

# Ex Corde Ecclesiae and the Work of Student Affairs

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Campus Ministry

Catholic educational institutions preserve and hand on the rich heritage of the Catholic faith and the Catholic intellectual tradition to the next generation. The task of preservation has focused on the role of the Catholic intellectual which historically required a personal vocation to the intellectual life and to the mission of Catholic higher education. Similarly required was a fidelity to what had been said in the tradition. Student Affairs emerged on campuses in the United States around 1937. Student Life, beyond the demands of required chapel and common meals, dealt with student discipline. Today, Student Affairs professionals have a role in preserving, transmitting, and fostering the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities.

It is still a rare occasion when Catholic higher education reflects on the ways in which the life experience outside the classroom impacts the Catholic character of an institution. Issues of Catholic higher education, as reflected in church documents and many journals, reflect on curriculum, academic personnel, and the mission of these institutions. The role and work of Student Affairs as an institutional agent responsible for building the Catholic character receives passing mention—if any. There is a necessity to more closely examine the role Student Affairs has in building the Catholic identity of Catholic institutions of higher education. This necessity is supported by a growing body of knowledge which has highlighted the impact and importance of the educational experience outside the classroom.

Recognizing the changing circumstances of Catholic colleges and universities, a document, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*,<sup>1</sup> was prepared by the Vatican. It addresses Catholic colleges and universities around the world, from Tokyo's Sofia University where a very small percentage of students and faculty are Christian, to the gracious grounds of our own institution. By examining *Ex corde* through the lens of the historical elements of preservation, mission, vocation, and fidelity,<sup>2</sup> the current controversies related to the document, are placed in a framework which allows continuing dialogue. The debates currently taking place between the academic community and the Congregation for Bishops is too vital to be stalled over juridical limits. An exclusive concern for limits and boundaries between bishop and institutions of higher education may undermine the continued discovery and development of a distinctive Catholic intellectual tradition and a vigorous Catholic campus life. The document promotes and enhances our understanding of Catholic colleges and universities. Examining *Ex corde* from the four foci of preservation, mission, vocation, and fidelity, reveals more clearly the opportunities and challenges which face Catholic institutions of higher education. Following this overview I will then turn my attention to the areas of Student Affairs and Campus Ministry.

What is meant by preservation? And what is being preserved? For some, preservation in institutions of Catholic higher education would mean an attempt to replicate the experience of Catholic colleges of the pre-Vatican II era. For others, preservation of the Catholic character would be the task of the Theology Department and Philosophy Department perhaps aided by Campus Ministry.

The task of preservation establishes identity, permanence and a common history. It includes the history of an institution that has been around 2000 years and its intellectual, artistic, and social activity. Within the bountiful Catholic tradition, individuals and institutions emphasize different aspects of this heritage. The Catholic tradition includes a sacramental tradition, many spiritual traditions, and a tradition of charity and social transformation. The Catholic intellectual tradition is a collective storehouse and includes people whose thoughts are as different as Thomas Aquinas and Teilhard de Chardin, Theresa of Avila and Dorothy Day, and institutions as different as Opus Dei and the Catholic Worker. Catholic identities are varied.

Preservation suggests a deep concern for the historical, yet, it is more than recording the past. This task must be an appropriation, a self-definition, by individuals and institutions, of the richness and vigor of a living tradition. *Ex corde* recognizes and encourages this task. Yet it must be remembered that preserved in the tradition are also deeply embedded attitudes which have plagued the Catholic intellectual community in the past. It may be prudent to pause and reflect on those elements which have historically undermined the growth and strength of Catholic intellectual life. Thomas O' Dea in *American Catholic Dilemma: An Inquiry into the Intellectual Life*<sup>3</sup> described five attitudes which have adversely influenced the intellectual contributions of Catholics to their church and their society. They are intellectual formalism, authoritarianism, clericalism, moralism, and a defensiveness.

Preserved in the Catholic intellectual tradition has been an intellectual formalism in which doubt, questions, and experience are superseded by proscribed formulae. An authoritarianism at times reduced the Catholic scholar to a 'mischief-maker' and the ecclesiastical authorities into the 'local police.' Clericalism responded to problems, tasks, and risks within the academic community from a clerical point of view rather than from an developmental, educational, or communal vantage point. Also preserved was a moralism that saw the world as a place of moral danger to be avoided or ignored. Added to the above was a defensiveness which kept Catholics from examining our own condition in a frank, calm, rational, manner. Are these attitudes still preserved in the academic community? Catholic institutions of higher education may incur an institutional poverty if they are not aware of these attitudes, and remember how they have affected the American Catholic intellectual community in the past, in order that they may be cognizant of how they may contribute to discussions and decisions of today and the future.

The mission of Catholic colleges and universities is to educate. How this is understood and accomplished is as varied as the institutions themselves. Education is the pursuit and contemplation of truth and requires a freedom of inquiry which is an openness to

knowledge. The pursuit of truth also demands an openness to the checks, balances, and adjustments of learning in a living community.

The mission of Catholic universities articulated in *Ex corde Ecclesiae* also suggests a deep involvement in the human society: "A Catholic university...is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society."<sup>4</sup> There is great potential for institutional conflict—there is also a great potential for being profoundly Catholic.

The Second Vatican Council provided a new outlook and connection with the world in documents such as *The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* and *The Declaration on Religious Liberty*. *Ex corde* provides a reminder and a challenge to Catholic universities; the mission of Catholic institutions of higher education is also connected to the tough questions facing the human family. The contemporary concerns of a rich, diverse, global community are to be reflected in the teaching, research, and work of the university community. Catholic universities also teach students to be active agents in the world. How can students be prepared so that they are able to recognize conditions that drive people to the margins of society? How can students' minds and hearts be opened to be responsible members of a global community?

Vocation on Catholic campuses has focused on a continuing decline of clerics and religious—the vocation crisis. The definition of vocation, beyond the immediate religious sense, is also understood as a call or inclination to a particular state or occupation. This definition of vocation, clearly witnessed by many devoted professors and staff, who are also deeply devoted to the Catholic Tradition or their denomination, needs to be more effectively communicated and valued at every level of the university. In an ever increasing way the ethos of Catholic institutions of higher education will be formed by deeply dedicated lay persons. To the degree that this is not understood by those participating in the mission of the Catholic higher education—we also have a vocation crisis.

The vocation of those involved in the educational enterprise is spelled out in *Ex corde*. "Christians among the teachers are called to be witnesses and educators of authentic Christian life, which evidences an attained integration between faith and life, and between professional competence and Christian wisdom."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the document clearly recognizes the participation of members of other religions who contribute to the various tasks and disciplines of the university and asks their respect of the Catholic Tradition. Students are not taught Catholic identity; they may be taught Catholic history, thought, and practice, but Catholic identity is most concretely developed in relationship with others who hold the Tradition with respect and affection. The vocation crisis—in both senses of the term—must be part of the ongoing attention given to Catholic colleges and universities.

The inclusion of Canon 812 in *Ex corde*, namely that Catholic teachers of theological disciplines obtain a mandate from competent ecclesiastical authority, has the potential of making fidelity a matter of mandates, juridical limits, and boundaries between theological

faculties and local ordinaries rather than the shared responsibility of a community. This section of *Ex corde*, more than any other part of the document, has evoked debate and discussion, generated fears and suspicion, and raised concerns and complexities on the part of theologians and university officials. Its inclusion also raises questions about academic freedom and about the hierarchical Church's involvement in the operations of a university. If the mandate is viewed solely as a juridical mechanism for theological uniformity and conformity, the work of theology and the morale of theologians, as well as those who value the vigor and the yet-unearthed good of the Catholic intellectual tradition, may be undermined. Theology could be reduced to intellectual formalism and the dignity of bishops, theologians, and administrators lowered to that of "mischief-maker and police."

An exclusive identification of juridical concerns precludes an appreciation of the over-all value which *Ex corde* affords Catholic institutions of higher education. Because of the attention paid to the inclusion of Canon 812, less energy and focus is being given to such areas of research, teaching, administration, and campus life, all of which constitutes the day to day fodder of campus life. What follows is my attempt to draw the conversation back to the practical and prosaic—back to the familiar!

*Ex corde* simply states "the dedication and witness of the non-academic staff are vital for the identity and life of the University."<sup>6</sup> Yet, these members of the non-academic staff include deans of students, directors of residence halls, directors of student activities or student life, counseling staff, and health and wellness clinicians. Campus Ministry is often assigned to this division within the university structure. Despite the significant influence that these administrators have in assisting the growth and development of students on campus, and in the assisting of student value formation, Student Affairs, beyond the mention of Campus Ministry, is not developed in most of the Church documentation on Catholic colleges and universities.<sup>7</sup> There is, in fact, little written on the role of student affairs at Catholic colleges and universities in any church documents or journals. Similarly, there are few national professional organizations which address the needs and issues of Catholic student-affairs professional staff.<sup>8</sup> However, student-affairs professionals set almost all student-related policy which does not directly relate to classroom work, clinical training, or research.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, there is a growing body of research in higher education that indicates that college students are influenced as much, if not more, by the experiences they have outside the classroom than by the curriculum they study.<sup>10</sup> An important form of education occurs outside the setting of classrooms.

Student-affairs professionals are faced with providing programs and policies around such issues as: student conduct, gay/lesbian issues, an increasingly diverse student body, community service, social justice issues, the lack of knowledge about Catholic doctrine and practice, the role of women in the Catholic Church, alcohol and drug policy, and racism.<sup>11</sup> Student Affairs faces the tasks of addressing these issues within a Catholic context.

Student-affairs professionals are a constitutive element of the educational experience at Catholic colleges and universities. Their work is complementary experience to the

classroom yet distinct. At the University of St. Thomas the Residence Halls have created such learning communities as Women in Science, Spanish/French Floors, and the Catholic Women's Floor. VISION Trips and Tutor/Mentor programs instill a worldview and foster a course of action, based on critical reflection. The division of Student-affairs nurtures the mission and values of our particular institution and is also involved in the task of defining what it means to be a Catholic university. In many and varied ways students are formed in the Catholic Tradition by the work of Student Affairs. If Catholic identity is fostered in the division of Student Affairs it cannot help but strengthen and enliven the Catholic character of the university.

Since *Ex corde* envisions an integration of religious principles in non-academic activities, the work of Campus Ministry is, therefore, a crucial part of a Catholic university. Over the past eight years I have had the privilege of participating in some of the following activities.

VISION Trips (Volunteers In Service Internationally or Nationally) offers the opportunity of seeing the many cultural expressions of Catholicism: participants may join the work of the Mission of San Lucas Toliman and visit the tomb of a present day martyr, or stay with a Bishop in a diocese that is only six years old, or experience the worship of a Black Catholic parish in Alabama, or join a priest on a small island and go door to door 'locating' his flock—while possibly discovering a little more clearly one's own mission.

The retreat program provides time for prayer, reflection, community and discussions of faith. These are often a time to reflect on vocation, though it may not be the customarily Catholic question of "religious vocation." A student who has never heard of a "religious brother/sister" or who has no clear sense of how to make life choices in faith, asks different "vocational" questions than someone who has encountered others who provide an example of faith in this manner. For some, the search for a major is also a search for identity, vocation, and mission. Retreats build community where life's big questions can be safely asked in a supportive community and prayerfully pondered.

The social justice program is a constitutive element of Catholic identity. The social justice program introduces students to the systemic ills of our culture and works for the evolution of those structures. The program is educational and active. Those who are involved pray and picket. To what degree are students, faculty, and staff engaged with issues in the public forum? Who encourages dialogue between the Catholic tradition and modern culture in such areas as health care, foreign policy, education, and medical ethics? Why is our concern for fidelity in this area less rigorous than our concern for devotional fidelity?

Liturgy, by its nature, preserves the tradition by calling one to a deeper mission in the life of Christ. The liturgical life of the campus is an expression of our Catholic identity and belief that, the "University of St. Thomas is a Catholic, diocesan university, founded on belief in God and commitment to a life of worship leading to active participation in the mission of Christ and the Church in the world."<sup>12</sup> By the celebration of the liturgy, we express who we are and become more fully who we are called to be.

Campus Ministry is involved in the challenging task of encouraging and supporting the setting forth of the Gospel in personal terms as well as in the institution itself. Campus Ministry's work includes the unfolding of the many-faceted life of the Church, calling ourselves and others to live the mission of Christ.

Catholic universities are engaged in a dynamic struggle. The struggle for Catholic identity is the struggle to understand more clearly the mission of the institution itself. Catholic identity, preservation, mission, vocation, fidelity: is it possible to wrestle with the meaning of these terms and not wonder about the future of Catholic educational institutions? Should there be surprise or consternation that Rome is also concerned? *Ex corde Ecclesiae* provides encouragement, and challenges for Catholic higher education. It provides a strong affirmation of the value and importance of Catholic higher education and a call to a re-examination and renewal of what it means to be a Catholic college or universities. At the same time, *Ex corde* poses challenges to Catholic identity, institutional autonomy, and the relationship between theologians and bishops. By locating the Catholic identity of the university in its relation to the Catholic Church, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* also raises controversial question regarding academic freedom and institutional autonomy. This has led conversation and concerns to juridical limits and boundaries rather than sustained reflection on the many and varied ways that Catholic identity can be nurtured and fostered at all levels of the university.

The very nature of our context within educational institutions which educates people of diverse ages, races, economic strata, national origin, and religious creed, requires the full vitality of the Catholic heritage to be offered at all levels of the educational experience. In light of this shared responsibility, what is the shared work that builds the common life of the institution? All members of higher education participate in the mission of the university. Further consideration needs to be given to the unique contributions of the division of Student Affairs in building the Catholic character of the university.

#### Works Cited

1. -John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic Universities*; Publication No. 399-X, U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1990.
2. -Dennis H. Holtschneider, and Melanie M. Morey, "Reclaiming the Catholic Intellectual Tradition: Two Newcomers Look at the 1995 Conference on Catholic Higher Education in the United States," *Current Issues* (Winter, 1996), p. 123-133.
3. -O'Dea, Thomas, *American Catholic Dilemma: An Inquiry into the Intellectual Life* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), pp. 155-167.
4. -*Ex corde Ecclesiae*, # 32.
5. *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, #22.
6. *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, #24.

7. -Student Affairs professional are not mentioned in *The Church's Presence in the University and in University Culture. Empowered by the Spirit* provides only a passing reference. The same is true in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. It is understandable that Student Affairs receives only a passing mention since this field is particular to colleges and universities in the United States.

8. -The exception to this is JASPA, the Jesuit Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

9. -Sandy Estanek, "A Study of Student Affairs Practice at Catholic Colleges and Universities," *Current Issues* (Dec. 1996) pp. 63-72.

10. -Sandy Estanek, "A Study of Student Affairs Practice at Catholic Colleges and Universities," *Current Issues* (Dec. 1996) pp. 63-72. See A.W. Astin, *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993); E.L. Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987); G.D. Kuh, J.H. Shuh, E.J. Whitt and Associates, *Involving Colleges* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

11. -Sandra M. Estanek, "A Study of Student Affairs Practice at Catholic Colleges and Universities." The author also suggests that a similar organization for student affairs professionals at all Catholic institutions might be organized.

12. -*University of St. Thomas Course Catalog, 1996-1997.*