he would, in fact, be following through on what John Paul II himself affirmed quite clearly several years ago at a high-level meeting of Catholic scholars: “It is clear that university centers that do not observe the law of the Church and the teaching of the Magisterium, especially in the matter of bioethics, cannot be considered as having the character of a Catholic university.”<sup>41</sup>

Whether or not the Holy See should in any way force the question is a moot and delicate point. Despite some publicity to the contrary, in general it has shown itself to be very reluctant to do so. The stakes are high, and in an institution such as the Roman Curia which thinks in centuries, a premium is placed on prudence. While commentators might argue for the way of pruning, others are just as convinced, especially in Europe where many Catholic universities have centuries-old traditions, that, while a particular university’s ecclesial identity may well be compromised, it has only temporarily been taken hostage. The better course of action, these latter maintain, is to be patient, to work for slow incremental changes while putting up with far less than the ideal, and to pray that successive generations will reassert the institution’s Catholic identity for their children’s children. The coming years will not be lacking in interest in this regard – which is a Vatican circumlocution for saying they will be exciting!

#### **IV. Affirming the Role of Faith in the Academy**

From the Vatican’s viewpoint, the second major challenge facing

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Richard A. McCormick, “What Is a Great Catholic University?” in John Wilcox and Irene King, eds., *Enhancing Religious Identity: Best Practices from Catholic Campuses* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 6-7. See also the essays in *As Leaven in the World: Catholic Perspectives on Faith, Vocation, and the Intellectual Life*, ed. Thomas M. Landy (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward), 2001).

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, Address to the International Congress on “Globalization and the Catholic University” (5 December 2002), 6: *L’Osservatore Romano*, English-language edition, 50 (11 December 2002), 4.

Catholic higher education in the West is the need, in light of the widespread opinion which exiles faith from the Academy, to foster the university community's "continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge."<sup>42</sup> This is what John Paul said in this regard to a group of academics in 1989:

In carrying out its research, a Catholic university can rely on a superior enlightenment which, without changing the nature of this research, purifies it, orients it, enriches it and uplifts it. . . . This light is not found "outside" of rational research, as a limitation or an impediment, but rather "above" it, as its elevation and an expansion of its horizons.<sup>43</sup>

From Justin Martyr in the second century down to the present day, the Catholic tradition has unremittingly held that the more we probe the mystery of God with the help of faith, the more we understand reality—a direct proportional relationship. The gift of faith empowers the intellect to act according to its deepest nature.

In light of faith's role in a Catholic university, I would now like to consider two particular challenges to contemporary higher education that the Holy See has identified. Each of these challenges, to a greater or lesser extent, arises from the intellectual climate that permeates the Academy in Europe and the United States; and each calls for a vigorous response from institutions of higher learning which take their catholicity seriously.

### ***Passion for Truth***

Let me begin with what Pope Benedict XVI considers to be a major challenge to the Church of the twenty-first century. Indeed, he calls it "a particularly insidious obstacle in the educational endeavor." For the Holy Father, this obstacle is "the massive presence in our society and culture of a relativism that, by not acknowledging anything as definitive, only has as its ultimate measure the 'I' itself, with its tastes . . . In such a relativist horizon an

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<sup>42</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Third International Meeting of Catholic Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning (25 April 1989): *Insegnamenti*, 12/1 (1989), 940-941.

authentic education is not possible.”<sup>44</sup>

Relativism in the Academy must be met head-on by a countercultural insistence on the importance of truth. The foundation of a Catholic university’s intellectual life is St. Augustine’s *gaudium de veritate*—a specific conviction about truth: that it can be pursued and, to a limited but real extent, attained by the human mind and communicated to others.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, Pope John Paul II wrote that “it is the honor and responsibility of a Catholic university to consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth. . . . a Catholic university is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God. . . . [and] is completely dedicated to the research of all aspects of truth in their essential connection with the supreme Truth, who is God.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the vocation of the Catholic university is to be open to the truth in every field – to truth wherever it may be found in the material or spiritual world.

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>47</sup> Education in the truth is a proper goal of Catholic higher education. To proclaim truth in face of what the soon-to-be Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger, called the fashionable “dictatorship of relativism”<sup>48</sup> is a service rendered by the Catholic college or university, since without this fundamental value freedom, justice and human

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<sup>44</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Participants of the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome (6 June 2005): *L’Osservatore Romano*, English-language edition (15 June 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1, 2, 4, 7, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23, 29, 30, 45, 46.

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 4; cf. John Paul II, Address to the Academic Community of “Louvain la Neuve” (21 May 1985), 4: *Insegnamenti*, 8/1 (1985), 1600.

<sup>47</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Third International Meeting of Catholic Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning (25 April 1989): *Insegnamenti*, 12/1 (1989), 939.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, Homily for Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontefice* (18 April 2005): *Origins*, 34:45 (28 April 2005), 719-720.

dignity are extinguished.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Integral Christian Humanism***

The dawn of the third millennium is accompanied by the urgency to sow the seeds for a new Christian humanism. To many, the West – and perhaps Europe even more than the United States – is showing signs of disorientation, demographic suicide, cultural fatigue, moral decadence and spiritual aridity.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, social tensions are being generated by a new poverty and marginalization, as well as by the growing number of unassimilated ethnic and religious minorities.

For many years, Cardinal Ratzinger dedicated a great deal of attention to Europe's spiritual and moral roots in Christianity. He diagnosed a grave pathology of the West: that it no longer loves itself. As a therapeutic measure, he maintained that Europe (and, we might add, the United States) must accept itself if it wishes to survive.<sup>51</sup>

A lack of moral energy in social life is abetted, I believe, by those who

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 4. See also Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," *Communio*, 23: 4 (1996), 16-35; and an alternative translation by Henry Taylor in Ratzinger's *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 231-258.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 7-9; George Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics Without God* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Europa: I suoi fondamenti oggi e domani* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo Edizioni, 2004), 28. In a discourse held at Subiaco on 1 April 2005, Cardinal Ratzinger, several days before he was elected pope, analyzed the situation of contemporary Europe as follows: "All this [progress] shows that the growth of our possibilities has not been matched by a comparable development of our moral energy. Moral strength has not grown together with the development of science; rather, it has diminished, because the technical mentality relegates morality to the subjective realm, while we have need, precisely, of a public morality, a morality that is able to respond to the threats that weigh down on the existence of us all. The real and gravest danger in these times lies, precisely, in this imbalance between technical possibilities and moral energy" (Joseph Ratzinger, "L'Europa nella crisi delle culture," *Docete*, 20 [2005], 478).

regard education primarily as an investment in human “capital,” thereby disregarding the university’s age-old mission of giving a central place to fostering the humanist tradition, especially as it is embodied in the study of the liberal arts.<sup>52</sup> Many of our contemporaries, both inside and outside the Academy, justify higher education almost exclusively as an instrument for career preparation and think of the university as a convenient structure to house commercially sponsored research.<sup>53</sup> For all practical purposes such a commercialization is eliminating the teaching of those disciplines whose study is the foundation of Christian humanism.<sup>54</sup> A market-driven perspective in which education is viewed as a commodity to be consumed and in which universities increasingly take on the organization and values of for-profit enterprises must be combated.<sup>55</sup> How? In Catholic institutions, by reclaiming their tradition of an integral Christian humanism, a tradition of learning which places the person in community at the center of the educational process.

It greatly troubled Pope John Paul II that “the humanistic character of culture sometimes seems relegated to the periphery, while there is an increased tendency to reduce the horizon of knowledge to what can be measured and to ignore any question touching on the ultimate meaning of reality.” To meet this challenge, he proposed that Catholic universities should dedicate themselves to

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<sup>52</sup> For a recent review of the current situation in Europe, see the various articles in “The Brains Business: A Survey of Higher Education,” *The Economist* (10 September 2005), 3-22.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Eyal Press and Jennifer Washburn, “The Kept University,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, 285:3 (March 2000), 39-54.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, *Globalization and Catholic Higher Education: Working Document* (Vatican City: Vatican City Press, 2004), p. 9; John Dougherty, “From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic University for the Third Millennium,” *Catholic International*, 8:1 (January 1997), 45-46.

<sup>55</sup> See the analysis of Riccardo Petrella, counselor of the European Commission, on the “five wounds” currently afflicting higher education in Europe: *L’éducation, victime de cinq pièges: à propos de la société de la connaissance* (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 2000). For a contemporary analysis of education at all levels in Europe, both secular and Catholic, see A. Vincenzo Zani, *Formare l’uomo europeo: sfide educative e politiche culturali* (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 2005).

“creating a new authentic and integral humanism.”<sup>56</sup> Such a humanism would be inspired by an awareness of human autonomy as well “the sense of responsibility for the spiritual and moral maturity of humankind.”<sup>57</sup> The Pope’s proposal meets head-on the pressure for universities, including Catholic ones, to stress the utilitarian, “to neglect the needs and expectations of persons, to censure or stifle the most basic questions of personal and social existence.”<sup>58</sup>

In order to answer reductionist views of the human person, Catholic universities need to propose front and center a solid Christian anthropology aimed at unraveling the mystery of the human person. Such a reflection on the human person can establish a common ground for people of good will throughout the Academy and beyond, and can facilitate the discernment and integration of what is worthwhile in human progress today.<sup>59</sup> The “truth about the human person,” one of the most frequent phrases in the papal magisterium of John Paul, needs to be embodied in the ethos and enshrined in the curriculum of every Catholic university.

### ***Closing the Gap: International Educational Solidarity***

I now move on to my final point, which takes up a particular moral challenge to Catholic higher education in the twenty-first century. In the contemporary world, the ever widening gap in the social, economic, cultural and technological spheres of human life is a matter of great concern to all people of good will. The inequality evident in this situation is repeatedly addressed in

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<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, Homily for the Jubilee of University Professors (10 September 2000), 4: *Insegnamenti*, 23/2 (2000), 364.

<sup>57</sup> Józef M. Życiński, “In Search of a New Identity: The Opening Address of the Grand Chancellor of the Catholic University of Lublin,” in Christopher Grabowski, Piotr Gutowski and Agnieszka Kijewska, eds., *Catholic Universities in the New Europe* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2005), 16.

<sup>58</sup> 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* (1994), I: 9; cf. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Address to the University Rectors of the Society of Jesus (9 November 1985), 5: *Insegnamenti*, 8:2 (1985), 1230.

Vatican documents and interventions.<sup>60</sup> Given his veneration for his beloved predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI will no doubt continue this tradition of developing the Church's social doctrine, though he has not yet spoken at length about these issues. The injustice of this gap should provoke a determined response from all sectors in the Church, especially from her universities, which are enjoined "to discern and evaluate both the aspirations and the contradictions of modern culture, in order to make it more suited to the total development of individuals and peoples."<sup>61</sup>

Essential to an institution's genuine catholicity, therefore, is the promotion of justice<sup>62</sup> and the Gospel's "option of preference for the poor."<sup>63</sup> Speaking for a worldwide community, more than half of whose members are poor, the Vatican is well aware of the need to serve the marginalized, underprivileged and vulnerable members of society and seeks to convince those on the wealthier side of the divide to be attentive to the cry of the poor in the area of education.

What efforts are being made to bridge the higher education gap in a globalized world?

The unevenness of the resources available to Catholic higher education institutions worldwide is a matter of grave concern. Many universities in Europe and the United States enjoy the abundant resources necessary to meet the demands of teaching and serious research in a technological age. In developing countries, while a very few institutions might be capable of such research, the majority are not.

In a joint statement of the Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, the Holy See clarified its

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2004), nn. 361-369.

<sup>61</sup> John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 45.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 34.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. John Paul II: *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42; *Redemptoris Mater*, 14, 37; *Redemptoris Missio*, 14, 37, 60; *Centesimus Annus*, 11, 57-58; *Ecclesia in Africa*, 44; *Vita Consecrata*, 82.

position in favour of an increased sharing of the Church's educational resources: "It is this asymmetry that calls for cooperation among Catholic institutions worldwide. In the light of the mission of the university to serve, this educational divide can be an opportunity and an avenue where this mandate for service can be realized."<sup>64</sup> This imbalance can be overcome only by cooperative efforts which, in the first place, are promoted by the creative proposals of first-world institutions. How can the Catholic Academy in the United States and, to a lesser extent in Europe, blessed with such enormous wealth, make a significant contribution to institutions of higher learning in the third world? Given the enormous pressure in the United States to foster first-class institutions according to criteria which seem to have little to do with justice, how will such an imaginative and courageous undertaking be incorporated into an institution's reward structure, research objectives and budget priorities?

With ever increasing intensity, the Holy See urges Catholic universities in America and Europe to develop partnerships with institutions in the emerging nations, and especially in Africa. There the need for serious and sound Catholic higher education is more evident than anywhere else in the world. No easy solutions are available. But, it seems to me, that a true mark of an institution's catholicity is the extent to which it takes to heart the need to tithe its own academic and financial resources so as to help build up the educational systems of other local churches. Cooperative projects among Catholic universities of various countries and different economic situations engaged in research together can help all those involved to grow in mutual understanding. Collaboration, as a concrete expression of educational solidarity and ecclesial communion, should be a distinguishing trait of the Catholic Academy.

What Pope John Paul said about the contemporary situation, described as "far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the requirements of justice, and even more of social love,"<sup>65</sup> also applies to the sphere of higher education. To meet the challenge of the educational divide, the Holy See calls for effective international solidarity, an exchange of academic

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<sup>64</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education and the International Federation of Catholic Universities, *Globalization and Catholic Higher Education: Working Document* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2004), p. 19. See the major publications of the conference, held from 2-6 December 2002 in Rome, in the special volume dedicated to this theme in the Congregation for Catholic Education's journal, *Seminarium*, 42:3-4 (2002).

<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 16.

gifts and resources, between wealthy institutions and those still on the road to development.

### **Conclusion**

I believe that since the publication of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, many Catholic universities around the world have become more mature and more able to articulate their Catholic identity. Consequently, they are better equipped to meet the challenges posed to them by the marginalization of faith-based institutions in the Academy, by an educational philosophy which ignores the humanist tradition and by a pseudo-globalized world economy which undermines educational solidarity. Both the imminent prospect of such a papal document in the 1980s and the discussion of it in the 1990s after its publication concentrated the efforts of many to address sensitive topics that they might otherwise have left alone.

As these exchanges continue in the Benedictine pontificate, creative ways must be found to strengthen the Catholic identity of the Church's institutions of higher learning so that they will remain faithful to their noble calling. "Catholic" is not just a label but a fundamental principle informing its organizational, administrative and academic structure, its programs, curriculum, ambience, outreach and the formation of to students. The university's Catholic ethos must be visible and embodied in the concrete decisions of its daily choices and life. While the challenges are still many in America, and perhaps even more so in Europe, there is nothing more thrilling or exhilarating than for a Catholic university to affirm courageously and confidently its specific identity, owning it and rejoicing in its vocation of service to society and the Church.

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