

The Catholic University as a Source of Integrity

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It is common to assume a defensive posture when discussing the issue of sustaining the Catholic character of a college or university. The issue is often presented as a drama in which the broad cultural force of secularization threatens to erode the religious foundation of the institution, a foundation built on the bedrock (critics would say sandstone) of an earlier cultural period.

This article will instead focus on the particular strengths and resources that the Catholic nature of a university can contribute to the current cultural situation. The Catholic character of a university provides a source for the concept of the unity of knowledge that enables a Catholic college to achieve a vision of a coherent curriculum; it provides a source for the concept of the unity of the human person, so that our conversations about our educational commitment to "the whole person" can be rendered articulate and meaningful; and it provides the source for a view of the role of a Catholic university within the broader social order, so that our commitment to service can be enacted in a manner that flows directly and appropriately from our educational mission.

Following a clue supplied by Cardinal Newman, this particular source of strength can be termed "integrity." In the second paragraph of the preface to *The Idea of a University*, Newman speaks of the Church as necessary for the "integrity" of the university, although he does not explain how he uses the term in this context. The word "integrity" points to the intrinsic unity of the university derived from its essential mission of teaching "universal knowledge," as Newman states in the first sentence of the preface. The Church secures the integrity of the university by keeping open a vision of the wholeness and unity of the world and of the human person in the light of which the diverse components and functions of the university remain integrated as cooperative parts of a greater whole. The Catholic university in turn can then serve as a source of personal and social integration and integrity through the fulfillment of its educational mission.

To be sure, a vision of the unity of knowledge is usually no more than "almost imaginable," in the words of Timothy S. Healy, and stands as "the pervasive dream of the university since the monastic schools first begot Paris" (Healy, 25). Nonetheless, this dream provides an open and formed horizon for the intellectual life of a Catholic university, and thereby endows that intellectual life with a passionate drive toward the integration of knowledge.

Integrity of the Curriculum

It is important to note that the ideal of a coherent and unified curriculum is disparaged by some contemporary thinkers who believe that the academic disciplines produce separate and incommensurable ways of knowing. For instance, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton describe culture as "an ensemble of contesting claims to knowledge" (92); each

disciplinary area of specialization constructs its own truth on the basis of its intellectual and rhetorical practices. This view leads to the conclusion that the university is the scene where diverse modes of knowledge clash without possibility of resolution. Such claims merit serious consideration, and the scope of this article is not sufficient to allow a full confrontation with such views. The Catholic nature of a university supplies it with particular intellectual and spiritual resources with which to meet the challenge of such powerful contemporary opinions, and we should work toward a deep confrontation with such views in the expectation that our understanding of the significance of the Catholic nature of the university will be enhanced.

Newman's *The Idea of a University* articulates with great clarity the ideal of the unity of knowledge on the basis of which the members of a university community can work continually toward a more fully coherent and integrated curriculum. In Newman's account, the unity of the intellectual disciplines is grounded ultimately in the unity of the world studied by those disciplines. The disciplines select and explore particular aspects of the world, and each has the opportunity to keep in view the relationship between that aspect of reality brought to the foreground by particular disciplinary practices and the larger whole which also announces itself through the intrinsic relationship of aspect to whole:

Viewed together, they approximate to a representation or subjective reflection of the objective truth, as nearly as is possible to the human mind, which advances toward the accurate apprehension of that object, in proportion to the number of sciences it has mastered ... (54).

Efforts to establish a coherent curriculum, then, are guided by the goal of achieving a comprehensive understanding of the whole of knowledge that stands at the origin of the academic disciplines, although we must acknowledge that this is a goal that can never be definitively attained. Still, is this not the goal that animates us in our love of knowledge? The goal remains active and present for us in the manner in which it draws us on at each stage of our intellectual development, revealing itself most fully as that which we yearn for when we speak of the love of knowledge.

Newman develops the concept of the unity of knowledge through the metaphor of "the circle of knowledge" (73). This metaphor has important implications for Newman's view of the relationship of the academic disciplines in the university, because the metaphor strongly implies a dynamic relationship among the disciplines in which they depend upon one another in particular ways to form the whole of knowledge. If any discipline is omitted from the circle, the dynamic tension linking the disciplines causes the other disciplines to expand and alter their boundaries to fill the vacancy, thereby distorting their proper limits. This tendency reveals the internal drive within all knowing to reach toward a comprehensive whole. Such a drive is beneficent when it leads one to seek and acknowledge the necessary contributions made by the whole range of academic disciplines. The drive for comprehensiveness becomes pernicious when, in denial or forgetfulness of the necessary contributions of other disciplines, the practitioner of a particular discipline attempts to construct a view of the whole of knowledge based solely

on the mode of knowledge appropriate to a single discipline. There is, then, hidden in the love of knowledge a drive toward knowing the totality of things; and the drive toward totality can degenerate into a form of totalitarianism when the whole of things is envisioned in an insufficiently comprehensive and inclusive manner.

The unity of knowledge is stressed also in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which envisions the academic disciplines as scrutinizing reality according to the approach proper to each discipline, while each discipline also stands in dialogue with the others "for their mutual enhancement" (14). Such a dialogue is the heart of the integration of knowledge:

Integration of knowledge is a process, one which will always remain incomplete; moreover, the explosion of knowledge in recent decades, together with the rigid compartmentalization of knowledge within individual academic

disciplines, makes the task increasingly difficult (15).

This call to recognize the integration of knowledge as a central mission of the Catholic university constitutes a major strength of such institutions, and marks also their special contribution to contemporary culture as a whole. During a time when most academic institutions are engaged in extensive reflection concerning their mission, the culture as a whole is well-served by the presence of Catholic colleges and universities that are able to articulate a vision of the unity of knowledge and that provide an example of the ongoing dialogue that reaches toward the continual integration of knowledge.

Integrity of the Human Person

The unity of the human person is also a contested notion in contemporary culture, and a number of contemporary thinkers call upon us to abandon the notion of the unified human person as an illusion left over from the now-defunct period of humanism. There is a direct link between the denial of the unity of knowledge and the denial of the unity of the human person. Only a being capable of integrating into a single whole the various faculties of sense, intellect, and spirit activated by the academic disciplines as they engage in the pursuit of knowledge would be capable of recognizing the unity of knowledge as an ideal. Those who are willing to abandon the ideal of the unity of knowledge also hold that we become different selves depending on the way of being in the world established by our chosen discipline or occupation. Clifford Geertz summarizes this position when he says that "Those roles we think to occupy turn out to be minds we find ourselves to have" (155).

The pastoral constitution on *The Church in the Modern World* from the Second Vatican Council recognizes the pervasiveness of the contemporary challenge to the unity of the human person. In the face of that challenge, the pastoral constitution undertakes extensive reflection in the area of philosophical and theological anthropology, and reaffirms the grounds for upholding the unity of the human person: "Though made of body and soul, man is one" (212). Human dignity, the communitarian nature of the vocation of the human being, and the value of human activity all stand closely linked to the unity of the

human person. The document recognizes the important part played by colleges and universities in bringing the unity of the human person into view:

Today it is more difficult than ever for a synthesis to be formed of the various branches of knowledge and the arts. For while the mass and the diversity of cultural factors are increasing, there is a decline in the individual man's ability to grasp and unify these elements. Thus the ideal of the "universal man" is disappearing more and more. Nevertheless, it remains each man's duty to preserve a view of the whole human person, a view in which the values of intellect, will, conscience, and fraternity are pre-eminent (267).

The curriculum of a Catholic college rightfully expects students to cultivate their intellectual, spiritual, and physical faculties, and to work toward an integration of those ways of knowing manifested in the sciences, the fine arts, the humanities, and in theology. Moreover, when a Catholic college holds out the expectation that its curriculum can integrate liberal education and education for a career, such an expectation is ultimately derived from the college's confidence in the ultimate unity of the human person. The professional man or woman who makes important strategic decisions for a business is always personally accountable for the ethical implications of such decisions because a human being remains fundamentally unified. What we experience during contemplative prayer remains active and available for us when we are deeply engaged in practical affairs, again because of the unity of the human person.

Integrity of the Social Order

Finally, the Catholic nature of a college or university makes available to the institution a view of the essential interdependence of the entire social order within which the university takes its place. The college's recognition of such interdependence is the foundation for its commitment to service, since it feels deeply its communitarian identification with all human persons and with all social institutions through which the various components of human nature are actualized. There is more than kindness or charity at work in the institution's commitment to the broader social order, although these motives are also important and themselves flow from our fundamental recognition of the interdependence of the whole human family. The Catholic university's vision of the larger social order engenders within the university a desire to contribute especially to the development of the cultural milieu within which it finds itself. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* recognizes this call to service with special clarity:

In its service to society, a Catholic university will relate especially to the academic, cultural, and scientific world of the region in which it is located. Original forms of dialogue and collaboration are to be encouraged between the Catholic universities and the other universities of a nation on behalf of development, of understanding between cultures and of the defense of nature in accordance with an awareness of the international ecological system (24).

A Catholic college is called upon to emphasize in its teaching that knowledge is acquired also for the sake of others within the social order, and that knowledge carries with it a responsibility to contribute to the welfare of the larger order. Brian Daley stresses this aspect of Catholic higher education with great clarity: "The work of a Catholic university, it seems to me, must always be in large part a concern for the human implications of the knowledge acquired, for the relevance of teaching and study and research to the building of a more just and more unified human society" (10). In this way also, then, the Catholic university acts to strengthen the integrity — the interdependence and unity — of the larger social order within which it thrives.

A Catholic university has special opportunities to strengthen itself through contemplation of these sources of integrity that it offers to all with whom it interacts. Integrity in this sense becomes active within the members of the university community based on their own deep — even prayerful — experience of the integrity of themselves as persons. The integrity of knowledge becomes active for a scholar when he or she humbly recognizes both the value and the insufficiency of a particular discipline of knowledge, and stands ready to enter into dialogue with scholars from other disciplines. The final experience of integrity for the university as a whole comes as an expression of its confidence that, however complex might be the dynamic relationship between faith and culture, there is ultimate accord toward which we are reaching.

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