

Preface

by the Reverend Dennis Dease,
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My sense of poignancy in presenting this third set of summer seminar essays on the Catholic nature of the university is more acute than in the previous two years. It is not happenstance that the center position of the five-year series was given to the role of the faculty.

As important as "the idea" of a Catholic university is (the topic of the first year), and as fundamental as the curriculum is in embodying and conveying that idea (the topic of the second year), our Catholic identity – indeed, any institution's – rises or falls with the faculty. The term "faculty" does not just identify a group of people who every now and then don garish robes and mortar boards; it more significantly means the authority and the ability of instruction. Without a faculty performing its distinctive function of teaching and learning, there is no college or university. And without a faculty invigorated by the idea of a Catholic university and dedicated to bringing its wisdom to students, there can be no Catholic college or university. I may talk about it; the Board of Trustees may insist on it; Campus Ministry may give important witness to it; but it will not be realized until faculty act on it. In "Meeting the Challenge and Fulfilling the Promise: Mission and Method in Constructing a Great Catholic University," Wilson D. Miscamble, C.S.C., (Chair of the Department of History at Notre Dame and a recent visitor to this campus) states the matter pointedly:

The faculty is located at the heart of a university. When a faculty is hostile to the mission of the institution, its attenuation is likely. When a faculty is passive, the mission is likely to be anemic. When a faculty is committed, there is every likelihood that the mission will be fulfilled. These observations are so obvious as to be banal. Yet it is surprising how many Catholic institutions have ignored these common sense insights over the past two decades.

It is to keep "these common sense insights" from being lost that at St. Thomas we do the uncommon thing of asking faculty to reflect in writing on our identity. I hope you will join me in applauding the fine work of our colleagues in this collection. These essays help us to be the faculty that John Paul II describes in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: "All teachers are to be inspired by academic ideals and by the principles of an authentically human life."

Finally, let me invite you to participate in the next two summer seminars. Next year's takes up the important, but often misunderstood, condition required for faculty to do their work: academic freedom. In the year following, the seminar will consider the need that the Catholic university fulfills in American culture. These efforts must be supported if we are to realize the vision of community articulated in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

A Catholic university pursues its objectives through its formation of an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ. The source of its unity springs from a common dedication to truth, a common vision of the dignity of the human person and ultimately the person and message of Christ, which gives the institution its distinctive character. As a result of this inspiration, the community is animated by a spirit of freedom and charity; it is characterized by mutual respect, sincere dialogue and protection of the rights of individuals. It assists each of its members to achieve wholeness as human persons; in turn, everyone in the community helps in promoting unity, and each one, according to his or her role and capacity, contributes toward decisions which affect the community and also toward maintaining and strengthening the distinctive Catholic character of the institution.