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## The Influence of Catholic Culture Type on the Spiritual Lives of College Students

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*This article considers the Catholic culture of American Catholic colleges and universities in light of their Catholic mission and purpose—that of fostering and drawing students to a deeper knowledge and understanding of truth and themselves in relation to Truth, who is God. Drawing on Catholic theology, philosophy, magisterial teachings, and scholarship on culture and human development, the study explores the relationship between Catholic culture and students’ spiritual development at Catholic colleges and universities. It applies the Morey-Piderit Catholic culture framework and analyzes survey responses from more than 10,000 college students to identify the relationship between Catholic culture type and spiritual development of students during college. The findings indicate that the predominant culture type found at the majority of Catholic colleges is proving ineffective in supporting the spiritual development of their students.*

### Keywords

Catholic culture, spiritual development, institutional effectiveness, mission

Faith, ethics, and personal beliefs hold an important and widespread role in the lives of Americans. According to a 2016 Gallup Poll, 74% of Americans identify as Christian and 53% say religion is very important in their lives (Newport, 2016). Interestingly, “the most significant trend in Americans’ religiosity in recent decades has been the growing shift away from formal or official religion” (Newport, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. However, the number of Americans who express “a deep sense of wonder about the universe has risen” (Masci & Lipka, 2016). This trend is mirrored among college students. In 2014, 62% of students reported that their spiritual life is important to them (Volpe, 2014). And, according to the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life, “young people are much less likely to affiliate with any religious tradi-

<sup>1</sup> In this instance, informal religion is defined as identifying as “no religion,” “atheist,” “agnostic,” and “no response.”

tion” (Pond, Smith, & Clement, 2010, p. 3). This includes those who are raised Catholic. Though these young people may not be entirely opposed to religion, “the possibility exists of losing them as members of the Catholic Church if we do not help young adults express their spirituality in the context of religion” (Overstreet, 2010, p. 261).

Over the past several decades, college students’ expressed interest in and commitment to religion and spirituality has shifted and assumed a more central part of their worldview (Astin & Astin, 2005). However, until recently, higher education “has paid relatively little attention to the students’ ‘inner’ development—the sphere of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding” (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, p. vii). There is a clear call from scholars and practitioners in higher education to consider and support the spiritual development of students (Chickering et al., 2006; Love, 2001; Palmer, 1983; Sikula & Sikula, 2005; Strange, 2001). Indeed, Chickering et al. (2006) notes that among many campus leaders, student affairs professionals, faculty and students, there is agreement that “a renewed commitment to recognizing and honoring spirituality in the academy is essential if we are to succeed in providing higher education that integrates intellect and spirit” (Chickering et al., 2006, p. 17).

Concurrently over the past several decades, the Catholic Church entered a period of renewed focus on and examination of the mission, purpose and nature of Catholic identity within Catholic colleges and universities. Prompted in large part by Pope John Paul II’s 1990 Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the mission of Catholic colleges and universities, and what constitutes a “Catholic” college continues to be an enduring topic of discussion and debate (see for example Camosy, 2016; Harmon, 2013; Morris-Young, 2012). As Bolduc (2009) states, “American Catholic colleges and universities invest a great deal of energy in attempting to understand and articulate what constitutes ‘true Catholic identity’” (p.126).

In referencing the second Vatican Council’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)*, Pope John Paul II (1990) encouraged Catholic colleges and universities to foster students in their

search for truth and for meaning throughout their lives, since ‘the human spirit must be cultivated in such a way that there results a growth in its ability to wonder, to understand, to contemplate, to make personal judgment, and to develop a religious, moral, and social sense.’(No. 23)

This study considers the Catholic culture of American Catholic colleges and universities in light of their ultimate mission and purpose—that of fostering and drawing students to a deeper knowledge and understanding of truth and themselves in relation to Truth, who is God.

Very little attention has been given to understanding the intersection of an institution's Catholic identity and culture with student development (Estanek, 2002b; King, 2014; King & Herr, 2015). Research on institutional Catholic identity and student development is limited and much is based on case studies of a small number of individuals or institutions (e.g., Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001). By drawing on both secular and Church perspectives, this paper builds upon prior research and further illumines the discourse by identifying the relationship between Catholic identity (as expressed through the Catholic culture) and human development at Catholic colleges and universities. It also assesses the effectiveness of Catholic cultures in supporting the spiritual growth and development of students attending Catholic colleges and universities.

### **Catholic Identity**

Catholic identity in higher education has its origin in the purposes of Catholic colleges and universities. Catholic colleges and universities were established to prepare students in both academic and spiritual matters, to be a place where faith and reason come together, and to train future church leaders—namely priests. As Garrett explains in his historical account of higher education, “Catholic higher education’s initial purpose was to prepare future clergy” (2006, p. 229). And this purpose endured. Up through the establishment of the American university in the late nineteenth century, religious and moral instruction were included within the college curriculum (Stamm, 2006).

As colleges and universities evolved during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, “spirit lost ground to science...and religious perspectives began to appear out of place in the secular milieu” (Bryant et al., 2003, p. 723). Initially, these changes affected primarily Protestant institutions, while Catholic institutions lagged behind the national trend. But, what took place in Protestant institutions starting in the 1890s parallels what occurred in Catholic institutions in the 1960s (Burtchaell, 1998). Catholic colleges and universities “fended off both Modernism and Americanism until the destabilizing 1960s, when lay autonomy, an embarrassment about scholarly mediocrity, and the drive for recognition by the then secular American academy ...abruptly destroyed

the Catholic self-assuredness of an intellectual advantage” (1998, p. ix). In the 1960s, the status of many Catholic colleges and universities began to mimic the earlier pattern of their Protestant counterparts, with regard to emphasizing academics over moral and religious training. The impact of these changes on Catholic institutions’ Catholic identities is still being experienced today.

No single factor served as the sole impetus for the transformation of Catholic colleges. Rather, the transformation of Catholic colleges and universities which began in the 1960s has its roots in a series of occurrences. The most influential of these being, (a) social and political acceptance of Catholics and a loss of the sense of need for distinctively Catholic institutions; (b) new approaches to Catholic philosophy and theology that encouraged stronger assimilation into American culture; and (c) calls from within the Catholic academy for higher academic standards. All of this took place amidst the general cultural upheaval of the 1960s (Gleason, 1992). As Gleason notes, “the effects of this confluence of forces on Catholic higher education were manifold and profound” (1992, p. 246) and led to what has been coined an ‘identity crisis’ within Catholic higher education.

Following on the heels of the Second Vatican Council, in 1967, the Land o’ Lakes statement established increased autonomy and academic freedom within Catholic institutions (Gleason, 1995) and quickly became “the classic doctrine on how modern Catholic universities were to be defined primarily by their membership in the modern educational establishment, sharing the same autonomy, academic freedom, functions, services, disciplines, public, and norms of academic excellence” (Burtchaell, 1998, p. 595). The ensuing “identity crisis” of Catholic colleges and universities was not a question of *whether* to maintain their Catholic affiliation, but of *how* (Gleason, 1995). While the Catholic college or university remains “one of the few places where religious scholarship can truly flourish alongside secular scholarship” (Roche, 2003, p. 5), “few would dispute that in the pursuit of academic excellence many Catholic colleges underestimated the challenge posed by secularism. Preserving the distinctive Catholic identity of historically Catholic colleges is a real concern” (Reidy, 2006, p. 12).

Amidst the backdrop of the varied practices by which Catholic colleges and universities maintained their ties both to the Church and their respective founding religious orders, in 1990 Pope John Paul II called for a renewed commitment to the Catholic nature, identity, and purpose of Catholic colleges and universities through the issuance of the Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (*Ex corde*). In *Ex corde* John Paul II reaffirmed the mission and

purpose of Catholic higher education, called on institutions to clearly articulate and embody their Catholic identity, and set forth standards for institutional policy and practice that relate to all aspects of university life including governance, administration, spiritual development of students, faculty hiring, and relationship to the Church hierarchy. After ten years of dialogue with the Vatican, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *The Application of Ex corde Ecclesiae for the United States (Application)*; an application of the *Ex corde* requirements as they relate to American Catholic colleges and universities. While the issue of Catholic identity was implicit in the discussions leading up to the promulgation of the *Application*, lost was “the fundamental conversation about the intrinsic nature of what makes Catholic higher education Catholic” (Hellwig, 2005, p. 5).

But the Church has much guidance to offer on the concept of Catholic identity. Catholic colleges and universities “are privileged places for a dynamic dialogue between faith and reason, Gospel and culture” (Currie, 2011, p. 355) and through its magisterial teachings the Church calls upon Catholic colleges and universities to understand “the complexity of personhood, with regard to knowledge and learning and their implications for the relationship between faith and reason” (D’Souza, 2008, p. 266). In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II reminds the Catholic world that “men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them” (1998). Renowned Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain asserts that “to be true to its Catholic identity, a Catholic university must be able to show how it contributes to human liberation, freedom, and unity in face of the proliferation of knowledge” (D’Souza, 2008, p. 254).

Catholic philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre maintains that true Catholic identity is determined in great part by the faculty through the establishment of the curriculum (MacIntyre, 2001). However, Catholic identity does not consist of simply adding a religious or spiritual overlay to the existing curriculum (Roche, 2003), nor does it stop at the classroom door. It must integrate the spiritual, historical, and philosophical into a cohesive whole (Haldane, 2004). Indeed, Catholic identity “demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith” (Benedict XVI, 2008). Any “divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and, far from advancing freedom, inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral intellectual, or spiritual” (Benedict XVI, 2008).

### Culture

Culture as a concept is a cross-disciplinary term and is used in different ways in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Schein, 1990). The definition of culture developed by noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz provides a foundational understanding that is incorporated in more recent discussions on culture and its influence. Geertz defines culture to be a “transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (1973, p. 89). And this definition is applicable to understanding an organization’s or institution’s culture. Though an organization’s culture is an integrated whole (Louis, 1983), it “has many elements, layered along a continuum of subjectivity and accessibility. More objective elements become vehicles for transmission of less tangible, more subjective facets of culture” (Rousseau, 1990, pp. 157–158). These elements are commonly classified as: artifacts including language, rituals, and myths; behaviors, espoused values, and goals; and beliefs and basic underlying assumptions (Morey & Piderit, 2006; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Rousseau, 1990; Schein, 1990; Strange & Banning, 2001).

Scholars of institutional culture maintain that an institution’s culture is driven by the institutional mission, is expressed through content, symbols, and actors, and pervades all areas of the organization. Institutional culture penetrates and influences all aspects of the organization. It is expressed through history, language, symbols, heroes, traditions, values and assumptions—all of which are undergirded and driven by the institutional mission (Birnbaum, 1988; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Dill, 1982; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Louis, 1983; Masland, 1985; Morey & Piderit, 2006; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Strange, 2003; Tierney, 1988). Within higher education, as with any institution, “culture affects every part of the enterprise” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 7). Cultural elements that influence the student experience include physical structure, architecture, subcultures, organizational structures, environmental press, and social climate (Strange, 2003). There also exist intellectual and curricular components (e.g., philosophy requirement, the integration of faith and reason, behavioral norms, etc.) that guide and inform the non-curricular portion of the institution (Benne, 2001). Lonergan maintains that “a university is a reproductive organ of cultural community. Its constitutive endowment lies not in buildings or equipment, civil status or revenues, but in the intellectual life of its professors. Its central function is the com-

munication of intellectual development” (1988, p. 111). An educational culture then serves to define, unite, and convey the mission of the institution and its various manifestations.

Morey and Piderit in their description of culture maintain there are “two minimum conditions necessary for the existence and continuation of organizational cultures and subcultures: *distinguishability* and *inheritability*” (2006, p. 31). A distinguishable culture is one that maintains “apparent differences” between its own culture and that of competitors—characteristics that make the culture unique. An inheritable culture is one that contains elements that can be passed on or taught to new members as a means of assimilation (Morey & Piderit, 2006).

An educational institution’s culture has long been known to have a significant impact on student learning and development. Noted American education pioneer John Dewey held that “we never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment. Whether we permit chance environments to do the work, or whether we design environments for the purpose makes a great difference” (as quoted by Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 2). G.K. Chesterton elaborates on this conviction,

every education teaches a philosophy; if not by dogma then by suggestion, by implication, by atmosphere. Every part of that education has a connection with every other part. If it does not all combine to convey some general view of life, it is not education at all (1950, p. 167).

Within Catholic colleges and universities, there exists the great potential for a distinct Catholic culture. John Paul II asserts that “a faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not faithfully lived out” (1982). And, as Haldane explains, “a Catholic philosophy of education...must build an extensive structure around the simple yet unlimited claim that we exist for the sake of God’s glory” (2004, pp. 219–220). A Catholic culture then is “comprised of the group of practices and behaviors, beliefs, and understandings that form the ever-deepening context that nourishes the community of believers and energizes their commitment to Christ through the Church” (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p. 33).

The Catholic culture of an institution spans several dimensions of its life and operations. In applying organizational culture theory to the Catholic culture, the primary contributors to the Catholic culture of Catholic colleges and universities are the content, symbols, and actors (Morey & Piderit, 2006).



The sacramental nature of Catholic culture provides a wealth of content and symbols that give definition to the culture and fosters the spiritual side of life at the same time. Further, the rituals and religious practices within the Catholic faith tradition provide opportunities for greater communal identity formation. Guido explains that,

the sacraments of the church (its rites, rituals and liturgy) and a distinctively Catholic culture (art, music, images and icons, the language of faith and the history of ideas) offer not only a context in which conversion can take place, but the experience of God and the sacred that is at the heart of that conversion (2001, p. 13).

The Catholic culture then is influenced by the institutional mission, institutional policies that govern curricular and extra-curricular life, the members of the community including students, faculty, and administrators, and Catholicism itself.

### **Human and Spiritual Development**

Theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan describes human development as, “a series of emergent leaps from the logic of one position to the logic of the next” and “a creative response” that synthesizes precepts, inner impulses and external circumstances (Lonergan, Morelli, & Morelli, 1997, p. 262). Love and Talbot assert that, “human development is incomplete without consideration of spiritual development,” (1999, p. 368) and “by failing to address students’ spiritual development in practice and research we are ignoring an important aspect of their development” (1999, p. 362).

Both secular and religiously affiliated institutions are interested in approaching the development of the student as a whole person as opposed to considering the multiple components of student development in isolation (Capeheart-Meningall, 2005; Manning, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stamm, 2006). Estanek points out, “*Ex corde Ecclesiae* takes seriously the idea of the ‘holistic education of the student’ and argues that the Catholic identity should be experienced in all aspects of the life of the campus,” (2002a, p. 23). The majority of Catholic college and university mission statements reflect a commitment to providing a holistic education that includes students’ spiritual and moral development (Estanek, James, & Norton, 2006).

Scholars both within and outside the Catholic academy suggest that religious and spiritual development of students does not occur in isolation

from cognitive or intellectual development. Thomas Aquinas understood that reason, emotions, and morality within each person are all interrelated with each other (Ryan, 2001). Accordingly, in discussing intellectual, affective, and volitional virtues, Aquinas “integrates cognitive and moral psychology in a single theory of the structure and powers of the human soul” (Haldane, 2004, p. 193). Indeed “Christian anthropology actually stresses the substantial unity of the human person when it designates the soul as the body’s form” (Cesario, 2009, p. 58). Maritain defines this as “the individual metaphysical and spiritual unity and integrity of the person” (D’Souza, 2008, pp. 254–255). Pope Benedict reminds providers of Catholic education of their duty to ensure that the

public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church’s Magisterium, shapes all aspects of an institution’s life, both inside and outside the classroom. Divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and, far from advancing freedom, inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral, intellectual or spiritual. (Benedict XVI, 2008)

The Catholic Church provides guidance for Catholic colleges and universities pertaining to moral and spiritual development. *Gravissimum educationis* (*Declaration on Christian Education*), calls for spiritual and intellectual guidance for those attending Catholic colleges and universities. Further, the Church recognizes the need to address the education of the whole person; “graduates of these institutes should be outstanding in learning, ready to undertake the more responsible duties of society, and to be witnesses in the world to the true faith” (Paul VI, 1965a). Similarly, in *Dignitatis humanae* (*Declaration on Religious Liberty*), the Church encourages “those responsible for educating others, to try to form men with a respect for the moral order” (Paul VI, 1965b) through inquiry, teaching, instruction, communication, and dialogue.

Secular human development theories (cognitive, psycho-social, and spiritual) ask similar questions about meaning, and seek to be integrated with other aspects of a person’s life (Bussema, 1999). Cognitive theories distinguish the progressive stages of processing and analyzing information as people age and mature. Psycho-social theories classify the ways in which people advance in their interactions and relations with their surroundings and others. Spiritual development is best understood to be a process that

is intertwined with the cognitive and affective development (Chickering et al., 2006; Estanek, 2008; Love & Talbot, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Indeed, “focusing on the role of spirituality in the educational process is a continuation of the examination of the multiple ways in which people construct knowledge” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 26).

The two primary human development theories that address issues of spiritual development were developed by James Fowler and Sharon Parks. According to Fowler, faith is not a separate or distinct aspect of a person’s life, rather a means of defining personal identity, meaning and purpose in life. He explains that progression in the stages of faith “is in part a function of biological maturation and of psychosocial, cognitive and moral development” (1981, p. 276). While the same issues or concepts may be considered in progressive stages, they will be understood and integrated into the person’s understanding in different and more complex ways. Parks (1986) describes three influences of spiritual development: cognition, the relationship of self to authority, and the community. Arthur Chickering’s development theory, while not a spiritual development theory, includes questions about religious affiliation and believing, and developing a sense of self; areas naturally related to spiritual development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As Chickering explains, student spiritual development “is highly interactive and is interdependent with other major vectors of human development: integrity, identity, autonomy and interdependence, purpose and meaning” (2006, p. 221). All three theorists understand spiritual or faith development to be a process of meaning making and thus, define it as inextricably linked to other aspects of development, particularly cognitive and psycho-social development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986). Of these three, the most significant influences come from interpersonal, social, and cultural interactions (Love, 2001; Parks, 2000). Catholic colleges and universities, then, are compelled to consider the means by which they can facilitate this developmental process.

### **Catholic Culture and Spiritual Development**

The extent of influence that the collegiate culture has on students must not be overlooked, particularly in religiously affiliated institutions. Chesterton was ahead of his time in recognizing the alignment between Catholic philosophical and secular psychological perspectives about the relationship between culture and spiritual development:

Our schoolmasters profess to bring out every side of the pupil; the athletic side; the political side; and so on; and yet they still talk the stale cant of the nineteenth century about public instruction having nothing to do with the religious side. The truth is that, in this matter...[Catholics] are on the side of all modern psychologists and serious educationists in recognising the idea of atmosphere. They sometimes like to call it culture. (1950, p. 169)

Research confirms that the influence of the culture and environment on the character development of students at Christian colleges is greater than at other types of institutions (Kuh, 2000).

*Ex corde* and the *Application* affirm both the Church's and Catholic higher education institutions' commitment to students, and clearly articulate the importance of supporting them in both their academic and spiritual development (John Paul II, 1990; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000). Students in particular are to be supported in the development of their whole self as "the education of students is to combine academic and professional development with formation in moral and religious principles" (John Paul II, 1990). The *Application* confirms this educational approach, and asserts that students have the right to be instructed and supported in their faith (whether or not they are Catholic), and to be "educated in the Church's moral and religious principles and social teachings and to participate in the life of faith" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Within a Catholic college or university, the institution's Catholic culture necessarily will play some role in shaping students' spiritual development. There is widespread agreement that part of the duty and responsibility of Catholic higher education is to incorporate spirituality and religiosity into the intellectual sphere of development (Benedict XVI, 2008; D'Souza, 2008; John Paul II, 1990). Roche notes that "a Catholic university must encourage its students to become intellectually ambitious, to recognize not only the modern Christian ideal of active service to the community, but also the more traditional Christian ideal of contemplation" (2003, p. 32). Nonetheless, uncertainty remains within Catholic colleges and universities about how best to achieve this end. As Stamm explains, "Catholic colleges and universities around the country are grappling with how to foster spiritual development 'in the Catholic tradition' for students who no longer identify their spirituality with the traditional Catholic rituals and practices" (2006, p. 87).

Institutional culture has a deep influence in the spiritual development

process (Tisdell, 2003), and “spiritual development, like student development, can either be fostered or inhibited by the environmental context in which students live, grow, and develop” (Love & Talbot, 1999, p. 369). By informing, educating and reinforcing the mission and values of the institution, and incorporating them into the culture through the curriculum, experiences, practices, and policies, an institution can foster and promote spiritual development of its students (Dalton, 2006). The college or university’s influence on students also extends beyond the classroom; “students are influenced as much, if not more, by their experiences outside of the classroom as by what occurs in class” (Estanek, 2002b, p. viii), including the religious experiences and culture of the institution (Chickering et al., 2006; Estanek, 2002b; Kuh, 2000). MacIntyre (2001) reasons that only through an integrated understanding of their educational experiences will students of Catholic colleges be equipped to understand themselves in relation to the greater world, and be able to make choices throughout life. He maintains that integration is essential and includes “what has been learned in all the different areas of the university’s life: in the language laboratory and in the chapel, on the basketball court and in the library, in the social relationships of the residence hall and in those of the philosophy seminar” (2001, p. 17).

As a means of understanding and classifying Catholic culture within the context of American Catholic higher education, Morey and Piderit (2006) identified four distinct types of Catholic culture found in Catholic colleges and universities. According to the Morey-Piderit framework, each institution determines its own culture type based on cultural elements including: institutional mission; policies that govern academic and residence life; student affairs practices; religious activities; personnel practices as they relate to faculty and staff; and the percentage of Catholic students enrolled in the institution. Table 1 provides an overview of each culture type. The multiple components of the Morey-Piderit framework reflect the importance of the many facets that create a culture, as well as the need for comprehensive, multi-faceted integration in order to truly affect and foster spiritual development.

Table 1

*Morey-Piderit (2006) Catholic Culture Types*

| Culture type | General description and cultural goal  |
|--------------|--|
| Immersion    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract and educate committed Catholic students; deeply educate, encourage, and support knowledge and practice of the Catholic faith.</li> <li>• A vast majority, if not all, of the student body are Catholic.</li> <li>• “The goal is to attract committed Catholic students, to educate them more deeply about the Catholic tradition, and to both encourage and actively support their practice of the faith” (p. 62).</li> </ul>   |
| Persuasion   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student body is comprised of Catholics and non-Catholics</li> <li>• Catholic identity and nature is promoted to all. Instill in all students a mature knowledge of Catholic faith (including non-Catholics).</li> <li>• Religious maturity in practicing the faith for Catholic students.</li> <li>• Cultural goal is “to instill in all students, whether Catholic or not, a certain religious maturity in knowledge of the Catholic faith” (p. 63).</li> </ul>  |
| Cohort       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student body is comprised of Catholic and non-Catholic.</li> <li>• Recruits a “cohort” of committed Catholic students.</li> <li>• Dual objectives: 1) Attract high-academic students regardless of religion, and train them to use influence to promote Catholic teachings but not necessarily on issues of controversy; 2) Within smaller Catholic “cohort” promote understanding and appreciation of Catholic faith.</li> <li>• Cultural goal: “graduate talented students with the potential to operate in important sectors of civil, business, and cultural society” (p. 65).</li> </ul> |
| Diaspora     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minority (&lt;50%) of students are Catholic.</li> <li>• Non-Catholic students are open to teachings of Catholic faith.</li> <li>• Cultural goal is “to orient students to the Catholic Church without requiring much knowledge or practice.</li> <li>• These colleges are constrained, in terms of the Catholic dimension of their educational program, by the type of student body they can attract” (p. 64).</li> </ul>   |

### Purpose of Study

Contemporary research and discussion on Catholic identity and culture within Catholic higher education focuses either on individual components of culture such as mission statements, or on the impact of Catholic culture at a single institution or among select individuals within a single institution. Discussions surrounding student outcomes and institutional effectiveness are centered on metrics such as enrollment, retention, and graduation rates—indisputably critical data points—to the exclusion of an assessment on those things which are more difficult to measure, but hold equal if not greater import in light of the ultimate purpose of Catholic education.

In an effort to bring a renewed awareness of how Catholic colleges and universities can more effectively support students' spiritual development, this study analyzes the intersection of Catholic culture and student spiritual development and answers the following questions:

1. Is there a relationship between religious affiliation and Catholic culture?
2. What is the relationship between students' perception of institutional support for spiritual development and students' own deepened sense of spirituality?
3. Are there differences between the type of Catholic culture and the perceptions of Catholic and non-Catholic students about institutional mission, support for spiritual development, diversity, personal understanding, or personal religious practices?

### Methods

#### Data Sources and Instrumentation

The overall population of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States includes over 220 institutions, a majority of which are sponsored by their founding religious organizations (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2017). The population of Catholic colleges and universities for the study is the group of Catholic institutions that participate in the Consortium of Catholic Colleges and Universities of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE is an annually administered voluntary survey that assesses student engagement of freshmen and seniors across a broad range of academic and co-curricular activities. The NSSE Consortium of Catholic Colleges and Universities (CCCU) was created in 2004 with 15 participating institutions, expanded to 67 participating institutions in 2007

and in 2017 to over 110 institutions. An average of 31 institutions participate each year. The sample is not representative; participation in both the NSSE and CCCU is voluntary, and some of the most well-known and prominent Catholic institutions do not participate, most notably: Notre Dame University, DePaul University (the largest Catholic university based on enrollment) and all Jesuit institutions<sup>2</sup>.

In the development of both the NSSE and CCCU instruments, the reliability of the instruments was addressed through the phrasing of the questions, asking students about events that occurred no more than six months prior to the survey, and the voluntary and confidential nature of the survey design and administration (Boylan, 2005; Kuh et al., 2001). Standardized reliability coefficients (Chronbach's alpha) for the four sections of the NSSE are (.85) for college activities, (.90) for educational and personal growth, (.84) for opinions about the school, and (.70) for reading, writing and educational program characteristics (this increases to (.80) when items asking about memorization are removed) (Kuh, 2004). Similar reliability analysis was conducted in the development, pilot, and administration of the CCCU instrument and produced a reliability coefficient (Chronbach's alpha) of (.88) for the items on the CCCU survey (Boylan, 2005). Individual items from the NSSE and CCCU surveys are selected for use in this study.

### Participants

Survey data used in the study are from the 2006 and 2007 surveys and represent approximately 30% of all Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. 32 of the 48 participating Catholic institutions from 2006 and 2007 agreed to release their NSSE data, resulting in a response rate of 66.7%. Adjusting for missing data, the survey data sample for the study represents 10,582 respondents from 32 institutions. Students self-identified their religious affiliation, and Catholics comprise 54.4% of the sample, and non-Catholics 45.6%. The sample is almost evenly divided between freshmen, 47.9% and seniors, 52.1%, but dominated by female students, with 73% female, and 27% male. (The high proportion of females is due in part to the inclusion of all-female institution(s) in the sample.)

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<sup>2</sup> Jesuit institutions participate in a separate consortium, Consortium of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, whose survey questions focus on social justice and service as opposed to spirituality.



### Analytical Techniques

To discover the relationship between an institution's Catholic culture and student spiritual development, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

First, document analysis was conducted to identify and categorize each institution according to the Morey-Piderit Catholic culture framework. Specific documents collected for analysis include: institutional mission and purpose statements; policies that govern general education requirements and academic undergraduate degree requirements; university catalogs; student life handbooks; policies and guidelines that govern student organizations; faculty handbooks; personnel policies; campus ministry schedules and programming; admissions marketing materials; and other publicly available information. Catholic culture analysis involved the development of a priori codes derived from the Morey-Piderit Catholic culture framework, document analysis and coding, and both data triangulation and analyst triangulation<sup>3</sup>.

Once each institution's Catholic culture type was identified, inferential statistical analyses of NSSE and CCCU student survey data were performed to consider student attitudes, opinions, and beliefs, and the relationship between those opinions and the type of Catholic culture. The 120 survey questions from the NSSE and CCCU were analyzed with exploratory factor analysis using a priori codes derived from human and spiritual development literature as well as through principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation. After factor rotation, five factors were identified for use in the analysis as shown in Table 2. (Two additional factors were eliminated due to low Chronbach alpha scores below .60).

Using these five factors, multiple inferential statistical analyses were conducted including: correlation; chi-square; analysis of variance (ANOVA) with "Catholic culture type" as the independent variable; and Tukey post-hoc analyses to reveal any differences between culture types.

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<sup>3</sup> The results of the culture analysis were reviewed by an expert in the field of higher education and an expert in the field of Catholic higher education. Both reviewers agreed with the conclusions of the Catholic culture analysis portion of this study. Upon completion of these reviews, the results of the cultural analyses were coded for entering into the NSSE survey dataset.

Table 2

*Factor Analysis Results*

| Factor name   | Chronbach alpha | No. of survey items |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|
| Understanding of institutional mission                | .866            | 7                   |
| Environment that supports diversity                   | .864            | 5                   |
| Perception institution supports spiritual development | .856            | 8                   |
| Personal understanding of values and self             | .821            | 4                   |
| Personal religious practices                          | .686            | 3                   |

## Results

### Catholic Culture

The Morey-Piderit Catholic culture framework was effective for analyzing the Catholic culture type of each institution in the sample. Each of the four culture types (Immersion, Persuasion, Cohort, Diaspora) is represented in the sample. The distribution of culture types among the 32 institutions in the study is: Immersion: 3 (or 9.4%); Persuasion: 24 (or 75%); Diaspora: 4 (or 12.5%); and Cohort: 1 (or 3.1%). The overwhelming majority of the institutions are classified as having a Persuasion culture type. Institutions with a Persuasion culture make up 75% of the sample, and only one Cohort institution is in the sample; Persuasion institutions appear to be overrepresented and Cohort institutions underrepresented.

While a specific culture type was identified for each institution in the study, intra-cultural differences are present. Within institutions that share the same culture type there exist a range of policies and practices. This is most clearly seen in Persuasion institutions, but is also evident in Immersion and Diaspora institutions. Further, the range of practices is expressed in multiple functional areas particularly in academic policies, student affairs, residence life.

Of the six functional areas the Morey-Piderit framework identifies as expressing the Catholic culture type, two proved not significant in determining Catholic culture type: personnel practices and campus ministry. At most institutions, information on personnel practices and policies that serve to inform the culture analysis is not publicly available. While in a few cases

personnel information was available and assisted in determining the culture type of the institution, overall the functional area proved not as relevant in this study.

In contrast, information on campus ministry and religious programming is widely available for every institution. And, while descriptions of campus ministry at each institution coincide with one of the four Catholic culture types, the range of programming and services offered through campus ministry are consistent across all four culture types. Thus, campus ministry is not a strong differentiator in determining culture type.

The other four functional areas (institutional mission and goals; academic requirements for coursework in theology, philosophy, and religion; student affairs policies; and residence life policies as they relate to Catholic teachings on personal and interpersonal behavior) provide information that illuminates and clarifies the culture analyses. Determining the culture type of a given institution is only possible by considering data from multiple functional areas; one functional area does not in and of itself enable a culture type determination to be made. And, the functional areas in which institutional Catholic culture is expressed are consistent across Culture type.

### Student Perspectives

Findings from the Catholic culture analysis were used as a variable in the analysis of the student survey dataset. The distribution of culture type within the sample of student survey data is: Immersion 6.0% ( $n = 654$ ); Persuasion 79.4% ( $n = 8618$ ); Cohort 1.6% ( $n = 174$ ); Diaspora 13.0% ( $n = 1406$ ).

First, chi-square tests were performed to explore any relationships between Catholic culture type and student religious affiliation. Table 3 shows that there is a highly significant relationship between Catholic culture type and students' religious affiliation, and that the proportion of Catholic students is higher in Immersion and Persuasion institutions and lower in Cohort and Diaspora institutions. These findings align with the Morey-Piderit framework culture definitions (see Table 1).

Table 3

*Percentage of Catholic and Non-Catholic students by Catholic Culture Type*

| Religious Affiliation | I <sup>a</sup><br>(n=654) | P<br>(n=8,618) | C<br>(n=174) | D<br>(n=1,406) | Total<br>(n=10,852) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Catholic              | 73.7                      | 55.8           | 44.8         | 37.5           | 54.4                |
| Non-Catholic          | 26.3                      | 44.2           | 55.2         | 62.5           | 45.6                |

<sup>a</sup>Catholic culture type: I=Immersion; P=Persuasion; C=Cohort; D=Diaspora

To answer the second research question, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted for all respondents by culture type. All the correlation coefficients (see Table 4) indicate a strong positive relationship, and suggest that regardless of an institution's Catholic culture type, students who perceive support for their spiritual development report having a deepened sense of spirituality<sup>4</sup> while in college.

Table 4

*Correlation between "Deepened Sense of Spirituality" and "Perception of Support for Spiritual Development" by Catholic Culture Type*

| Culture type | Correlation |
|--------------|-------------|
| Cohort       | .778*       |
| Diaspora     | .759*       |
| Immersion    | .755*       |
| Persuasion   | .719*       |
| All students | .729*       |

\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

To answer the third research question, multiple ANOVA tests were conducted. For all five factors, the ANOVA tests indicate there are significant differences between the perceptions of both Catholic and non-Catholic students at all Catholic culture types for each of the five factors. (See Table 5).

<sup>4</sup> "developing a deepened sense of spirituality" is a specific item on the NSSE survey and is distinct from the five factors

Table 5  
Table of Means of Student Perceptions with Religious Affiliation by Catholic Culture Type

| Factor <sup>a</sup>                                   | Religious affiliation | I <sup>b</sup> | P    | C    | D    | F      |
|---|-----------------------|----------------|------|------|------|--------|
| Perception institution supports spiritual development | All                   | 3.68           | 3.50 | 3.73 | 3.60 | 31.02* |
|   | Catholic              | 3.80           | 3.57 | 3.79 | 3.66 | 23.34* |
|   | Non-Catholic          | 3.36           | 3.40 | 3.68 | 3.56 | 20.46* |
| Understanding of institutional mission                | All                   | 4.14           | 3.90 | 4.05 | 3.98 | 31.54* |
|   | Catholic              | 4.21           | 3.94 | 4.04 | 4.00 | 24.98* |
|   | Non-Catholic          | 3.93           | 3.84 | 4.06 | 3.96 | 10.92* |
| Environment that supports diversity                   | All                   | 3.83           | 3.92 | 4.38 | 4.13 | 58.26* |
|   | Catholic              | 3.89           | 3.99 | 4.44 | 4.19 | 28.90* |
|   | Non-Catholic          | 3.67           | 3.84 | 4.33 | 4.09 | 40.60* |
| Personal understanding of values and self             | All                   | 3.30           | 3.01 | 3.19 | 3.12 | 34.39* |
|   | Catholic              | 3.44           | 3.10 | 3.25 | 3.19 | 30.91* |
|   | Non-Catholic          | 2.90           | 2.90 | 3.14 | 3.08 | 14.62* |
| Personal religious practices                          | All                   | 1.97           | 1.66 | 1.76 | 1.69 | 61.93* |
|   | Catholic              | 2.12           | 1.77 | 1.95 | 1.82 | 58.11* |
|   | Non-Catholic          | 1.53           | 1.51 | 1.61 | 1.62 | 9.62*  |

<sup>a</sup> Means are on a scale of 1-5 with 5 meaning strongly agree, except factor "personal religious practices" where scores are lower because two items in the factor have a scale range from 1-2, and one has a scale range of 1-2.

<sup>b</sup> Catholic culture type: I=Immersion; P=Persuasion; C=Cohort; D=Diaspora

\* p<.05

Tukey post-hoc tests were conducted to identify between which culture types students' perceptions significantly differed. Results indicate that the perceptions of all students at Immersion institutions are significantly higher than students at both Persuasion and Diaspora institutions on four factors: "perception institution support spiritual development"; "understanding of institutional mission"; "personal understanding of values and self"; and "personal religious practices"; and significantly lower on than all other culture types for "environment that supports diversity". In contrast, perceptions of students at Persuasion institutions are significantly lower than students from all other culture types on "perception that institution supports spiritual development"; "understanding of institutional mission"; and "personal understanding of values and self".

## Discussion

### Culture Analysis

Conducting the Catholic culture analysis using the Morey-Piderit framework proved effective; it provides a constructive means for identifying and distinguishing Catholic culture. Surprisingly, campus ministry programming does not aid in differentiating Catholic culture. Across all four culture types, institutions generally host a similar range of programs. Most offer at least one daily Mass, and the array of liturgical and ministerial programming and support for students is indistinguishable. The relatively minor role of campus ministry in distinguishing Catholic culture is particularly evident in comparison with other functional areas included in the culture analysis such as mission statements, academic policies, student affairs and residence life policies.

The high percentage of Persuasion institutions (75%) in the study reveals a gap in the culture analysis framework. This suggests that a more refined Catholic culture framework may better capture the nuances within any given culture type. Introducing additional criteria within the definition of the Persuasion culture would enable greater differentiation among those institutions with a Persuasion culture. For example, the analysis revealed similar academic policies, but a wide range of practices regarding fulfilling requirements in theology, religions and/or philosophy. At some institutions only Judeo-Christian courses are eligible, other institutions require at least one Catholic and/or Christian course; and still others allow students to fulfill requirements without being exposed to any Catholic or Christian theology or philosophy. Other potential means for refining the Persuasion culture type

include campus site visits and focus groups or interviews. These may provide additional insight into how culture is expressed in the physical environment, and the interaction of students within the environment.

### **Spiritual Development and the Influence of Catholic Culture**

Across all culture types, there is a strong positive correlation between a student's perception of the institution's support for student spiritual development and student's reporting a deepened sense of spirituality. From the student perspective, the perceived support of spiritual development is an important element in students' perceptions of their own spiritual growth. According to the students in this study, their deepened sense of spirituality is directly related to their perceptions of an environment that supports spiritual development, and suggests that if students do not feel supported within an environment, they may be less likely to develop spiritually. This is consistent with findings of other researchers on the relationship between collegiate environment and student spiritual development and with person-environment theories (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 1981; Kuh & Gonyea, 2005; Parks, 1986, 2000; Sanford, 1966; Tisdell, 2003).

The findings also reveal that when it comes to students' spiritual development the type of Catholic culture matters. That the perceptions of students at Immersion institutions are highest on four factors suggests strong consistency between stated institutional objectives and students' perceptions and practices as they relate to spiritual development. Because the Immersion culture is characterized by an ardent commitment to attracting, educating, and encouraging a deeper faith practice among committed Catholic students, it is not surprising that the perceptions of students at Immersion institutions vis-à-vis the relationship between Catholic culture and spiritual development is highest. This confirms previous research that "the most influential institutions—those most likely to have distinctive imprints on their students have a powerful, conforming campus culture" (Kuh, 2000, p. 10).

Standing in stark contrast are the findings that both Catholic and non-Catholic students' perspectives are lower at Persuasion institutions than in any other Catholic culture type. By definition the Persuasion culture is found at institutions that clearly identify themselves as Catholic, state that they seek to support the faith development of Catholic and non-Catholic students, and desire to instill in all students mature knowledge and practice of the Catholic faith (Morey & Piderit, 2006). These findings highlight a serious disconnect and discrepancy between the stated institutional objectives of Persuasion

institutions with regard to student spiritual development and the reported perceptions and practices of students attending Persuasion institutions.

Across the board non-Catholic students' perceptions are highest at Cohort institutions and lowest at Immersion and Persuasion institutions. Notably, the low rank at Immersion and Persuasion institutions of student perceptions of an environment that supports diversity may be reflective of the composition of the student body and the Catholic orientation of institutional programming and policies. Immersion students are comprised of almost 100% Catholic students, and the majority of students at Persuasion institutions are Catholic. Students may consider the predominance of Catholic students to be a sign of exclusion as it relates to people from other religions or backgrounds. Regardless, these findings on the perceptions of non-Catholic students reveal a need on the part of both Persuasion and Immersion institutions to consider the support they extend to the spiritual development of non-Catholic students.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study have direct implications for the work of university faculty, administrators and practitioners, in matters related to both institutional Catholic culture and the spiritual development of students. This is best illustrated in the area of campus ministry. While campus ministry is a logical setting for the expression of Catholic culture, this study affirms that Catholic culture can neither be determined nor is it solely expressed through campus ministry programs or initiatives. Just as spiritual development involves the whole person (intellect, psyche, emotions, physical), an institution's Catholic culture and support of spiritual development must also span all aspects of the student experience.

For an institution's mission and by extension its Catholic culture to be fully expressed, it must penetrate all aspects and functional areas of the institution. As it relates to Catholic culture, many institutions fail to fully implement their mission across the institution (Gambescia & Paolucci, 2011); instead Catholic culture is isolated and allocated to the domain of a single or select few areas.

Catholic theologians and philosophers have warned about the risks of a compartmentalized or poorly developed Catholic identity. McIntyre (2001) warns that if the Catholic identity of the university is not well established through the curriculum, "the default will be to mimic the secular institutions. Roche expands on this,



If the Catholicism of Catholic universities were reduced, however, to enriching the liberal arts ideal with a spiritual dimension, these universities would not differ greatly from any number of Christian colleges. And if their Catholicism were reduced to the development of a distinct curricular and scholarly focus, Catholic universities would not differ, at least formally, from any number of other universities that have developed niche identities with overlapping spheres (2003, p. 9).

Lonergan puts it more acerbically when he asserts that nobody should presume “that a second-rate Catholic university is any more acceptable to God in the New Law than was in the Old Law the sacrifice of maimed or diseased beasts” (1988, p. 111).

To truly exhibit a strong Catholic culture, Catholic colleges and universities need to clarify and consistently manifest their Catholic culture throughout all aspects of institutional life. This calls for increased and intentional integration of the Catholic culture and those elements that support spiritual development into the academic, residential, and social aspects of the student experience (Astin, A. & Astin, 2005; Astin, H. & Antonio, 2004; Capeheart-Meningall, 2005; Dalton, 2006a; Love, 2002). King and Herr (2015) found that daily encounters have the most profound and lasting effect on students:

Whether in sports, music, or academics, the frequency and repetition of actions is what impacts people most in these endeavors. We should not expect Catholic identity to be much different. What students encounter most frequently will have the greatest effect (p.205).

No single culture type is perfect, though these findings clearly demonstrate that some are more effective than others. Immersion is most effective in supporting Catholic students, Cohort in supporting non-Catholic students, and Persuasion least effective in supporting both Catholic and non-Catholic students.

The significantly lower levels of support perceived by students at Persuasion institutions reveals a troubling failure of Persuasion institutions to successfully support the spiritual development of their students (Catholic and non-Catholic). Persuasion institutions account for over 50% of all Catholic colleges and universities in the United States (Morey & Piderit, 2006). By their own account these institutions seek to foster and develop a mature knowledge and practice of the Catholic faith in their students. And yet, ac-

According to their own students, they are mediocre at best in doing so. Clearly there is a significant discrepancy between the stated objectives and student experience.

On the part of Persuasion institutions there is a need for increased commitment to strengthening institutional Catholic culture and supporting the spiritual development of their students. While the specific elements of a supportive environment are not identified within the context of this study, Persuasion institutions need to ensure they are creating and fostering an environment that supports their students' spiritual development. This is not to disparage students' efforts in pursuing their own spiritual development, rather to provoke institutions to assume a more prominent role in the establishment and expression of institutional Catholic culture and an environment that supports student spiritual development.

#### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

As noted in the methods discussion, the sample used in this study was not representative, and many notable and diverse Catholic institutions were not included in the sample. Consequently, the findings in this study, while substantiated by the data, are neither as complete nor as conclusive as they might be with a more representative sample. It would be useful to have the involvement of a greater number and type of Catholic institutions, particularly Jesuit institutions of which there are none in the study. This would allow for greater comparisons of the influence of founding orders on the expression of Catholic culture. An expanded sample also might yield a more diverse student sample and thus facilitate exploration of the perspectives of non-traditional students (e.g., online learners, commuter students) and racial and ethnic minorities. This is particularly important as the demographic profile of college students continues to evolve.

As Catholic institutions seek to better support student spiritual development and understand how best to meet students perceived needs, there is a need to collect more reliable data. To date, there has not been an instrument designed for a widespread study of spiritual development. Future research on this topic would benefit from the creation of such an instrument; one specifically designed to elicit feedback and understanding of the elements that influence students' spiritual development. The instruments used in this study served as a good starting point, but going forward, better metrics and instruments are needed to assess (1) the truly distinguishing elements of Catholic culture; and (2) the impact of culture on student perceptions and experiences,

including student spiritual development. To pursue additional research on student spiritual development, revisions need to be made to the existing CCCU instrument, or a separate instrument should be developed.

Because the data used in this study are ten years old, a follow up study with more recent data also would be informative. Any changes in outcomes could then be explored against the baseline as established in this study. Updated results may reveal new practices and techniques related to the expression of Catholic culture and its consequent impact on students' spiritual development.

This is the first study of its kind, and the first study to incorporate the Morey-Piderit model of Catholic culture. The Morey-Piderit model, developed in great part for internal use within the Catholic college setting, if expanded upon, would enhance future studies that explore the relationship between Catholic culture and the expression of that culture at an experiential level. In addition, a more representative sample would likely result in a higher number of Cohort institutions. While the findings in this study suggest that the Cohort model is an effective one in terms of the consistency between stated institutional objectives and student perceptions and practices, because these data are from a single institution, no firm conclusions can be drawn. Further, the Cohort institution in this study exhibited many characteristics of a Diaspora culture, and thus is not the best prototype for a Cohort culture. There remains a need for further exploration of the effectiveness of the Cohort culture as it relates to student spiritual development.

Finally, while some factors that influence student spiritual development were identified in this study, there remains much more to be understood about specific institutional factors that strengthen student spiritual development.

### Conclusion

The influence of a culture is profound. The influence of Catholic culture at Catholic colleges and universities can have an eternal impact. Namely leading souls to truth. Findings from this study confirm that a culture which is truly effective in fulfilling its mission is one that is intentionally deliberate, wholly integrated, expressed and lived across the spectrum of activities by all the actors, and manifest in all their actions.

Of perhaps greatest concern is the general finding that at the vast majority of Catholic colleges and universities the spiritual development of students is not being well attended to. And this is neither the fault nor the sole

responsibility of those in campus ministry. Quite the opposite. It is a call to the entire Catholic university community to reconsider how the Catholic identity of the institution might be more effectively defined, expressed, and experienced across the institution.

Catholic institutions have an important role in student spiritual development, and the findings from this study challenge Catholic colleges and universities to be more faithful in fulfilling that role by comprehensively incorporating institutional Catholic culture across all areas of the institution and institutional life and pursuing with greater attentiveness the spiritual development of their students. For the students' sake and the sake of the whole Church.

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