

DOES *EX CORDE ECCLESIAE* HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TO CATHOLIC BUSINESS SCHOOLS?

Terence McGoldrick
A Response by Dr. Don Briel

I want to thank Professor McGoldrick for his thoughtful summary both of the arguments and the reception of *Ex corde ecclesiae*. Particularly at a time in which a variety of critics have argued that the contemporary university is increasingly incoherent and indeed culturally irrelevant (I am thinking here of C. John Sommerville's recent *The Decline of the Secular University* but also of similar reflections by a former dean of Harvard College and a former dean of Yale Law School) it is important for us to reconsider the claims of what Robert Maynard Hutchins called the most venerable intellectual tradition of the West for the contemporary university.

Professor McGoldrick suggests that a fundamental stalemate has occurred in the reception of *Ex Corde*. In large measure I suspect that this is in fact the case, however, it is worth noting that the initial perception of a basic threat to the university's essential identity has largely receded (the widely publicized statements of a few notable Catholic presidents that they would declare their institutions no longer Catholic should a juridical implementation of *Ex Corde* occur are now largely forgotten) and perhaps equally importantly, the last eighteen years have been remarkably fertile in the discussion of the claims and promise of Catholic higher education.

Nonetheless, on one level stalemate it is, for we seemed forced to choose between extreme alternatives and have been unable to find a creative way forward. On the one hand, *Ex corde ecclesiae* provides a remarkably coherent overview of a distinctive Catholic philosophy of education but it is in many ways in sharp contrast to the basic understanding of the modern university system which Newman described in 1851 as a mere caravanserai of ideas and claims: autonomous; discrete; mutually suspicious; and manifesting a pervasive sense of envy. Such a system is by definition hostile to John Paul II's emphasis on the unity of knowledge and the ultimate complementarity of faith and reason.

Catholic universities seem to confront few distinct alternatives in responding to the specific challenge and promise of *Ex corde ecclesiae*. It seems to me that one of the most prevalent of responses has been to insist upon the claim that Catholic universities are legitimately universities in the modern sense but equally to insist upon certain distinctive if somewhat vague values. This leads to the following question: "What must we do minimally to retain our claims to be a Catholic institution?" In other words, what minimal legal burden does it impose, what values will we be required to demonstrate in order to avoid a public relations problem? An alternative question might be the following: "What must we do to achieve and renew this distinctive vision of the intellectual life and its complementary emphasis on the household of the faith?"

The first question is not likely to produce a vibrant renewal of Catholic identity but merely confirm an institutional self understanding in which that identity is a mile wide and an inch deep.

On the other hand, unless we are prepared to develop entirely new institutions (a project not only difficult in itself but also intellectually problematic in many ways) we realize that the very diversity of our institutions and the plurality of the audiences they now serve make it difficult, at least in the immediate future, to achieve the organic transformation envisioned in *Ex corde ecclesiae*.

It may be worth exploring new ways to renew Catholic universities from within, to explore in particular Benedict XVI's emphasis on the importance of creative minorities within the larger culture to serve as catalysts of change and renewal. In the context of the business school, this might emphasize the integrating role of relatively small groups of faculty and of a relatively small set of courses which would offer opportunities for a systematic reflection on the distinctively Catholic vision of God, of Christ, of the human person, the common good, the pursuit of justice, and the life of virtue.

One can hope that this conference will provide opportunities for the development of new curricular models for business education in Catholic universities, for programs that explore and affirm the importance of faith and the life of virtue in both private and public spheres, of new approaches to hiring for mission for all faculty but also for ways in which to develop a core group of faculty who would bring specialized training in the theological, philosophical and interdisciplinary tradition of the Church to bear upon the complex economic and managerial concerns of business education. Without such a creative minority vitally present and integrated into our institutions, the comprehensive claims of *Ex corde ecclesiae* will surely recede into the language of mere values.

This is an important time and an important opportunity and I want to thank Professor McGoldrick once again for his reflections on the relevance of the apostolic constitution for business education in our universities.