

WHAT NEXT? FAITH, REASON, AND BUSINESS PROGRAMS AT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

HANK HILTON AND PETER LORENZI

Tradition tells us that Catholic colleges and universities nurture the interplay of faith and reason. Vatican Two reminds us that Catholic colleges exist so that “the convergence of faith and reason in the one truth may be seen more clearly” and that this claim “follows the tradition of the doctors of the Church and especially St. Thomas Aquinas.” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 10). The tag line – that Catholic universities feed the interaction of faith and reason – has endured for centuries.

But that phrase’s meaning has changed. Much has been written about faith, reason, and universities, but little has been written about the evolution of the tag line’s meaning or about its relevance to business programs. That dearth of analysis motivates this paper. The essay surveys the recent evolution of the phrase’s meaning and then considers its future relevance for Catholic business programs. The paper concludes that business programs can imbue the phrase with exceptional meaning and that, by doing so, business programs can lead a graced revival of Catholic higher education.

The Evolving Meaning of “The Interaction of Faith and Reason”

The history of Catholic higher education in the United States breaks, so far, into two periods. Stage One began with the founding of Catholic colleges, the first major wave of which began in the middle of the nineteenth century. Stage Two started to replace Stage One after World War II. By the early 1970s, Catholic higher education had moved completely into Stage Two.

In analyzing how the meaning of “the interaction of faith and reason” has evolved, it is useful to focus on three markers of that change: the balance of faith and reason, the nature of intellectual formation, and the nature of faith formation.

The Balance of Faith and Reason in the Faith-Reason Partnership

Faith formation started out as the senior partner in the faith-reason partnership. The pursuit of intellectual formation mattered but, throughout Stage One, faith formation was the more equal of the two partners. The emphasis on faith formation reflected the *raison d’etre* of the orders and dioceses that founded the colleges. Evidence of that emphasis comes from many sources.

Prior to the 1970s, “Catholic psychology and sociology textbooks . . . always started with Catholic teachings on morality and the nature of man and only then proceeded to issues specific to the subject matter” (Morris p. 269). The curriculum promoted faith formation by requiring all students to complete the equivalent of a minor in Philosophy, a discipline that took students to a deeper, stronger, and much more precise understanding of their faith. Catholic colleges assumed that their students already knew their religion and that philosophy would carry students to a deeper understanding of their faith. Sodalities, co-curricular life, and liturgical life furthered the faith formation.

Staffing practices also revealed the primacy of faith formation. Prior to World War II, priests and religious were almost automatically granted the rank of full professor and religious superiors, not boards of trustees, chose the college presidents. The schools reserved the most cherished ranks for those most qualified to advance the faith.

Stage Two then made intellectual formation the senior partner in the faith-reason partnership. Faith's promotion and reason's demotion reflected a concentrated desire to correct what John Tracy Ellis referred to in the 1950s as the:

“overemphasis which some authorities of the Church’s educational system in the United States have given to the school as an agency for moral development, with an insufficient stress on the role of the school as an instrument for fostering intellectual excellence. That fact has at times led to a confusion of aims and to a neglect of the school as a training ground for the intellectual virtues.”¹

The ensuing effort to make reason the more equal partner took many forms. Professors stopped using specifically Catholic texts, even in theology and philosophy. Students no longer had to complete the philosophy minor and used most of the newfound electives to study their majors. Faculty hiring focused on recruiting scholars who could enhance the school's academic reputation, regardless of their ability to contribute to faith formation. Priests and religious had to compete like everyone else for jobs and for promotion and the board of trustees replaced religious superiors as the ultimate authority. Reason displaced faith as the more equal of the two partners. The changes cleared the way for a recent, classic Stage Two claim by a Boston College business dean, “Religion plays no role in the curriculum at the graduate level at Boston College.”²

Neither Stage One nor Stage Two put faith and reason in a balanced partnership. Stage One made faith the more important partner. Stage Two put reason in that role.

The Quality of Intellectual Formation

Stage One Catholic colleges provided an unconventional intellectual formation. It differed significantly from the intellectual formation occurring at the benchmarks of their day, the Ivy League colleges and the major public universities.

Philosophy requirements made Catholic colleges unusual. So did the presence of priests and religious. Most Catholic schools had meager budgets, endowments, laboratories, and libraries and so, for the most part, could not recruit or retain the type of world-renowned faculty whose presence announced conventional success. Moreover, the Catholic schools' best graduates tended to pursue advanced studies in medicine, law, and other professions rather than in arts and sciences. Graduates' preference for professional schools, which became an additional emblem of their unconventionality, suggested to John Tracey Ellis that Catholic colleges failed to produce “scholars of distinction,” (p. 375), “true intellectuals” (p. 361), or a corps of graduates who pursued “pure scholarship” (p. 355). Ellis believed that, compared to the most reputable colleges, Catholic colleges were terribly unconventional in not producing renowned scholars in arts and sciences.

Ample evidence indicates that the most influential educational organizations regarded that *unconventionality as unacceptable*. The Association of American Universities (AAU) accredited very few Catholic colleges in the 1920s. In 1934, the AAU certified sixty-three U.S. schools to offer “doctor’s degrees.” Only two were Catholic, Catholic University and Notre Dame. While it is unlikely that Catholic colleges offered an inferior education, it is clear that they offered an education that many regarded as *unacceptably unconventional*.

Pressures from inside and outside the world of Catholic colleges subsequently stirred an energetic pursuit of conventionality. Rather than question the prevailing criteria, Catholic colleges decided to satisfy them. The decision steered some schools away from their core competencies and comparative advantages, but it also made many schools *acceptably conventional* and yielded undeniable enhancements in terms of instruction, facilities, reputation, applications, and ability to increase tuition and salaries. *U.S. News and World Reports’* annual survey of U.S. colleges, the new bible of academic acceptability, currently ranks many Catholic colleges among the country’s best. That survey shows that Catholic colleges have become *acceptably conventional*.

The intellectual formation at Catholic colleges and universities has thus undergone one major, evolutionary change. It evolved from *unacceptably unconventional* in Stage One to *acceptably conventional* in Stage Two.

The Nature of Faith Formation

Faith formation, both at Catholic colleges and in other parts of the Catholic world, has changed in innumerable ways. One particularly important marker of that change – the balance of freedom and accountability – has itself changed considerably.

In Stage One, students experienced faith formation as a process involving much accountability and relatively little freedom. Those charged with the task of faith formation, faced a three-part job description. They had to instruct students in the precepts of the faith, encourage behavior that aligned with those precepts, and hold students accountable for what they knew and did. A 1972 lawsuit against religious colleges in Maryland points to the perceived primacy of accountability over freedom:

“Each of the institutional defendants is a sectarian, educational institution engaged in the teaching and practice of religion, a substantial purpose of which is to inculcate religious values. Each is controlled in whole or part by a particular church. Each compels obedience to the doctrines and dogmas of a particular religion, requires instruction in theology and doctrine, and does everything it can to propagate a particular religion.”³

Stage Two, largely a product of the 1960s and 1970s, then provided a new model of faith formation, one rooted in freedom rather than in accountability. Schools stopped holding students accountable for their faith formation. Students faced no requirement to explain

their faith or their choices either inside or outside the classroom. The above-mentioned legal case found that:

“. . . Academic freedom prevailed on campus. (Loyola) admitted students and hired faculty who were not members of the affiliated church, (does not) require attendance at religious services (but does) require students to study theology . . . according to the academic requirements of the subject”⁴

Neither Stage One nor Stage Two truly blended freedom and accountability. Stage One stressed accountability. Stage Two stressed freedom.

STAGE THREE AND BUSINESS PROGRAMS AT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

No stage, in Catholic colleges or anywhere else, lasts forever. Stage One gave way to Stage Two and Stage Two will give way to Stage Three. The prospect of the next transition stirs three critically important questions: what might “the interaction of faith and reason” mean in Stage Three; what role might business schools play in the schools’ transition into Stage Three; and; what exactly might business schools do in Stage Three?

What Might “The Interaction of Faith and Reason” Mean in Stage Three?

All three markers – the balance of faith and reason, the nature of intellectual formation, and the nature of faith formation – have undergone significant change and are poised for more. Past changes suggest likely directions for upcoming changes.

In terms of the relationship between faith and reason, Stage Three could be the first in which faith formation and intellectual formation strike authentic balance and become truly equal partners in the “interaction of faith and reason.” Neither Stage One nor Stage Two provided that balance.

In terms of intellectual formation, Stage Three could move Catholic schools beyond the Stage One situation of *unacceptably unconventional* and beyond the Stage Two experience of being *acceptably conventional*. Stage Three could be the one in which intellectual formation at Catholic colleges is *acceptably unconventional*. They could, for the first time, be true to both the call from Athens and the call from Jerusalem.

Finally, in terms of faith formation, Stage Three could allow Catholic colleges to enter the still untested realm in which students are both free to pursue their religious convictions and accountable for their choices.

Table One summarizes what has already happened in Stages One and Two and what “the interaction of faith and reason” might mean in Stage Three.

TABLE ONE: ASPECTS OF FAITH-REASON PARTNERSHIP IN THE THREE STAGES

	STAGE ONE	STAGE TWO	STAGE THREE?
PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON	Faith is more equal partner	Reason is more equal partner	Faith and reason are equal partners
NATURE OF INTELLECTUAL FORMATION	Unacceptably unconventional	Acceptably conventional	Acceptably unconventional
NATURE OF FAITH FORMATION	Accountability trumps freedom	Freedom displaces accountability	Freedom AND accountability

What Role Might Business Programs Play in the Upcoming Transition?

The inevitable transition from Stage Two to Stage Three calls for capable leadership. Business programs have the numbers, the credibility, and the skills to lead it.

Stage Two has not only created most business programs at Catholic colleges – there were only a handful during Stage One – it has also given them great popularity and great enrollments. Business programs at Catholic schools are more popular than they are at most other schools. Nationwide, business degrees account for roughly 12 percent of all undergraduate degrees conferred. At Jesuit schools, the share now stands at 25 percent. At the graduate level, the story is similar. The typical U.S. university confers 25 percent of its graduate degrees in business. The typical Jesuit school confers 50 percent. Business programs have become a major presence at most Catholic colleges. Prevailing perceptions frequently fail to acknowledge the enrollments in business programs, but they are, in fact, very large. Business programs are not side show boutiques. They are big enough to lead Catholic colleges into Stage Three of the faith-reason interplay.

Business programs, despite their numeric prominence, are generally not regarded as part of the inner sanctum of Catholic colleges. They are not part of the proverbial old-boys humanities network that many regard as the soul of the Catholic college. Business programs are something of the outsider. That status yields definite disadvantages. But it also provides one major advantage. It places business programs in the category of likely leaders for the upcoming transition. Philosophy, Theology, and other humanities departments have, for decades if not centuries, carried most school's Catholic banners. The new stage calls for new leadership, credible leadership that has no major ties to past transitions and no Stage Two *status quo* to defend. Business programs enjoy credibility.

Business programs also have the skills required to facilitate institutional change. Business faculties possess much of the expertise and experience required to facilitate productive transition. As agents of organizational transformation, they are very well qualified to lead schools' efforts to revitalize their understanding of "the interaction of faith and reason."

What Exactly Might Business Programs Do in Stage Three?

Stage Three – in which faith and reason become equal partners, intellectual formation becomes acceptably unconventional, and faith formation blends accountability and freedom – will require business programs to undertake actions that suit their mission. The actions could include

anything from the small scale development of optional retreats and suggested readings to the institutionalization of think tanks and academic journals.

This paper endorses a more middle-of-the-road option, one that commits the schools to Stage Three, does not initially make enormous demands on resources, and enables schools to conduct the right experiments, collect the right data, refine the project, and grow with a wisdom that enables them to develop quality programs that interact faith and reason. We advocate the development of courses in Faith and Business.

The courses we envision are *not* about business ethics and *not* about social responsibility. Neither are they specialized efforts in scripture studies or systematic theology, *per se*. Rather, they are about requiring students to identify their own belief systems and to connect the dots between those systems and their work. The program would, of course, treat atheism and agnosticism as it treats all other faith traditions, as belief systems that require the student to understand how that tradition understands many truths, including how it regards the interaction of human and divine labors, what it asks of workplace decision making, and what it demands of the work/leisure trade-off.

Properly delivered, such a course would change faith and reason into mutually respectful partners, would make business programs at Catholic colleges acceptably unconventional, and would cultivate an exemplary mix of accountability and freedom. This course could easily mark the first moment of business programs providing a new and much needed renovation of the meaning of “the interaction of faith and reason.”

1 Ellis, 1955, p 377

2 Business Week: B-School News July 9, 2007, 10:01PM EST Taking B-School on Faith Is your business school experience going to be all that different if you attend a religiously affiliated institution?

3 Varga, 1990, p. 502

4 Varga, p. 507