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James L. Heft

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## Almost No Generalizations: Reflections on Catholic Studies

James L. Heft, S.M.

University of Southern California

### Reasons Not to Generalize

Mark Twain once remarked that “no generalization is worth a damn, including this one.” The older I get, the harder it is for me to make generalizations, at least ones that convey the impression that there are few exceptions. Thomas Aquinas wrote that being is multiple and superabundant. But you, the astute reader, will notice already that my first three sentences are generalizations! If we are to learn anything, some of what we come to know has to be in the form of generalizations. The best that we can hope for, it seems to me, is that we make generalizations that admit not only that there are exceptions, but also that reality, as it unfolds in daily events, assumes a wide variety of forms. So, we need to keep our eye on reality as it unfolds, and make generalizations with great care.

There are good reasons to be very careful about generalizations about Catholic higher education in the United States. Recall that the 220 or so Catholic colleges and universities are of very different kinds, very different sizes, with different student bodies, and are located in different parts of a country that sometimes have quite different cultures. Some of these institutions have no graduate programs; some are set on becoming recognized as research universities. All these institutions are staffed and administered by people who themselves are quite different, even though they are all involved in Catholic higher education. Some have student bodies that are 90% Catholic and others less than 40%. Some are mostly residential with traditional undergraduates 18 to 22 years old, and others mainly adult commuters able to attend classes only in the evenings and on weekends. A few Catholic colleges and universities are well endowed and others have trouble annually meeting expenses. A few have doctoral programs in Catholic theology; most do not.

### *A Few Generalizations*

If there are all these differences, what generalizations can be made about Catholic colleges and universities in the United States? One is that over 90%

of these institutions were founded by religious orders whose membership is now in free fall. Compared with 1960, very few religious and priests still serve as full-time faculty members, and most of those who do are approaching retirement. Over 60% of these institutions now have lay presidents. There are many fewer single-sex colleges, especially for women, than there were 50 years ago, and the presidents of those remaining few are more often men than women. By secular academic standards and accrediting agencies, many Catholic colleges and universities offer a better education now than they did 50 years ago. Faculty and students are religiously more diverse than ever before at most of these institutions. If in the 1920s and 1950s there were protracted debates over the lack of academic quality in Catholic colleges and universities, since the late 1960s there have been protracted debates on their catholicity. In the last 30 years, several new Catholic universities have been founded, mainly by lay persons, who want a clearer focus on Catholicism in both the curriculum and student life.

One of the more interesting developments in recent years has been the appearance of Catholic Studies Programs (CSPs). A number of Catholic colleges and universities have highly publicized these programs, and tried with varying success to make them vehicles for the transmission of the mission and identity of their institution. Commentaries on these programs often reflect the ongoing debates about the larger question of the mission and identity of Catholic universities and colleges. The quality of the debate about CSPs on a specific campus often indicates the depth of understanding that faculty and administrators of that institution have of their overall mission and identity. This article begins with a look at CSPs, and concludes with some personal reflections on the larger questions related to the mission and identity of Catholic higher education in the United States today.

### **Recent Periodical Debates**

Courses in several disciplines designed to pass on the Catholic tradition, what have come to be called Catholic Studies Programs, first came to national attention through an article written by Thomas Landy, the founder of *Collegium*, an 8-day summer institute launched in the early 1990s to help junior faculty and doctoral students learn about Catholic intellectual life and encourage them to serve in Catholic colleges and universities. The article, "Catholic Studies at Catholic Colleges and Universities," appeared in the January 3, 1998, issue of *America* magazine. Landy described these programs, which had appeared by then at seven Catholic universities, beginning with the program, now the most extensive and well funded, at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul,

Minnesota. He saw in these programs a trend that allowed Catholic colleges and universities to “address their religious identity and pass along Catholic tradition to students” (Landy, 1998, p. 12). If in the previous 30 years Catholic colleges and universities were interested mainly in opening themselves up to the rest of the world and “shedding the constraints of ghetto Catholicism” (p. 13), Landy stated that these new programs arose because some faculty and administrators realized that the Catholic identity of their institutions could no longer be taken for granted. After describing the content of some of the programs, he described some of the criticisms that have been made of them: a fear that they represent “Restorationist” projects, that their leaders wanted to retreat to the “Catholic ghetto” of old, that they become protected curricular islands that either generate hostility from the rest of the faculty (“We are doing what all of you should be doing”) or relieve the rest of the faculty of responsibility for passing on the tradition (“We’ll take care of it; you can do your secular thing”).

The next national conversation about Catholic higher education in general, and implicitly about CSPs in particular, appeared the following year as a half-dozen articles on this topic in the April 9, 1999, issue of *Commonweal*. Six months later that same year the American bishops would meet to vote on whether they would, as Rome had directed them, approve juridical elements (e.g., the *mandatum* for Catholic theologians teaching Catholic theology) in their application of John Paul II’s 1990 apostolic constitution on Catholic higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Given the pressure coming from Rome and the likelihood, therefore, of a favorable vote (the bishops previously had voted almost unanimously to use a pastoral approach), anxieties among faculty and administration at most Catholic colleges and universities ran high. An editorial introduction to the various articles reflected that anxiety: “Next November when the bishops of the United States gather for their annual meeting they are very likely to approve a set of canonical requirements that would irredeemably alter the character and mission of U.S. Catholic higher education” (“Keeping Colleges Catholic,” 1999, p. 13). The future of these institutions, the editorial continued, was “gravely threatened” (p. 13). If the new juridical requirements were accepted by these institutions, the editorial predicted, they would forsake their “autonomy, academic freedom, and pluralism” (p. 13).

In the face of such immense threats, what should the leaders of Catholic higher education do? Steinfels (1999) recommended three things: first, a “return to the basics” as outlined quite positively in the first half of *Ex Corde*; second, acceptance of the great diversity among Catholic colleges and universities (“a strictly doctrinally defined Franciscan University of Steubenville

and a cosmopolitan Georgetown and a more religiously homogeneous but academically open Notre Dame, and also liberal arts colleges serving working-class women or minority and often non-Catholic returning students,” p. 17); and third, “let bishops be bishops, not errand boys,” which is to say, “take into consideration the actual realities of Catholic higher education in the United States rather than reach a paper solution or get a good report card from Rome” (p. 17).

Many of the same fears mentioned in the editorial and by Steinfelds were echoed by lawyer Paul Saunders who in the mid-1980s served as counsel to Charles Curran in *Curran v. The Catholic University of America*. In an article entitled “Look Before You Leap,” Saunders (1999) claimed that

implementation of the proposed norms will, in short, raise a hornet’s nest of legal issues that will not be resolved easily or quickly and that may result not only in the loss of federal or state aid, but in liability by the university to those who will be adversely affected by such implementation. (p. 26)

In retrospect, these predictions have proven to be alarmist. Other articles in that issue of *Commonweal* reflected a wider range of opinion. Sociologist priest Andrew Greeley (1999), one of the few academics to defend the importance of Catholic education consistently in the 1970s and 1980s, described with many vivid examples how Catholic colleges and universities had been fleeing from their Catholicism, argued that mandates would make no difference, and zeroed in on the need for Catholic research and courses. Greeley had had enough of the “silly season, a time of shallow, angry, ideological romanticism” (p. 27), of “clergy dressing in sweat suits and nuns in Bermuda shorts” (p. 28).

John Cavadini (1999), the chair of the theology department at Notre Dame, tried to lower the temperature of the debate between the bishops and the Catholic academics. He suggested that leaders of Catholic higher education avoid talk of an “impasse.” He encouraged academics to admit that there are problems and also to avoid “calls for academic freedom [which is never absolute anywhere] without corresponding calls for Catholic identity” (p. 21). On the one hand, Cavadini did not want Catholic universities to become simply “an arm of the Church,” or be turned into “glorified pulpits,” and on the other, for theology departments to become “unremittingly critical of the magisterium” (p. 22). He recommended that the bishops take a 5-year moratorium before deciding to implement *Ex Corde* so that the Catholic colleges and universities could think more deeply about how they might embody in serious and creative ways the bold call for a robust Catholic identity sounded in the first part of the pope’s apostolic constitution.

I have summarized the key points of several of the articles in this special issue of *Commonweal* because the points the various authors raised also played themselves out, as I mentioned earlier, in other articles that more directly talk about CSPs. Concerns about creating a “Catholic ghetto” within the university, of cutting off academic freedom to criticize the Catholic tradition, of turning universities into seminaries, of narrowing the breadth and richness of the Catholic tradition in order to force them into current narrow categories of orthodoxy, and of general faculty opposition are also mentioned in articles that argue the pros and cons of CSPs. Landy (1998) noted in his article that at institutions where CSPs never got off the ground, the faculty did “not want to confront contested notions of what constitutes the Catholic tradition” (p. 17). Also mentioned by Landy were fears by some administrators that CSPs would marginalize Catholic content, sequestering them in a small area of the curriculum, or reduce them to simply one more option in the curriculum, such as women’s studies or environmental studies. Other faculty feared that creating a specific set of Catholic courses would make oversight by bishops more likely and hence threaten academic freedom.

A particularly thoughtful article on CSPs that appeared in the theme issue of *Commonweal* was written by Francis W. Nichols (1999), then professor of theology at Saint Louis University. Nichols, generally positive about the contribution that CSPs could make, nevertheless raised some points not explicitly mentioned by other authors. First, he noted the historical evolution of a key department, that of theology, from mainly a catechetical and apologetic emphasis in the 1950s into theological departments, and then in more recent years into religious studies departments that devote a lot of time to the study of the religions of the world. He then asked whether such religious studies departments today would see the push for Catholic studies as a criticism of their own lack of an exclusive concentration on Catholicism. He noted that “the most difficult challenge” (p. 31) facing faculty is actually defining what constitutes Catholic studies. This challenge requires faculty to ask not only what is meant by “Catholic,” but also by “studies.” And if most students today are illiterate when it comes to Catholicism, how will courses that are primarily interdisciplinary rather than remedial function pedagogically? And are not, he asked, interdisciplinary courses hampered with their own difficulties, not least of which is the danger of faculty becoming incompetent in two disciplines? Despite these concerns, Nichols sees CSPs as a positive development, a “diverse work in progress” that to him seems “destined for a secure place” (p. 32) in the future.

These decade-old appraisals of CSPs indicted a mixed, but basically positive report card—say a “B-.” What has happened in the decade since?

### Some Current Programs

Ten years later, there are many more CSPs. But the report card remains mixed and still, in my opinion, basically positive. Before offering an evaluation of the current situation, it would be helpful, I think, to provide a sketch of the current landscape. Googling “Catholic Studies” today produces dozens of results. Some programs list over 50 courses, some gathered in clusters as minors or even majors, and in at least two instances as graduate degree programs. Few programs can boast what St. Thomas in St. Paul can. Starting out in 1993 as an interdisciplinary degree program and established in 1996 as a Center, its now extensive program, still under the leadership of Professor Don Briel, draws 100 freshmen a year who indicate that they intend to major or minor in Catholic Studies. It currently has 325 students in the undergraduate program and aims to have 500 by the year 2013, 10% of the undergraduate population. More than 85% of its students double-major, and it now has 90 students in the graduate program (the university’s Master of Arts Degree in Theology at the School of Divinity enrolls only 37). Besides a residential studies location in Rome, St. Thomas also has on campus two houses for men and one for women in which students majoring in the program can live together. All these opportunities are made possible, in part, because of a \$10 million endowment.

Other programs, while not as extensive, also seem to be growing at places like Loyola Chicago, Santa Clara, Seton Hall, and John Carroll. Some remain quite small. DePaul University, currently the largest Catholic university in the country (over 15,000 undergraduates), lists on its website 63 courses as part of its Catholic Studies Program and 39 faculty who teach these courses from many different departments. However, it currently has only 15 majors in Catholic Studies and 7 minors. Though in existence since 1999, Detroit Mercy had its first certificate (18 credit hours in several disciplines) graduate in 2006, and currently has three students in its program, all of whom will finish in 2009; more students than these, of course, take courses in Catholic Studies, but very few enter the certificate program.

Some Catholic universities, like the University of Dayton where I served for nearly 30 years, have worked for decades to create a culture in which the Catholic intellectual tradition is respected and understood by the whole faculty, and furthered through research and teaching by a growing number of the faculty who teach in all the disciplines and professional programs. Instead of establishing a Catholic Studies program, the faculty leadership at Dayton decided to work over a period of many years, and continues to work, to have dimensions of Catholic intellectual tradition become an integral part

of the required general education program. Dayton's theology program has on average about 80 majors and well over 100 minors. Besides a cluster of courses providing an interdisciplinary focus on Catholicism, a new minor is being offered in Marianist Social Transformation, the Marianists being the founding order of the University. Catholic universities besides the University of Dayton do their "Catholic thing" without calling it Catholic Studies. It is therefore important to google more than "Catholic Studies Programs" if one is to find out what various Catholic campuses are doing to strengthen their Catholic mission and identity.

Descriptions of CSPs at non-Catholic universities are also available on the web at such universities as the University of Illinois at Chicago, which lists 19 courses but only two faculty members, one of whom, Paul J. Griffiths, recently became a chaired professor of Catholic theology at Duke University's Divinity School. The University of California at Santa Barbara, like a number of other non-Catholic universities, has also established a chair of Catholic Studies, held by Ann Taves, and offers courses both on the undergraduate and graduate levels. At Stanford, where 25% of the undergraduates are Catholic (a number reflective of the Catholic population at many prestigious Ivies), and where a vital Catholic campus ministry program draws 2,000 students weekly for Sunday Eucharist (total student population of 13,000), efforts are underway to establish a chair in Catholic Studies. At the University of Southern California, a private university established by but no longer affiliated with the Methodists, I occupy a chaired position in the School of Religion and teach courses in Catholic history, theology, and thought.

All of this is to say that since the 1970s, movements to establish Catholic identity at Catholic universities through CSPs have been growing, and while they are at very different levels of maturity, they represent an effort to address a need that has not been sufficiently met by the ordinary offerings of the curriculum: a focus on Catholic tradition. Moreover, growing Catholic populations of undergraduate students on secular campuses, and a greater openness in the academy to the study of religion, have allowed religious studies, Catholic Studies, and endowed chairs in Catholic theology (or sometimes called Catholic thought) to be established at a number of secular universities.

### **Some Generalizations after All**

Have these efforts been successful in deepening the Catholic mission and identity of Catholic colleges and universities? Have they proven helpful or unhelpful? In this last section of this article, I wish to point out some of the things not often mentioned in print, but are either true or very important to



mention if a fuller picture of the current landscape on the mission and identity of Catholic colleges might become clearer. The observations will be necessarily evaluative, but not without some basis in fact. I should, by way of disclosure, say that for over three decades I have been working on these issues, first at the University of Dayton, but then also in my own research and writing, especially once I became provost of Dayton for nearly 8 years from 1989-1996 and then its chancellor for the following 10 years. A fuller understanding of the university as an institution, what it takes to change the culture of such a complex entity as well as set and implement long-term priorities that are institution-wide—that understanding was, for me personally, the greatest benefit of those very challenging and interesting years in administration. I also had the privilege of serving on the Board of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities for nearly a decade, and chaired that board during the 2 years that the Catholic bishops decided on the final implementation of *Ex Corde*. All of these experiences, including speaking at numerous Catholic campuses around the country, have left me with some understanding of the complexities and opportunities that questions about mission and identity pose for Catholic colleges and universities.

May I now indulge in a number of generalizations not often seen in print, at least in the way I wish to express them? People may well question them, but they are conclusions that I have come to after many years on the ground. They appear in quite succinct form, need fuller development than they have here to avoid misunderstandings, and admit of many exceptions. I begin with some specific observations on CSPs and then move to more general concerns about Catholic universities, and end with two observations about the larger culture in which we live.

### ***Catholic Studies Programs***

The first thing to be said about CSPs is that they constitute a genuine if often uneven effort on the part of at least some of the faculty and administrators to make more explicit the Catholic mission and identity of the university. This effort is an implicit admission that without such an emphasis, the mission of the institution runs the risk of being invisible (which in itself is a sad commentary on the last few decades), or at least less visible than they believe it should be. It is also a clear statement that transmitting the Catholic identity of the institution should no longer be placed upon the shoulders of only a theology department (philosophy departments today are typically more complicated than they were before given the dissolution in the early 1960s of the Thomistic synthesis of philosophy and theology). Nor can that responsibility

be handled mainly by campus ministry staffs, as important as their ministries are. These programs also indicate that the mission of the institution as Catholic is not only religious and moral formation, but also intellectual formation: Catholicism has a history of achievements in such areas as theology and philosophy, social teaching, political thought, music, and aesthetics (unfortunately, art and drama are often stepchildren at our institutions). Finally, these programs begin to rescue “religion” from the tendency in our society to think of it primarily only in emotional and moral terms, with morality being reduced to sexual issues alone.

Second, CSPs can be put in place in ways that are not helpful. If the faculty who lead this effort are perceived by their peers as academically weak to begin with, the programs they advocate will be only tolerated if not outright opposed. If these programs are perceived as being driven by administrators and donors with narrow versions of Catholicism, faculty will reject the program. If the courses lack intellectual rigor, ignore legitimate criticism, or avoid tough questions, many faculty will reject the program. And if these programs are driven by faculty who do not care what other faculty in the university have committed themselves to in terms of their research and teaching, the program will never act as it should, as a leaven within the entire curriculum.

### ***About Catholic Colleges and Universities***

First, Catholic colleges and universities need to be more honest about the challenges they face. Those institutions with sufficient budget, alumni publications and websites, and promotional literature can give the impression that all is well, that there are no disagreements among the faculty, and that the administration and board of trustees understand well the mission of Catholic colleges and universities today. Disagreements among faculty can be healthy or they may be a sign of disaffection with the mission of the university. Administrators, adept as managers and fund-raisers, often lack understanding of Catholicism as an intellectual tradition. Members of the board of trustees typically bring a wealth of managerial and financial advice to the administration, but often have little understanding of the institutional conditions needed to support a vibrant intellectual life among the faculty and why that matters to the long-term survival and quality of the institution. And religious orders now have trouble finding enough of their own members to serve on these boards, where they often feel incompetent to enter into discussions dominated by financial and legal questions. One of the major concerns, therefore, of boards and administrators should be to raise a substantial endowment that would ensure the continuing education of faculty, administrators, and board members

on the nature of a Catholic university, with special emphasis on Catholicism as a tradition that is intellectual as well as religious and moral.

Second, I think it is important to admit that Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, an impressive array of institutions that now constitute nearly 20% of all the Catholic colleges and universities of the world, have not declined from some golden age that reached its peak, say, in the 1950s. The usual declension trope claims that those were the best days because there were so many priests and religious teaching and leading these institutions and that the Thomistic synthesis (the merits of which are too quickly dismissed today) held everything beautifully together. But were these institutions then that academically distinguished? Were their faculties pushing back the frontiers of knowledge? Were not many of our institutions back then more deeply involved in professional education (mainly business, education, and law) than recognized for the depth of their commitment to the humanities or for distinguished graduate education in the sciences? Were not they then, as many still are today, mainly teaching institutions? I am not persuaded that in the 1950s Catholic intellectual life on most of our campuses was actually all that distinguished, even though there were many more religious and priests teaching (and not necessarily writing) then compared with now. Our situation today is better in some respects (faculty credentials and accredited programs), but we now see the need to put much more emphasis on our Catholic mission and identity, as well as on research and publication, especially on issues relevant to Catholic intellectual life. Each age has had its challenges.

On the other hand, my third point is that those who look back to the 1950s are right to recall with gratitude the example of dedication, availability, and service of many of the faculty, especially the priests and religious. In the late 1960s, many higher education institutions no longer thought it appropriate for universities to act *in loco parentis*, that is, to be concerned with the moral formation of their students. Some Catholic universities even allowed their residence life staffs to dispense with that responsibility. Today, we need to concentrate not only on strengthening Catholic intellectual life, but also to offer, especially at our traditional college-age institutions with large residential populations, a moral formation not only through residence life policies and campus ministry services, but also, as in the 1950s, by an emphasis on how the faculty should act—that is, how they teach, how available they are, and how much they care for the formation of the “whole person,” as we often say in our literature. Faculty would do well to take more seriously the moral formation of students often stressed by bishops, and bishops would do well to take more seriously their intellectual formation. Several CSPs include

cocurricular possibilities for students to integrate what they learn in their courses with how they live and use their time outside of class.

Fourth, why do faculty at some of the biggest and best-endowed Catholic universities feel the need to dismiss efforts, mainly by lay persons, to establish new Catholic universities that focus more explicitly on their Catholic mission and identity? And why do the leaders of these new Catholic colleges dismiss other Catholic universities as secularized and no longer faithful to the Catholic tradition? Both types of institutions have problems and strengths, and each can learn something from the other. For example, the bigger and older institutions might learn some ways that they can be clearer about their Catholic commitment, while the newer ones could learn that there are several legitimate forms of Catholic higher education. Mutual lessons could be multiplied.

Fifth and finally, why is the performance of a play such as the *Vagina Monologues* the litmus test for some Catholics as to whether a Catholic university is Catholic or not? Why should having a thoughtful pro-choice speaker on campus be anathema? What should be of concern, rather, is a Catholic college or university where such a play is not thoughtfully criticized in the light of a fuller understanding of the dignity of the human person and richer understanding of human sexuality. Of equal concern should be a university in which there are few faculty capable and willing to engage respectfully a pro-choice speaker, make compelling arguments not only to end abortion, but also to commit the resources of the community for the support of the poor and women who are in crisis pregnancy. Such vibrant criticism and engagement could provide an excellent exposure for students to Catholic intellectual life in action. A superb example of such a thoughtfully faithful argument is Sidney Callahan's (1986) article, "A Case for Pro-Life Feminism: Abortion & the Sexual Agenda."

### ***Challenges Facing Faculty***

First, one of the major problems for faculty is to open up the types of questions that they can legitimately explore in their disciplines. Many faculty are so wedded to the current shape of their discipline that the religious and ethical dimensions actually inherent in their subject areas are arbitrarily excluded. Yale theologian Denys Turner (2002) warns that too many academic disciplines allow only "sensible questions whose route to an answer is governed by agreed methodologies" (p. 136). Turner worries, and I also worry, that in our universities and colleges there is the danger that

we will reverse the traffic between question and answer so as to permit only such questions to be asked as we already possess predetermined methodologies for answering, cutting the agenda of questions down to the shape and size of our given routines for answering them. (p. 136)

Too many disciplines today simply lop off the big questions, and remain safe in predictable, often admirably precise, methodologies. Within such methodological restrictions, Catholic intellectual life suffocates. Those few faculty who do raise the big questions, say in economics or law or engineering, are often deemed by colleagues as going “soft,” as lacking rigor, as asking questions for which there are no “real” answers. Meeting this huge academic challenge is rarely talked about, perhaps because it is rarely clearly perceived. Even courses in Catholic Studies—courses where the borders of the disciplines should be porous—can actually perpetuate narrow disciplinary focuses, or worse, never rise to the legitimate rigors of the traditional disciplines.

Second, nothing can halt progress in strengthening the Catholic mission of an institution more than disaffected tenured Catholic faculty. All of us know stories about faculty who are Protestants or from other religious traditions, such as Islam and Judaism, who are supportive of efforts to enhance Catholic tradition academically. Catholic faculty who harp about bishops, who endlessly criticize magisterial teachings, and regularly chronicle missteps by administrators rarely contribute positively to the mission of their institution. None of this is to say that bishops, any more than faculty, are beyond criticism, or that thoughtful criticism of official teachings of the Church cannot be a genuine contribution to the development of doctrine, or that no administrators are inept. It is, however, to say that it would be nice if disaffected Catholic faculty (I believe that their number is actually decreasing) took early retirement.

Third, the faculty need to develop a more adequate understanding of Catholic intellectual traditions. Debates about just what constitutes the Catholic intellectual tradition are normal. In fact, there is no one answer to what it includes. Philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre (1990) has reminded us that all living traditions are historically extended and socially embodied debates about what really matters. Anyone who asks for “the seven key points of an effective” Catholic intellectual tradition, or desires to know “exactly” what it includes, inevitably reduces that tradition to a few definitions. Von Balthasar (1987) believed that truth is “symphonic,” that is, truth always draws on several notes simultaneously, and warned academics, especially theologians, to pay close attention first to aesthetic experiences (embodiments of beauty), then to their dramatic forms (embodiments in persons, especially the saints), and only

finally to engage in theological reflection (an always inadequate effort to speak about God and the things of God [Heft, 1980]. For an excellent brief description of the multifaceted Catholic imagination, see the Catholic Studies website of Santa Clara University under the title “Catholic Studies Colloquium”).

### *Theology and Theologians*

First, I believe that apologetics and catechesis still remain important for university students, undergraduate and graduate. In the *Commonweal* article referred to earlier, Cavadini (1999) described well why:

The goal [of a university theology course] is to provide students with the astonishing awareness that faith—yes, the very familiar and “simple” faith of their family and friends—can speak just as articulately and sophisticatedly as the other sciences and arts; that it can withstand questioning and sophisticated critique; that it can be self-critical; that it has had expression in the many genres represented from Gregory’s life of Benedict to Thomas’s *summae*, from Hildegard’s visions to Dante’s *Commedia* and everything in between; that faith can still be itself and speak in a variety of cultural voices; that it is embraced by sophisticated liberals as well as sophisticated conservatives. (p. 22)

What committed professors of chemistry, political science, or German do not enter the classroom with the hope that their students will come to love the subject to which they have committed their own intellectual lives? Why should theology not be catechetical, apologetic, as well as critical? Theologians should literally love their subject, and with even greater reason than other professors who teach disciplines that do not directly deal with God.

Second, the *mandatum* for Catholic theologians never became the disaster that the *Commonweal* lead story predicted. Understood properly, it can be a good thing if conditions for its granting and removal are carefully monitored by both theologians and bishops; rogue bishops can be as problematic as dissenting theologians. At most Catholic colleges and universities theology courses constitute only 2 of 40 courses students must take to graduate. On many campuses much more influential on many students are their business, social science, and science courses, where various forms of methodological reduction (regular arbitrary exclusion of ethical and religious issues) are often the rule. What is more, administrators and development officers find it easier to raise money for sports, buildings, and professional education (except for education) than for the humanities and social sciences. Without enlightened and persistent leadership by administrators, these imbalances go uncorrected.

### *The Culture We Live In*

The classic secularization thesis—that religion would disappear with the process of modernization and the advances of science—has turned out to be partly true and partly false. In Europe, where the thesis was formulated over a hundred years ago, there is widespread secularization. Less so in the United States, though the media and universities in general are more secular than are the cultures in which they exist. In the United States, however, where religious pluralism and energy are very evident, religion is often a-intellectual, and/or kept in the private sphere. Understood in this way, most people do not look for religion to make cognitive claims or provide a public platform that can contribute to the common good. In such an atmosphere, a public Catholicism, and especially Catholic Social Teaching, has trouble taking root. This atmosphere also makes it difficult for Catholic universities to deepen Catholic intellectual traditions.

Second, Catholicism as a big “C” and a small “c” are both critically important. The culture we live in pushes some faculty and administrators to emphasize only the small “c.” They focus on ideas that most everyone will find unobjectionable: those dimensions of Catholicism that are “all inclusive,” that affirm a both/and approach, that celebrate the importance of reason (the natural law tradition affirms a common humanity and a solid basis for universal forms of human rights and responsibilities), and themes related to creation and respect for the environment. In doing so, they avoid the less attractive dimensions of Catholicism, such as magisterial teaching authority, dogmas, moral teachings that condemn abortion, homosexual acts, and the recent statements banning the ordination of women as priests. Such people also seem to believe that it would be off putting to speak much about Jesus, except as an example of service and love. They would rather speak of “values” than “truths,” of insights rather than dogmas, of the “people of God” rather than Holy Mother the Church. The Eucharist is a celebration and not also a sacrifice. This tendency is widespread in the academy. On the other hand, I understand why people want to be careful about using “insider language” in an environment where we want to be able to welcome the stranger. Nonetheless, I think it is important to point out that without the big “C,” the small “c” will soon morph into Christian values, and if we are not careful, will soon become a bland humanism, and eventually all that is truly distinctive of Catholicism runs the risk of disappearing. Our universities need to be not just generically Christian, but explicitly Catholic with all that includes, especially a commitment to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. We need to find ways to rediscover the truth that Catholic colleges and universities are

inclusive communities. We embrace diversity because we affirm that God creates everyone in the divine image. The Catholic academic culture is more intellectually stimulated because of rather than despite dogmas. Catholic higher education institutions are more unified and international through magisterial teachings. That some teachings that are not dogmatic will be pushed by some as though they were, that some members of the hierarchy will seek to close off thinking that is faithful but also critical, that some faculty will criticize Catholicism out of ignorance, and that some members of the laity and bishops will continue to confuse legitimate diversity of views among Catholic scholars as a lack of fidelity to the Church—none of these unfortunate but seemingly predictable postures should lead us to deemphasize what is genuinely Catholic.

Third, lay people are now and will continue to be the faculty and leaders of Catholic colleges and universities. In a number of institutions, the charism of the religious orders will likely no longer be emphasized, unless lay people can make sense of it for the institutions they have inherited and for the work they do. No religious order has been promised to exist to the end of time; the Church has, but in what condition, no one knows. The intellectual resources of Catholicism, however, are richer and deeper than those of any religious order. I expect those Catholic universities that strengthen their mission and identity will do so by drawing primarily on Catholicism, both its big “C” and small “c,” and secondarily on the charisms of the orders that founded them. In the Catholic Church we have come only of late to begin the development to genuine forms of lay spirituality. The challenge for the lay leaders of our universities will be to distinguish the intellectual mission of their institutions as Catholic, and, if possible, continue in fresh ways the charism of their founding orders.

### **Conclusion**

All of this is to say that the challenges before us are formidable. Catholic Studies, led by capable faculty and supported by thoughtful administrators, should be a help in focusing more clearly the Catholic mission and identity of our very diverse Catholic colleges and universities. Some campuses enjoy resources that others do not. Some have a core of faculty who can lead this effort credibly, but others have few such faculty. In retrospect, Landy’s decade-old article holds up well. I have updated it a bit, but added a number of other challenges that we who are committed to Catholic higher education need to face honestly. I repeat what one author affirmed a decade ago: Catholic Studies is here to stay. May it grow in depth and intellectual vitality.



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*James L. Heft, S.M. is the Alton Books professor of Religion and president for the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California. Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Rev. James L. Heft, S.M., University Religious Center, Suite 102, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0751.*