THEOLOGICAL ROUNDTABLE

TEACHING CATHOLIC THEOLOGY IN THE COMING DECADE

J. Matthew Ashley, Anne M. Clifford, Brian D. Robinette

I. Introduction

From May 31 to June 2, 2009, thirty-seven theologians gathered to discuss the state of teaching Catholic theology in the United States with a view to thinking about challenges and opportunities in the coming decade.[1] Anne Clifford, long-time professor of theology at Duquesne University, recent president of the College Theology Society, and currently the Supple Chair of Catholic Studies at Iowa State University, along with Brian Robinette, associate professor of theology at St. Louis University, ably set the stage for the participants' reflections with the addresses that are reproduced in the accompanying pieces. My purpose in this introduction is to describe the process, some of its outcomes, and the questions it poses us for the future.[2]

The Process

During the four years I served as Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Theology at Notre Dame prior to this consultation, I had (and still have) many reasons to be extremely pleased with the doctoral program and the achievements of its graduates. Yet I wondered whether we were doing everything we could to prepare them for the challenges they faced when they went out into the diversity of teaching environments that characterize the current landscape of Catholic

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[2]As I do so I emphasize that these are *my* interpretations of the consultation, and my summaries of the shorter presentations of Kristin Heyer, John Cavadini, and Kevin Burke. Like any event-as-text, the consultation is open (and fruitfully so) to a variety of interpretations. I make no claim to speak for the consultation as a whole or any of its participants.

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colleges and universities in the United States. In casual conversations with colleagues who served in this capacity for other Catholic graduate programs, I found that they had similar questions. Thus was born the idea for a consultation that would draw from four different constituencies: directors of doctoral programs in Catholic theology; chairs of departments and/or directors of undergraduate studies; seasoned collegiate level undergraduate theology teachers; and, finally, recent graduates of doctoral programs in Catholic theology who are now working in theology departments across the country.

With generous support and encouragement from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion and from the University of Notre Dame's Graduate School, I enlisted the help of my then-doctoral student, Ernesto Valiente, who is now on the faculty of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. Starting in August of 2008 we identified institutions from which we would invite participants. In so doing we aimed for the greatest diversity possible of Catholic colleges or universities in the United States with departments of theology.[3] In our selection of schools we strove for diversity on at least the following variables: size of institution; geographical locale (for example, including institutions in dense urban settings as well as in more rural ones; West Coast, Midwest, South, and Northeast, etc.); ethnic diversity of populations served; gender diversity (including participants from women colleges, for example).

We also considered the typology developed by Melanie Morey and John Piderit, in their book, *Catholic Higher Education*.[4] While their question (how institutions understand and enact their character and mission as Catholic) did not map fully onto our question (how graduate programs can better prepare doctoral students to teach Catholic theology, and how the colleges and universities where they find employment can better build on that preparation), we found, in fact, that our selection of institutions did include colleges and universities that fit Morey and Piderit's four principal categories (immersion, cohort, diaspora, persuasion).[5] Seven directors of doctoral programs at Catholic

[3]We focused on departments of theology rather than religious studies, not because of any predisposition against the latter, but in order to remove the further variable of the relationship between the disciplines of theology and religious studies from the conversation.

[4]Melanie Morey and John Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education* (New York: Oxford, 2006). For a brief overview of these categories, see Anne Clifford's address.

[5]The following institutions had participants in the consultation (in alphabetical order): Barry University(Miami Shores, FL); Boston College (Chestnut Hill, MA); The Catholic University of America (Washington, DC); College of the Holy Cross (Worcester, MA); College of Saint Catherine (St. Paul/Minneapolis, MN); Fairfield University (Fairfield, CT); Fordham University, (New York, NY); Franciscan University

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universities participated, eight chairs of departments of theology or directors of undergraduate studies, an additional eight tenured professors of theology, and fourteen recent graduates or current doctoral students (with at least one from each of the seven represented doctoral programs, each having been nominated by its director of graduate studies).

To help generate the agenda for the consultation we asked chairs of departments and current faculty to respond to the following two questions: (1) What is the most significant accomplishment of your own undergraduate program in teaching theology to your students at your institution?; (2) What do you perceive to be the one or two greatest challenges in the coming decade? Recent graduates were asked to respond to the following questions: (1) What are the one or two ways in which you feel that you were best prepared to teach Catholic theology by your graduate training?; (2) What has been the biggest surprise or unexpected challenge that you have encountered as you have taken up a career in teaching Catholic theology? While there was diversity in the responses, we were surprised at how aptly the responses organized themselves into three different areas of concern, which then provided the basic structure for the consultation. These areas of concern were:

- Who are our students? What needs and gifts do they bring to our classrooms?
- What are the social, academic and ecclesial pressures that make our work as teachers of Catholic theology more complex?
- What do we hope our students take away with them from our classrooms? What are we giving them and how do we hope that they will integrate this into their future lives?

After a brief summary and contextualization of each of these themes by one of the participants, their different facets were discussed in five small groups, followed by plenary discussions. A final session on Tuesday allowed the participants to reflect on the entire process and what they would take away from it.

of Steubenville (Steubenville, OH); Gonzaga University (Spokane, WA); Iowa State University (Ames, IA); Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley (Berkeley, CA); Lourdes College (Sylvania, OH); Loyola University of Chicago (Chicago, IL); Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI); Sacred Heart University (Fairfield, CT); Santa Clara University (Santa Clara, CA); St. John's University (Collegeville, MN); St. Louis University (St. Louis, MO); St. Mary's University (San Antonio, TX); Saint Mary's College of California (Moraga, CA); St. Thomas University (Miami Gardens, FL); St. Vincent College (Latrobe, PA); University of Dayton (Dayton, OH); University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, IN); Villanova University (Villanova, PA); Xavier University of Louisiana (New Orleans, LA).

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The Conversations

1) Who are our students and what do they bring with them to our classrooms?

In the comments that the conference participants sent in prior to the consultation, many mentioned the challenge they face as an increasing number of students arrive with less and less knowledge of the Catholic tradition. This challenge is further complicated by the growing number of students in our classrooms who are members of other Christian denominations, non-Christians, or those who are "spiritual but not religious." In our classrooms, too, there is also growing racial and ethnic diversity, although the degree varies from institution to institution. A number of participants also mentioned the challenge of teaching young lay people who have very different experiences of church from each other and from us, their teachers. Several also noted the danger of an enervating polarization in the classroom between "conservative" and "progressive" students (an issue we could have easily incorporated into the second area of concern).

Teaching theology today is further complicated by deficiencies in the knowledge-base or skills required for humanistic disciplines in general (for example, how to appreciate a text and at the same time read it critically). Many spoke of the differing needs of students who take theology as a second major, a minor, or simply as required courses within a university's core curriculum or general education requirement. (To be clear, this diversity was not seen necessarily as a deficit, but as a challenge to be turned into a resource.) There was also the question of how our courses can better serve those students who are looking to integrate what they learn in our classes with what they learn in other classes. Finally, at the level of graduate education, some doctoral program directors mentioned the relative lack of formal philosophical training among incoming graduate students (as well as less formal training in classical or foreign languages). They also grapple with the problem of obtaining adequate funding (as well as health insurance) for doctoral students, many of whom are married and starting families.

In her framing remarks, Kristin Heyer (formerly of Loyola Marymount University, now at Santa Clara University) drew on the work of a number of contemporary commentators to flesh out and connect these intuitions.[6] Many of our students are, in fact, characterized

[6]She drew, in particular, on the work of Thomas Rausch, *Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2006), with reference as well to

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by diminished institutional identity, fed by the general religious individualism of American culture. Smith and Denton speak of a general "moralistic therapeutic deism" that holds sway among American teenagers. Heyer also pointed to the fading of strong Catholic subcultures, and what is for many a crisis in the Church's credibility particularly because of the church's stand on a number of issues related to sexual morality and because of the clergy sex abuse crisis. On the other hand, there is a significant group of what William Portier has named "evangelical Catholics."[7] These students, if not a majority, often include intellectually gifted and vocal individuals. Exhibiting very strong institutional identification, and a passion for theological issues that often sets them apart from more apathetic "spiritual but not religious" students, they require a different sort of approach in the undergraduate theology classroom than the predominant type described by Rausch, Smith, and Denton.[8] Heyer also drew the participants' attention to socioeconomic divides in the classroom, in which one will find students who are the first in their families to attend college alongside economically privileged students, all of whose initial responses to many theological issues, particularly in social ethics, map very closely onto that background. She noted that gender issues also play into this complex mix, with the further challenge that students across the socioeconomic spectrum, including both the relatively unchurched and evangelical Catholics, exhibit a distaste or fear for a feminist approach (whatever they conceive this to be) that tries to attend to these issues.

While this great diversity certainly raises challenges, Heyer also pointed to the opportunities it affords. Today's students sometimes have a greater tolerance for a diversity of views than their instructors, which opens the possibility for very productive conversation and peer-to-peer education. Building on a theme from the opening addresses, she pointed out that students have a desire to integrate their experiences of faith with the often dizzying array of issues that come up in their other undergraduate courses, as well as in their experiences of church (whatever these experiences might have been) and their attempts to live out their faith. The theology classroom is one of the few places in the university that foregrounds the necessity of this kind of integration. This foregrounding can provide a rich resource for engaging

Christian Smith, with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[7]See William Portier, "Here Come the Evangelical Catholics," *Communio* 31 (Spring 2004): 35–65.

[8]This point was also made, in different words, by Clifford in her address.

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students in ways that ignite their own convictions and passions, and allow more nuanced, richer presentations of Catholic theology. This requires a willingness to rethink teaching methods and course requirements in order to draw on these resources, but the payoff can be considerable.

While it would be impossible to capture the riches of the conversations in the small groups that followed Heyer's address, some points struck me, at any rate, as significant. First, the challenges and opportunities reported by the participants and highlighted by Heyer are differently presented according to the institutional context. The diversity of all the variables mentioned above (unchurched vs. evangelical Catholics, racial and ethnic diversity, socioeconomic diversity) varies considerably according to the institution, so that there is no one-size-fits-all response. There seemed to be general agreement, however, that in every institutional context theological illiteracy is a genuine problem, and the attractiveness of theology as an integrative discipline a real resource. Several groups stayed with the issue of working out the different strategies required for teaching students who are taking "required courses" in theology and those who are taking courses as theology majors, or even taking them as general electives. Some mentioned the resistance of their students to seeing theology as an academic discipline, which sparked discussion on how individual instructors teach theology courses or how departments configure their curricula (whether general education courses or required courses for majors) can either contribute to this problem or help resolve it. Having a carefully thought out rationale for the number, sequencing, and subjects taught in required courses can go far in communicating the academic coherence and integrity of theology, even though working out this rationale can require a great deal of discussion by department faculty members. Finally, several groups discussed the students' maturity (intellectual, emotional, spiritual) vis-á-vis the material they are being asked to study, often at the age of eighteen or nineteen.

A common point across different groups was that the diversity of students in our classes (a diversity that is not always predictable in advance, however much different institutions will have certain patterns that are proper to them) means that the need to get to know our students well is even more essential than it already is recognized to be for good pedagogy in general. Initial surveys or conversations with students was cited as a way of facilitating this kind of knowledge, as well as frequent reaction papers to readings or journaling exercises (although this is a labor-intensive exercise for the instructor). A multivalent syllabus, one that can offer resources and challenges at

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different points and on different levels to different elements of a diverse group of students, can provide the instructor with the flexibility that she or he needs to respond creatively to this diversity, as can a mid-course review that allows the instructor to make adjustments half way through the semester. It is clear that whatever the particular approach an instructor chooses, an extraordinary degree of openness to student needs and gifts as well as pedagogical agility are required to execute it successfully.

2) What are the social, academic, and ecclesial pressures that make our work as teachers of Catholic theology more complex?

There was a rich series of pre-consultation responses concerning how changes in society, church and academy—to name the "three publics" that David Tracy associates with theology—have challenged us to think again about how we teach theology.[9] Some participants mentioned the need to stress Christianity's prophetic and countercultural message for society, while others spoke of the problems that arise for teaching theology in a multicultural, pluralistic and postmodern culture that often militates against conversation among religious traditions in the search for common truth. The pressing challenges of teaching Catholic theology in contexts that call both for deepening Catholic students' appreciation for their own faith and for fostering ecumenical (and frequently interreligious) respect and dialogue emerged here, as they did for the first topic. Still others spoke of the challenge of teaching the mysteries of the faith in a strongly positivist or utilitarian culture that either flattens them out into one-dimensional factoids or instrumentalizes them.

Many noted that the tensions and splits in the church at large are often reflected in our students and faculty (in our individual classrooms, within our departments and in the broader university). Sometimes we are seen as too confessional, other times as not confessional enough. Some mentioned the challenge of dealing with faculty or administrators who do not really know what theology is, or do not understand it (either explicitly or tacitly) to be an academic discipline. It is no surprise that in this context the pressures on curricula are considerable. Some spoke of the need to reconfigure the traditional structure of biblical, historical, moral and systematic theology in order to encourage more conversation across theological disciplines and across departmental boundaries. Doctoral program directors spoke of a need

[9]For Tracy's discussion, see David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3–31.

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to help doctoral students begin reflecting on these challenges, although this is not easy to do, since the demands of simply mastering their discipline are already imposing, and the way that these challenges are configured can differ dramatically depending on the institutional setting in which the student finds employment.

In his framing remarks for these issues, John Cavadini (University of Notre Dame) began by reflecting on the central metaphor for the title of the session: "pressure."[10] He noted that a pressure can be harmful, impinging from the outside to truncate or distort a project. But it can also call forth creative energy and provide a channel for that energy to create something new and exciting. So the question is how we in the academy deal with these latter pressures. In his view, the greatest pressure for academic theologians comes from the academy, to the extent that it defines what a university is and how it pursues knowledge and truth in such a way that theology cannot claim to be a real academic discipline. As a destructive pressure, it forces a dangerous dichotomy on us: either a secularism that makes religious faith utterly subjective or a sectarianism that lapses into anti-intellectual fideism. In neither case is it possible to conceptualize and practice theology as a properly academic discipline. On the positive side, this pressure can urge us to be as clear as possible about the unique gifts our endeavor can bring to the academy in general and our universities in particular. A Catholic university should offer and promote a different style of inquiry, one that roots itself in a commitment rather than bracketing commitment. This nourishes a way of pursing knowledge and truth that follows a path that is always open to transcendence. Theology can provide an integrative center, best thought of as a wisdom tradition, a sapiential seeking firmly rooted in a particular tradition, that is always open-ended, and that draws on reason's activity in other fields. Cavadini continued with the assertion that the pressure exerted by the Church can be more easily channeled creatively to assist in this work. Theology as a species of wisdom tradition depends on the life of the Church, and can also draw on that life. Finally, speaking of pressures from the society, he reiterated a point made by a number of participants and by Heyer as well: the pressure brought to bear by an increasingly utilitarian society that demands proof of the usefulness of a discipline (or of its graduates' success in securing lucrative employment).

[10]I note again that this is my summary of the presentation (as with the other two) and not a verbatim report or an abstract provided by the presenter.

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A lively and rich conversation followed in the groups, of which I reproduce only a few points that struck me. First, the model of three pressures, while useful for organizing the conference (speaking as the conference convener!), requires significant nuance if it is better to represent the complexity of the different institutional settings out of which different participants spoke. The three pressures (or publics) are interwoven, and often come to bear in concert in very complex ways. They very often mediate one another and fold back on one another. One participant observed that whichever "pressure" is felt more strongly depends not only on institutional context but on the issue at hand. If it is a matter of curricular reform, it may well be the pressure from the academy; on another issue pressure from the church may be felt more strongly. Another observed that a secularizing tendency comes more from the ambient culture, so that whether or not it is felt as a pressure from the academy depends on how the given institution positions itself with respect to that culture (by emphasizing, for instance, the sciences and professional disciplines over and against the humanities). There was general disagreement over whether it was in fact the case that the pressure from the church was more manageable than that coming from the academy.

Three further issues arose that are worth noting. First, while the issue of how Catholic universities work out their distinctive Catholic identity was not the focus of this consultation, this concern did arise in the context of this session. Some argued that an excessive and overly narrow focus on "Catholicity" can impede a theology department's attempts to engage in fruitful dialogue with other departments and units of the modern university. Others noted that without a concern for a "grammar of thought" proper to theology such exchanges remain at the level of "interdisciplinary exchange" without moving to a deeper and more fruitful level of integration of the methods and results of different disciplines into a genuinely Catholic vision. Several groups discussed a tendency in Catholic colleges and universities to treat the mission of the university (for example, promoting social justice) as something separate (and separable) from its Catholic identity, with the latter involving an institutional engagement with a broad spectrum of Catholic doctrine and practice. Such a separation and resulting focus on mission leads, they argued, to a marginalization of theology and a loss of its distinctive contribution that enriches the conceptualization and practice of the mission of the university (which, all agreed, was a vital feature of its Catholicity). Others pointed out that a commitment to promoting justice in society can serve as a powerful *preparatio fidei* for those who are liminal to Catholic faith (both among students and faculty). In sum, while there was a general agreement

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that the ideal is for mission and identity to be integrated, there were a variety of views on the precise avenue for bringing this integration about.

Second, some participants raised issues about other impacts of the pressure exerted from the academy, internal to the university. Faculty who were hired more recently pointed to the mounting pressures to publish in order to gain tenure and the particular pressure that this puts on them as they have tried to respond creatively to the many other issues raised at this consultation. Finally, the "hyperspecialization" of theology also came under scrutiny. While this specialization contributes to faculty members' (and thereby departments') ability to demonstrate the academic rigor that is a *sine qua non* in the contemporary university and a prerequisite for respectful dialogue with faculty in other departments, it can also lead to a fragmentation of the discipline and a lack of attention to the broader integrative vision that theology can offer. In this regard, the requirement that all faculty teach core courses can be a real gift to theology departments, especially if it is done by faculty members in conversation with one another, since it can bring that integrative dimension fruitfully to the fore.

3) What do we hope our students take away with them from our classrooms? What are we giving them and how do we hope that they will integrate this into their future lives?

Many of the responses to the pre-consultation survey articulated the deep aspirations that teachers of theology have. Many spoke of a desire that students go away from theology classes with a heightened ability to integrate what they learn into their lives of faith. The precise character of this integration was expressed in various ways, sometimes in terms of a mature and nuanced sense of accountability to the visible church, other times as a student's ability to draw on his or her own religious experience through the course of his or her life in a self-consciously reflective way. One participant summarized a general tenor of remarks in mentioning a desire to persuade students that there is a deeply satisfying vision alternative to our society's pragmatic-utilitarian word-view. From this perspective, learning theology is not so much assimilating facts as it is immersing oneself in a wisdom tradition. Some spoke of a desire that their class be an occasion for students to begin (or continue) to embody a robust intellectual presence in society that can serve as a prophetic countervoice to the violence, overconsumption, social conformity and loneliness that our society often inculcates. Some identified as an achievement the fact that a significant number of undergraduate majors go on to further study at the masters and doctoral level. As one would expect, directors of graduate studies

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hoped that their graduates would find satisfying employment, and in fact noted with satisfaction higher rates of placement of graduates in tenure-track positions.

In his framing remarks Kevin Burke (Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University) focused on the theme of hope. We hope, he suggested, that our students find God, that they find reverence for humanity and for the journey of their own lives. We hope that they discover a complex world to which they belong and for which they are responsible. We hope that they take up, perhaps not immediately, but at some point in their lives, tools that we offer them—tools for the reading of beautiful, complex texts; tools for understanding the centrality of narrative to articulating a sense of meaning in life; tools for grasping and following central themes in Christian history. We hope that they desire wisdom in a dialectic of satisfaction and continued hunger. He compared theology to a wild animal, an animal that is both dangerous but also endangered, due to a human propensity to control it, subdue it, cage it. He focused on two threats to this "wildness": a reduction of theology to a superficial apologetics or catechetics and a secularizing reduction of theology to religious studies and/or ethics. Both reductions are inimical to the theological task. Both frustrate the necessary movement from despair, often unvoiced or masked as apathy in our students (and perhaps even reinforced by the theological vision that opens one so painfully to the suffering and sin of the world) to a hope, however counterintuitive, for our world's future that moves one to discipleship. Our job, he suggested in sum, is to expose our students to this wild animal as an instrument of their conversion and an occasion to fall in love with Jesus Christ.

Subsequent discussions broached the issue of the relationship between spirituality and theology. To what extent is conversion or attaining love for God an apt goal for a class, particularly at the general undergraduate level, and particularly for students who are liminally situated with respect to Catholic faith (or any particular faith)? One participant suggested that these kinds of goals might be fitting for an institution in Morey and Piderit's immersion or persuasion categories, but not for a cohort or diaspora school—at least when it comes to courses for the broader population of students. This raised interesting issues, again, about teaching strategies for students who are disinterested in religious faith, or even disaffected. Some argued that for these students the proper approach is to inculcate a desire for wisdom, particularly when it comes to exploring the meaning of being human and of our responsibility to the other. This would, it was suggested, set the stage for students to appreciate the Catholic tradition as a potent means of carrying on this search for wisdom, while allowing that some (of other religious faiths

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for instance) will decline to embrace it fully. Yet even these students will benefit to the extent that they come to a deeper appreciation of their own tradition.

Some participants, on the other hand, insisted that disaffected or indifferent students can and should be addressed in a more directly theological way. They occupy a liminal space with regard to their Catholic faith, but often have theological questions best articulated and explored from the outset with a Catholic theological vocabulary. They also have a desire for a spirituality that can help them live with greater integrity and peace in our challenging, often violent world (many of them, especially women, having experienced that violence at very close hand). This desire, once again, is best addressed with a robust vocabulary drawn from Catholic theology and spiritual traditions. These offer avenues or points of creative leverage for teaching theology in an inviting way. Participants mentioned the usefulness of service learning components to their courses for these students. Others spoke of finding the right balance between exposing students to the unsettling challenging character of theology (the wild animal as "dangerous") and giving them the tools and encouragement not to be overwhelmed by this wildness, but to respond creatively and constructively (without necessarily caging or domesticating the wild animal). Again, the strategies will differ according to the students. In light of Anne Clifford's plenary, one might say that the balance needs to be struck differently for each of the three categories of student that she mentions there.

Other hopes were expressed for our students: that we are present to each of them in the particularities of their biography; that we help them to be more reflective, more attentive to their experience; that they are able to find jobs (especially our graduate students!), and that those who choose to serve the church will find support in so doing—emotionally, spiritually and financially. Some spoke of the hope that students learn from us an ability to see the world as continually new, sometimes frighteningly so, sometimes wondrously. Several spoke in particular of a hope that students will develop open eyes to the suffering and violence of the world, and be moved to respond generously and creatively. Most strikingly, from my own view, was the premise, often (but not always) unvoiced, that it is in engaging our students and their hopes, and in allowing ourselves to have such profound hopes for them, that *we* find hope for ourselves as well. As one group put the matter in its summary comments: it is not so much what we hope for our students but that our students give us hope. So we hope that we continue to open ourselves to receiving hope and life and learning from them.

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Conclusion

By the nature of the case a process like this resists easy summary or formulation of tidy conclusions, and I have no such summary or bullet-point list of conclusions. While in many ways the proceedings confirmed the organizers' expectations, the confirmation was unexpectedly rich and nuanced. For example, it will come as no surprise to anyone with even a passing familiarity with the modern Catholic college or university that there is great diversity among its students, and that this diversity requires a high degree of reflexivity and flexibility on the part of teachers of Catholic theology. This certainly emerged as one of the principal themes of the consultation, with the added complication that this diversity varies by region, by school, and even by the level of class being taught (required course vs. a course for theology majors). Another principal theme revolved around the question of how best to teach students who are in a liminal position with regard to the practice of Catholicism (i.e., the majority at most schools). There was no consensus position on this question—nor even, perhaps, a majority response. Finally, the question of which "pressure" on theology was most difficult to manage and, without such management, most destructive to teaching theology engendered vigorous debate.

Graduate program directors left the meeting pondering how to prepare their doctoral students to respond to the particularities of the context in which they eventually find employment, no small challenge given the already over-crowded agenda for doctoral studies. My impression is that all the participants left the consultation encouraged. I suggest that we were encouraged by the discovery that our individual sense of the complexities, demands, and rewards of the vocation of teaching Catholic theology is shared by many others, even if those others work in different contexts and frame the task differently. One outcome that did perhaps surprise us as consultation organizers—although we had hoped for it—was that a common passion for theology as a vocation, however this was conceived, transcended substantive theological and ecclesial divides, making meaningful conversation possible and indeed rewarding across those divides. This was profoundly encouraging for me, and gave me hope for the future of the teaching of Catholic theology in this country in the next decade, the many challenges notwithstanding.

Many spoke of returning to their colleges and universities with renewed hope and energy. This prompts one final conclusion, at least from my own reading of the consultation. We often speak of the need for doctoral students or new teachers to have mentors who can field

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their concerns, give them counsel, and support them in the hard work of developing their own distinctive voices as scholar-teachers. I left the consultation reflecting that this need does not disappear at some magic moment in an academic career—say, at time of promotion and tenure, assuming an endowed chair, or becoming a department-level administrator. We continue to need conversations that help us test our own impressions and insights about our common endeavor, confirming some, challenging others. Above all, perhaps, we need conversations that remind us and persuade again of something that led us to do this work, something that we all continue to sense in our hearts, but at times forget or even despair of in the midst of the very taxing work of meeting all the day-to-day demands of our different academic positions: that what we do matters deeply and that there are others who accompany us in the work. That there are others who are grateful for what we do, incarnating God's gratitude for our fidelity to our vocations. Perhaps all of us, particularly department chairs or deans, need to think of ways to facilitate conversations like this one, both within departments of theology, and across departmental boundaries.[11]

University of Notre Dame J. MATTHEW ASHLEY

II. Catholic Theology at Catholic Colleges and Universities Panoptic and Pedestrian Perspectives

Introduction

Let me begin by thanking Professor Ashley for the privilege of speaking to you this evening. No doubt you are here because Catholic higher education, Catholic theology, and the students you teach, and hopefully reach each semester matter to you. They matter because, like me, you conceive of what you do as a vocation, a sacred trust given to you by God.

[11]I wish to express my thanks to all the consultation participants. They worked very hard for the two days of the consultation, and showed uncommon openness and charity to others, especially to those with whom they disagreed. The following individuals worked with the small groups and took careful and clear notes on the discussions: Elizabeth Antus, Thomas Bushlack, Kristin Colberg, James Lee, and Andrew Prevot. I am grateful to them as well. Finally, I take this opportunity to thank my assistant, and now colleague, Ernesto Valiente, without whose organizational skills and creativity this consultation could not have succeeded.

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My assigned task is to set the context for our consultation. To do that, I ask you to imagine that you are in a helicopter high above a city. You can see the contoured grid of streets with their skyscrapers and parks. From this vantage point, you have a panoptic view encompassing a great deal of territory. The panoptic view I intend to provide is a history of Catholic higher education with attention to the role of teaching religion and theology, hoping that by looking back we may see more clearly what lies ahead. Having done that, I will then invite you to a pedestrian's view, that together we might experience the city up close, walking a few of its busy streets with their major intersections, shop-fronts, and people. I invite you to consider yourselves to be one pedestrian among the others participating in this consultation, not running a race through the city but rather accompanying one another in a two-day discernment about your assessments of and hopes for theology at American Catholic colleges and universities.

Religion and Theology at Catholic Universities and Colleges, A Panoptic Perspective

The first Catholic university to be founded was Georgetown; the year was 1789. I have been unable to find any information on Georgetown's curriculum at the time of its foundation. I wonder if the ratification of the U.S. Constitution during the year of Georgetown's founding had any bearing on what was taught. Most of the 220 Catholic Universities and colleges were founded much later than Georgetown, but prior to 1960. The schools where most of you teach started with a simple and straightforward mission: to educate the sons and daughters (of mostly poor) Catholic immigrants.

Writing about the goals of newly founded Catholic colleges at the turn of the twentieth century, the Association of Catholic Colleges in the United States in its charter document, stressed that Catholic colleges were to exist to form "citizens for the city of God," while preparing "them for the business of life."[1] The type of citizens that Catholic institutions of higher learning were seeking to form was influenced by Tridentine and Vatican I ecclesiologies that held that the church is the *societas perfecta*, and therefore possessed all the resources necessary to

[1]Peter E. Hogan, *The Catholic University of America, 1887–1896: The Rectorship of Thomas J. Conaty* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 49; cited by David J. O'Brien in "The Church and Higher Education," *Horizons* 17 (1990): 13.

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achieve its goal of saving souls.[2] In that milieu, Catholic colleges and universities were to provide their students with an education in the "true religion," Catholicism, which would lead them to heaven, free from so-called "secular encroachments" (cf, Pope Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, 1885).[3] A panoptic view yields the perception that Catholic colleges aimed to insulate young Catholics from the corruption of the larger society.

In the early 1900s, Catholic doctrine was taught but not academic theology. At the Catholic University of America, for example, a Department of Religion was created with the goal of teaching religion in a way that made the saving truths of Catholicism *functional* in the minds and hearts of pupils and *practical* according to the person's capacity for moral virtue. As Patrick Carey points out, the focus on religion and not theology was primarily because the theological manuals used in seminaries of that era were judged ill-suited for young adults. By the early 1940s some Catholic colleges, especially Dominican schools and those influenced by them, were teaching students Thomistic philosophy and theology, based on the *Summa Theologiae*. Colleges founded by Jesuits that followed the lead of John Courtney Murray taught courses designed to teach students how to reflect on Christ and the Mystical Body in ways that demonstrated the "social dimensions of Catholicism and the Christian responsibility to transform the world in accord with the [biblical] Word."[4] Many Jesuit schools followed this model, yet Carey notes that Marquette University, until the 1950s, had a religion curriculum with a focus on Christian doctrine that emphasized apologetics.

These diverse approaches continued in the 1950s and even well into the 1960s. Catholic universities and colleges, however, were doing more than their religion curricula indicate. As Alice Gallin notes, Catholic institutions of higher learning were also beginning the practice of informing their students about Catholic Social Action principles, and at times providing students with the opportunity to be "lay

[2]Norbert Greinacher, "Catholic Identity in the Third Epoch of Church History, The Second Vatican Council and Its Consequences for the Theory and Practice of the Catholic Church," in *Catholic Identity*, ed. James Provost and Knut Walf, Concilium 1994, vol. 5 (London: SCM Press/Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 6.

[3]This purpose is reflected in an emphasis on character formation, which was featured strongly in the literature of Catholic universities and colleges prior to the 1960s; see Alice Gallin, OSU, *Negotiating Identity, Catholic Higher Education Since 1960* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2000), 1.

[4]Patrick W. Carey, "Catholic Theology in Historical Perspective," in *American Catholic Traditions, Resources for Renewal*, ed. Sandra Yocum Mize and William Portier (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 243–44. See also Gallin, *Negotiating Identity*, 105.

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missionaries."[5] A probable influence on this trend, according to Gallin, was Yves Congar, OP, who in the mid 1950s called attention to the need to appreciate the secular world to which the laity were "missioned." To be secular, he wrote, "is to use all the resources within us in the pursuit of justice and truth for which we hunger, the very stuff of human history."[6]

As enrollments grew at Catholic universities and colleges, students were prepared "for the business of life" by earning degrees that enabled them to find employment in the professions, resulting in a marked improvement in income and status. These graduates contributed to the relocation of Catholics from ethnic urban Catholic enclaves to a more ethnically and religiously diverse suburbia. In the process, the boundary between the Catholic world and the larger society became more porous, with the Catholic population becoming "Americanized."

The importance of developing a curriculum that would be responsive to the most Americanized generation of young adults choosing universities and colleges in the history of Catholic higher education was addressed in 1964. At the tenth anniversary of the foundation of Society of Catholic College Teachers of Christian Doctrine, Brother Luke Salm of Manhattan College drew attention to the change in the students entering college. He invited his listeners to consider whether past approaches to teaching Catholicism could be effective for this new generation. In particular, he questioned the authoritarian forms of religious instruction. These had to be replaced, he argued, by an approach to theology that raised questions, rather than merely providing answers.[7]

Soon thereafter, major curricular changes were undertaken in many Catholic institutions. By the early 1970s, there were two major academic approaches to the discipline: one in the direction of religious studies, which aimed to be neutral, objective and descriptive, and the other in the direction of theology, as a study of religion with emphasis on faith seeking understanding. There were many influences at work in this change. One obvious one was the new emphasis on ecumenism during the implementation of Vatican II. As the church embraced ecumenical openness, bishops and archbishops, who formerly had insisted that no Catholic parent send a child to a non-Catholic college,

[5]Gallin, *Negotiating Identity*, 21.

[6]Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminister, MD: Newman Press, 1959), 19–20; cited in Gallin, 21.

[7]Carey, "Catholic Theology in Historical Perspective," 261. This shift is reflected in the society's decision to adopt "College Theology Society" as its name in 1967.

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fell silent. By the early 1970s, enrollment of Catholic students in Catholic institutions of higher learning declined and the number of Protestants choosing Catholic schools increased. This trend signaled that Catholic institutions of higher learning were no longer viewed as sectarian.

At many Catholic schools in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was debate about whether theology should be required only of Catholic students, as had been the practice at most schools when nearly the entire student population was Catholic. At that point, most Catholic universities and colleges decided to adopt an academic approach to theology that would be far less confessional and more universal in scope, with emphasis on featuring Catholic and Protestant theologians. Catholic college curricula were revised. Whether schools had religious studies or theology departments, both provided course options that were responsive to Catholic and non-Catholic student populations. Courses required of all students as part of the core curriculum typically treated religious experience more broadly and examined religious truth claims with ecumenical sensitivity. Hiring policies, including those of religious studies departments, began to seek out non-Catholic faculty.

Another factor that characterized the 1970s was emphasis on greater autonomy from local church authority and greater professionalization. The "publish or perish" emphasis that characterized the more highly regarded non-Catholic universities became part of the hiring and tenure practices at Catholic universities. Often preference was given to the applicant who earned a doctorate from a prestigious non-church related school, who was judged to be likely to publish.

The effects of this major sea change in Catholic higher education were evidently on the mind of Pope John Paul II in 1979 when he addressed the presidents of Catholic universities and colleges at the Catholic University of America:

> A Catholic university or college must make specific contribution to the Church and to society through high-quality scientific research, in-depth study of problems, and a just sense of history, together with the concern to show the full meaning of the human person regenerated in Christ, thus favoring the complete development of the person. Furthermore, the Catholic university or college must train young men and women of outstanding knowledge who, having made a personal synthesis between faith and culture, will be both capable and willing to assume tasks in the service of the community and of society in general, and to bear witness to their faith before the world. And finally, to be what it ought to be, a Catholic college or

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> university must set up, among its faculty and students, a real community which bears witness to a living and operative Christianity, a community where sincere commitment to scientific research and study goes together with a deep commitment to authentic Christian living (#3).[8]

This statement, with its emphasis on a synthesis between faith and culture, is reflective of the emphasis on inculturation that appeared in many of the pope's writings.

Pope John Paul II's address raises an important question: In the newly acquired ecumenical environment of Catholic sponsored universities and colleges, how does a professor at a Catholic university or college teach young women and men to make a personal synthesis of [the Catholic] faith, and culture? Further, is the promotion of authentic Christian living by a Catholic university something expected of its theology and religious studies faculties? Should one presume that a "commitment to Christian living" means compliance with Catholic moral teachings? An additional pragmatic question surfaced: Is this emphasis wise, given the restrictions on Federal Aid to schools that engage in religious proselytizing?[9] These questions remain important, because they continue to be posed forty years later.

Alice Gallin, in *Negotiating Identity*, presents a helpful synthesis of developments in the 1970s and 1980s. She takes note of the dramatic decline in the ranks of religious orders and congregations that were the visible vehicle for the religious missions of the colleges and universities, which they founded. Related to this trend were the multiple ways in which the term "secular" was used with reference to Catholic higher education during that twenty-year period. On the one hand, secularization was used in a pejorative and condemning way, with concern about the threat that adaptation of Catholic universities to secular reality posed to a university's Catholicity. On the other hand, some regarded adaptations to American academic culture to be important to achieving academic excellence and not incompatible with self-identifying as "Catholic." Gallin reports that the President of Fordham University, Edmund Ryan, SJ, in a memo to Board of Trustees, made an argument for a form of "Catholic secularity,"

[8]*Address of his Holiness John Paul II to The Catholic University America,* Washington, DC, Sunday, 7 October 1979, which was given six months after *Sapientia Christiana* (*On Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties*) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1979/october/documents/hf_jpii_spe_19791007_usa_washington_univ-catt_en.html, (accessed 18 May 2009).

[9]Gallin, 151.

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arguing that it was not only possible but also basic to the Incarnational view of human existence affirmed at the Second Vatican Council. Being Christian was a paradigm of human life, for Christ is the fulfillment of culture.[10]

Questions about secularization continue to be posed today, with the pejorative interpretation often dominating. Today secularization is invoked in the context of statistics that indicate that college-educated Catholics, especially those who are in their twenties and thirties, are leaving the church, some to other churches and others ending affiliation with any church. I am cautious about attributing this phenomenon to secularization, a term I associate with the early enemies of religion, who in the name of "enlightenment" gave the term "secularization" its polemical force, with the goal of promoting their own ideology to the disadvantage of religion. Secularization is far from a transparent term. Rather than apply an abstract generalization to the decisions of young adult Catholics to cut formal church ties, it would be more useful to consider their specific reasons, such as the inability to accept specific doctrines and moral teachings and/or to reconcile their expectations of the Church with their experience of it.

A second development of the 1980s, which continues to be relevant, was the attention given to changes in American demographics. Racial, ethnic, and religious diversities were on the rise during this period. The admissions offices of many Catholic universities and colleges began to make an effort to recruit African-American, Hispanic and Asian students, but these efforts at many Catholic universities and schools were not very successful. The biggest reason for this was the dearth of sufficient scholarship funds to make it possible for persons of color to pay the tuition. Of course being a person of color in a school that is ninety-eight percent white is also not very attractive to the eighteen year old who will be part of the two percent minority. Catholic institutions of higher learning also began to try to recruit a more diverse faculty. In the 1980s, most schools addressed the imbalanced ratio of males to females, but few had success with hiring professors of color. The issue of racial and ethnic diversity remains in the foreground of the conversations taking place at many Catholic universities and colleges today.

The decade of the 1990s began with Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Higher Education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.[11]

[10]Ibid., 161.

[11]*Ex corde Ecclesiae* (*On Catholic Universities,* August 15, 1990), in *Catholic Identity in our Colleges and Universities, a Collection of Defining Documents* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 51–74.

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In this document, John Paul II picked up the theme of faith and culture emphasized in the 1979 address to Presidents of American Catholic Universities and Colleges and drew attention to what Catholic schools should provide to the church. Put simply, they are to help bishops to integrate the evangelical message of the church with the culture by offering the church the results of its research (#13, #34). There is also the expectation that a Catholic university give service to God and the church by preparing women and men to live their Christian vocation (#10, #44).

This expectation articulated in *Ex corde Ecclesia* is related to the major emphasis of Pope John Paul II, the issue of the identity and mission of Catholic universities and colleges. I will refrain from addressing this issue, since this is not my charge. For the purpose of taking a panoptic view of Catholic education and theology's role of theology in it, recalling what *Ex corde Ecclesiae* specifically says about theology seems fitting. John Paul II writes that theology plays a particularly important role "in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogue between faith and reason" (#15). Why?

> It [theology] serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning, not only by helping them to investigate how their discoveries will affect individuals and society but also by bringing a perspective and an orientation not contained within their own methodologies. In turn, interaction with these other disciplines and their discoveries enriches theology, offering it a better understanding of the world today, and making theological research more relevant to current needs (#19).

This statement implies that theology at a Catholic university will necessarily be in dialogue other disciplines for the purpose of mutual learning. That said, the first goal for theology, to bring a perspective to other disciplines not found in their own methodologies, has struck me to be a lofty if not perhaps an unattainable one. In an era in which academic disciplines have become highly specialized, it presumes that intelligent cross-disciplinary conversation at the level of research methods is possible.

The second goal emphasized in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, studying the findings of other disciplines, is obviously important if teachers of theology are to help students to make connections between Christian beliefs and values and their chosen major discipline. Engaging the academic disciplines is a way to insert theology into the wider world of the academy and check the temptation to treat theology in a marginal way. John

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Paul II also made it clear that theology should be taught in a manner "faithful to Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium," while providing awareness of Gospel principles that enrich and honor the dignity of human life (#20).

At this juncture, I acknowledge that my attempt to provide a panoptic view of Catholic universities and colleges and of religion and theology at them may actually be perceived to be myopic because of what is neglected. What this history does affirm for me is the fact that concern, and even debate, about curricular issues related to theology is nothing new. That curricular questions have been raised again and again is not only a sign of life and growth, but it also is symbolic of the inculturation in which American Catholic colleges and universities are necessarily engaged in the interest of the education of the whole person.

The Place of Theology at Catholic Universities and Colleges, A Pedestrian Perspective

There is great diversity among Catholic universities and colleges. Some of that diversity is connected to the history of these institutions, including who founded them and where they were founded. However, there is more at stake in this diversity, and that "more" is the goal-set connected to how the university or college envisions its Catholicity. Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, SJ have studied Catholic colleges and universities, proposing four models reflective of differing goals: "immersion," "persuasion," "cohort," and "diaspora."[12]

The primary focus of Morey and Piderit in *Catholic Higher Education* is on the administrative leadership at Catholic universities and colleges, which is not our focus. However, in the interest of a transition to a pedestrian view of Catholic universities and schools, I have decided to draw attention to the four Morey and Piderit models because each identifies distinct approaches to American Catholic higher education today. It may prove helpful to explore their relevance when making decisions about the role of theology in the core curriculum of your schools and the curricula of the undergraduate and graduate programs of your theology and religious studies departments.

"Immersion colleges," as the term indicates, have a strong confessional emphasis, with the overarching goal of educating a Catholic student body in Roman Catholic doctrine, while immersing them in

[12]Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, SJ, *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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elements of Catholic culture, often with emphasis on how they are opposed to American culture. It is common for students at such schools to be required to take four courses in Catholic theology. To further the students' immersion, campus life is infused with sacramental opportunities, Catholic devotions, and Catholic moral teaching, especially sexual ethics.[13]

The immersion schools are in the minority today. According to statistics gathered by the American Association of Colleges and Universities in 2007, less than sixty percent of incoming freshmen at Catholic institutions of higher learning self-identified as Catholic.[14] The major contributing factors include statistical evidence that indicates that while nearly one-in-three Americans (31%) were raised in the Catholic faith, today fewer than one-in-four (24%) describe themselves as practicing Catholics.[15] These statistics, along with other factors such as geographic location and individual institutions' histories, including ecumenical openness, contribute to the existence of the other three models for being a Catholic college or university.

The second model is the "persuasion school," which is said to have a majority of Catholics among its students who have some knowledge of Christianity and of Catholic faith as well as some experience of Catholic religiosity. At this school, required theology courses, most of which give substantive attention to Catholicism, number about half of what is expected at an immersion school.[16] Such schools have a strong non-academic Catholic culture. Campus ministry complements the curriculum with emphasis on liturgical planning and service opportunities informed by principles of Catholic social thought.

Morey and Piderit propose as a third model, "cohort schools." These are given this descriptive title because they have a small cohort of well-trained and committed Catholic faculty and students. These institutions have a much larger percentage of non-Catholic students

[13]Ibid., 62–63 and passim.

[14]This statistic was compiled by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities in 2007 and is available at http://www.accunet.org/i4a/pages/Index.cfm?pageID=3513# students (accessed 18 May, 2009). A statistic worth pondering is the fact that eighty percent of Catholic undergraduates are attending non-Catholic schools; see Richard A. Yankowski, "Catholic Education: The Untold Story," Address to the Catholic Colleges and Universities, 1 February 2010, 5, http://www.accunet.org/files/public/2010_presentations/Untold_Story.pdf+Catholic+undergraduates+at+non-Catholic+schools+accunet (accessed on 11 November 2010).

[15]Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, Report 1: Religious Affiliation" (2007), http://www.religions.pewforum.org/reports (accessed on 10 May, 2009).

[16]Morey and Piderit, 64–65.

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who are educated to be sensitive to religious issues and their ramifications for society than students at the other two types of schools. Although students at cohort schools usually are not required to take Catholic theology courses, they may do so.[17] Such schools seek to assist students in understanding what it means to be Catholic, including especially the Catholic commitment to social justice and service.

Finally, among the schools that self-identify as Catholic are "diaspora schools." These schools, typically located in geographic areas where Catholics are a negligible minority, have a student body in which the number of Catholics is less than half. The diaspora schools try to attract non-Catholics and offer few distinctively Catholic courses. Yet, Catholicism anchors the institution's character, while a religious studies faculty strives to blend Catholic teachings with interreligious sensitivity. Catholic students at such institutions are offered opportunities to strengthen and express their Catholic faith outside the classroom through campus ministry sponsored programs.[18]

Mindfulness of the four models may prove helpful when discerning curricula decisions at your institutions. You may find it enlightening to engage your fellow participants in this consultation and your faculty colleagues at home about whether one of the four models capture the goals you identify with your school. You may also consider which model is the most desirable at this juncture of your institution's history. For those of you who are in departments that offer a Ph.D. in theology, do the Morey-Piderit models and the aspirations of your doctoral students regarding a faculty appointment in the future have any relevance for curricular decisions? Presuming that your doctoral students do some teaching, does your university's model affect how they are mentored, especially in the development of syllabi with realistic student-learning outcomes?

One of the determining factors for Morey and Piderit in their development of the four models is the centrality given to theology at Catholic institutions of higher learning, reflected in the number of theology courses required for graduation. Concern about the number of theology courses featured in my decision to allow myself to be nominated to serve on the University Core Curriculum Committee at Duquesne University in the late 1990s. I stood for election to advocate for more theology than the single course that students could choose from among a smorgasbord of seven. I was soon educated by my

[17]Ibid., 89.
[18]Ibid., 65–66.

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professional school colleagues about why more theology was not possible and found myself with a file box full of accreditation requirements. This prompted me to abandon the impossible and to search for other ways to enhance the school's institutional commitment to its Catholic mission.

In 2002, the University Core Curriculum Committee found itself ready to evaluate and revise the existing core. The outcome of that work over a five-year period resulted in the usual writing, math, and science requirements, one theology course (out of three course options), one philosophy course, the addition of one ethics course in either philosophy or theology, and a service learning requirement. In selected disciplines, in order to replace introductory courses which the sample of students polled judged to be unmemorable (unless the course was foundational for their major), there would be four theme area courses. These courses would treat faith and reason, social justice, fine arts and cultural diversity, and could be taught by a variety of departments throughout the university. When the university-wide vote was cast, the new core was approved by close to ninety percent of the faculty.

In my role as director of the implementation of the new core, I chaired committees charged with vetting theme areas course proposals. I soon discovered that, although some of the committee members and faculty who willingly submitted courses were Catholics, most knew few specifics about Catholic teaching related to the four themes. Initially I was disheartened, especially about the social justice theme area. Although I believed that a few classes devoted to social justice questions in an economics or political science course was an important step to joining knowledge to conscience formation, I was hoping for more than a generic treatment of social justice. At the very least, I believed that these courses would be more beneficial to students if they gave substantive attention to principles of Catholic Social Thought and their relevance to course content.

I came to see this as a "teachable moment" and explored with members of the University Core Committee the possibility of a *collegium,* similar to those held at some Jesuit schools to discuss Catholic faith and the intellectual life. I envisioned faculty who proposed theme area courses for the core coming together for input about and discussion of elements of the Catholic tradition related to the theme areas, with the goal of exploring together how what they learned could be incorporated into their core courses. I hoped that cross-disciplinary dialogue would strengthen community among the faculty, benefit our students' education, and deepen the university's Catholic identity.

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I am sharing this facet of my very pedestrian core curriculum journey in the hope that it might prime the pump of your own thinking. Is it possible for a theology or religious studies department to explore with colleagues in other departments how the rich Catholic heritage may be relevant to their disciplines? Can/should this be part of the mentoring of new faculty hires?

No matter what the composition the core curriculum at your institution may be, being fellow pedestrians is really about walking across campus on the first day of a new semester, with syllabus and required texts in hand, to begin a course designated as part of the core. My question is usually: what will my approximately forty students bring with them to this course?

1) Are some coming to the course resentful of being required to take a theology or religious studies course, because they have severed ties with the church of their youth, are agnostics, or practice a non-Christian religion? The hope of this group may simply be to get a passing grade with as little effort as possible.
2) Are some taking the course with a measure of enthusiasm because they are either Catholic or Protestant, have attended church with some regularity and commitment, but recognize that their religious literacy is such that they have a piecemeal knowledge of Christian teaching and history? The hope of this group may be to be better informed and to learn something that they can apply directly to their lives, and yes, get a good grade.
3) Are some strongly committed to Catholicism or Protestantism because they seek "saving truths" that offer certainty? Catholics among this group tend to associate the certainty that they crave with pre-Vatican II doctrine, church devotions and liturgy, even though they often have a superficial, ahistorical knowledge of them. The Protestants among this group are often associated with a fundamentalist church and invested in being both right and righteous. Among the things that the Catholics of this group hope for is to acquire knowledge of official Catholic teachings, while the Protestants will seek to evangelize the others (including their teacher). Yet, both are also united in the desire for a very good grade.

In my experience, the student with some religious literacy and an interest in exploring religious commitment is the predominant one, and so I try to design a course, including its learning outcomes,

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with that group in mind. The university core course I regularly taught while at Duquesne University was the "Christian Understanding of the Human Person," created primarily for students enrolled in the schools of health science, nursing, and pharmacy. Although the title of the course includes "Christian," my primary goal was to facilitate students' grasp of a Catholic understanding of being human, with emphasis on the fundamental dignity of every person, without neglecting major theological positions of Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christianity and those of Judaism and Islam. I invited students' to become aware of how Christianity identifies and speaks of "the sacred" and the role that this awareness can play in a person's life. But I also designed the course mindful that no one can do "theology in general" but always and only with attentiveness to a specific religious tradition. I do not believe that a focus on the particularity of Catholicism is parochialism or that it is a rejection of openness to the religious other. Rather, it is an invitation to respectful dialogue without a rush to homogeneity.

In the pedagogical choices I made for the course, I tried to strike a balance between an academically rigorous and objective teaching of theology and a pastoral approach to teaching that gives attention to students' spiritual formation. From an academic standpoint, I want students to know pertinent elements of the Catholic tradition with sensitivity to the history of their emergence and development, but I also want to invite them to appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of the tradition, including especially the beauty of its sacramental manifestations. I draw attention to these things, which I associate with David Tracy's category of "analogical imagination," without ignoring the "dialectical imagination" that characterizes most forms of Protestantism.

Along with this emphasis, I want students to be aware of the Catholic "and" that is not characteristic of Protestantism, and to know why. For Catholics, it is not nature or grace, but graced nature; not reason or faith, but reason illumined by faith; not law or Gospel, but law inspired by the Gospel; not Scripture or tradition, but revelation encompassing both; not faith or works, but faith animated by works of love. No doubt, more examples could be added to this list.

In the classroom, I use a variety of pedagogical strategies to present information and engage students about it. For assigned papers, I usually require exposition, an objective treatment of a topic based on research, and a paragraph or two of personal reflection. I call this the "so what" section: What are the personal implications of what I have learned for my life? Of course, none of these strategies will necessarily

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result in a successful learning experience in which the students are really engaged in learning, unless I can provide an "open space" for the formation of a community of learners. Achieving this goal, of course, is dependent on that mysterious something called "group chemistry," over which no teacher has control.

An Invitation to Commencement

In lieu of a closing, I invite you to recall that I began this presentation with a reference to our vocation as professors of theology, which our life journeys led us to discover. In my journey, I had many teachers who reached me, leading me to consider being a theologian. The vocation of a Catholic educator is not only about guiding students to knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition. It also entails the privileged position of helping young adults to grasp what it means to call faith a "virtue"—a graced quality of life that informs how one knows and relates to reality and makes life decisions. Teaching theology and religious studies has the potential, therefore, of not only informing students about Catholic teachings and practices, but also opening them to the discovery of their own vocation—to discern how their gifts and passions meet the hungers of the world.

To be able to do this even moderately well requires turning to the Holy Spirit and begging for wisdom. On this feast of Pentecost, it seems fitting to end my presentation with a text from Yves Congar's *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. With reference to Pentecost, he writes:

> According to Acts, the part played by the Spirit is that of making present and spreading the good news of the salvation that has been gained in and through Christ and to do this by bearing witness. . . . [At Pentecost] the Spirit animates the disciples to give witness. . . . [and also] guides them in the witness that they bear.[19]

During this week of Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit, source of wisdom, bless us with guidance and, yes, *animation* as we commence to engage one another about teaching Catholic theology both now and in the future.

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[19]Yves Congar, OP, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit,* vol. 1 (New York/London: Seabury, 1983), 45.

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III. A Response

I wish to express my gratitude to Anne Clifford for providing us with such a richly textured account of the landscape we find ourselves in as Catholic educators. Speaking as a pedestrian who has more recently been put into positions requiring the sort of panoptic perspectives just outlined, I am grateful to Anne for the considerable experience and wisdom she brings to us this evening. It is my pleasure to have the opportunity to provide further reflections in response to her very comprehensive address, and I wish to thank Matt Ashley for inviting me to do so. I would like to frame my response from what I hope will be a valuable perspective, a perspective that is very much swept up in the kinds of sea changes Anne has helped us better to understand: namely, as a newly tenured professor who has recently transitioned from doctoral studies to become firmly immersed in this business of teaching theology at a Catholic university. What might this evening's address mean for those of us who are relatively new to this vocation, and what might such a perspective add to the kinds of conversations to which we have committed ourselves over the next few days?

To begin, allow me to tell you a little about myself as I think this will be relevant to highlight further some of the shifting dynamics and emerging challenges we are attempting to comprehend. I did not attend a Catholic university as an undergraduate, but attended a small, private liberal-arts college from which I graduated in 1994 with a degree in English literature. While I took courses in philosophy, and even a couple in religious studies, whatever theological instincts I had were channeled primarily through literature and art. I had abandoned the evangelical Christian commitments of my youth to become what you might call a wayward "seeker." Had I enrolled in one of Professor Clifford's courses in the early 1990s, I probably would have appeared on her radar somewhere between the first and second types she briefly sketched: an agnostic-leaning-atheist who resented the requirement, perhaps visibly, but who took passionate interest in the kinds of questions raised in her course, which would have continued to gestate within me for years. Would her course, "The Christian Understanding of the Human Person," have convinced me to become a major? Who knows? But that is beside the point. What I *do* know is this: some of the most important things that happen in the classroom only rarely manifest themselves within the span of a semester. Big questions and big ideas, especially those of a theological sort, tend to fester. They slow cook. They take years to grow into—which means they almost never appear on an outcomes-assessment report! In truth, had I been required

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to give some formal assessment of my education upon graduation, I could not possibly have done more than give the faintest inkling of what my educational experience would eventually provide me—and continues to provide me. This should humble, but also thrill us educators. At the very least, it should make us more keenly sensitive to the many unseen things that go on in our classrooms.

It is my own experience of being a "seeker" that no doubt draws me particularly to what we might call the *liminal* position of many students who venture into our classrooms. While any number of them may be expressly committed to an "insider" or "outsider" position vis-à-vis religious institutions and traditions, the greatest number tend to occupy spaces of considerable ambiguity and transition, and are much more willing than previous generations of students to entertain theological questions and ideas in a more experimental, tentative, and even eclectic manner. Now, this may not exactly be "news" to anyone here this evening; but the question I think we should ask ourselves is whether we have understood this very well, and whether we have calibrated our approaches to teaching theology in ways that more adequately reflect this reality. Now more than ever, a major part of teaching Catholic theology is found not so much in delivering course *content*, however important this surely remains. Rather, it has become increasingly important to exhibit a certain *style* in asking theological questions: a willingness to *model* strategies for negotiating difficult and, at times, intractable problems in ways that allow our students to grasp something of the *practical wisdom* of theological training. I assure you, more than any particular thing we can say in the classroom, or in our informal encounters with students, it is our *manner* of self-presentation as we entertain questions and ideas, even the most apparently "settled," that will make the greatest impact on our students in the long-run. For it is precisely the ongoing *process* of theological reflection that must be summoned as life-experience continues to unfold. I shall return to this in a moment.

When I graduated from college in 1994, I spent two years going through my "quarter-life crisis" before deciding to pursue graduate studies in theology. I will spare you the details of the intellectual and spiritual convulsions that led me to the world of academic theology, and eventually to the Catholic Church. Suffice it to say that I eventually came to find in theology—and especially Catholic theology—the most rich and dynamic environment for continuing the passionate search that first ignited my academic interests as an undergraduate. In 1996, I enrolled in the MA Program at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, where I studied systematic theology and church history in a milieu thoroughly steeped in monastic culture, liturgical renewal,

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and patristics. Because Saint John's does not have a PhD program, its MA students are lavished with the attention and expertise of its faculty that might otherwise be directed to PhD students. Besides that, most all the courses I took there established within me a sense for doing theology in ways that draw deeply from resources within Catholic theology and history that are sometimes neglected in graduate programs that opt too quickly for contemporary "issues." Please do not misunderstand me. I don't mean to suggest that contemporary issues should not be a major emphasis in our graduate programs. And neither am I suggesting that Saint John's did not provide opportunities for directly engaging issues related to, for example, religious pluralism, sexual ethics, feminist critique, liberation theologies, or contextual theologies. What I *am* saying is that all such engagements emerged within a broad conversation that allowed its students more thoroughly to take a "long-view" of the Catholic tradition and its internal diversity.

This consideration is extremely important, and for at least two reasons. The first is that the traditions within Catholic theology often have considerably more nuance and productive power than is sometimes acknowledged by those who, in the interest of addressing important contemporary issues, might too breathlessly dismiss them as outmoded or treat them only as a foil. Without in any way denying the important task of engaging our traditions in the manner of "suspicion," we might also ask how we can continue to allow these histories and traditions also to be "suspicious" of us, to question and provoke us. There is an important way, I think, that our current postmodern mood opens up possibilities for such provocations; it can allow the wisdom, prophetic, and apocalyptic strains of Christian history and theology both to unsettle and comfort us.

The second reason is that, as a matter of fact, the graduates of our MA and PhD programs are those who will be called upon to make intelligible for others the many histories and traditions that continue to shape us today. As you are all no doubt aware, when stepping into the undergraduate classroom, it is rarely the expertise you have honed over the years that is most relevant. It is your role as a *generalist* that most often comes into play. This is all the more crucial now, since, as Anne pointed out, our students come into our classrooms with less and less "background knowledge" than previous generations of students might have taken for granted. I trust that many of you have wrestled over how best to strike a balance between breadth and depth in your graduate programs: that is, how to encourage the sort of expertise that allows future professors to become viable researchers, while providing them sufficient range in knowledge to be effective in the classroom. This, I submit, is a key point of conversation.

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Happily, I found that balance in my doctoral studies at Notre Dame. The courses in systematics, as well as the several electives in biblical and historical studies made available to me, were generally pitched in ways that highlighted cutting-edge issues, but always within the context of a generous reading of Christianity's theological traditions. This allowed some students to "catch up" with others who had more background, while allowing those with more background to dig more deeply. Students were also encouraged to develop comprehensive examination topics that poised them for their dissertation research while also allowing them to cover areas that formed blind spots in their knowledge base. The configuration of assistantships also seemed wise to me, in retrospect, as they tended to blend research and teaching. While research assistantships are invaluable insofar as they can more thoroughly induct doctoral students into the craft of research, it is the art of teaching that will most immediately command the energies of the newly minted PhD, about which I should like to say something more.

I have thought many times how it ever become the norm to expect that somehow by absorbing the *content* of a particular field, a person can suddenly, as if by some alchemical process, become a competent teacher. Now, I realize that teaching is far more like an "art" than a "science," but so too is virtually everything else we do in the professorate. It is very difficult and time-consuming to impart to another the kinds of skills and sensibilities that make up teaching excellence. But this means it is all the worthy of our focus and program design, since very probably it is one of the main motivations for pursuing the professorate, and is the one activity that will dominate the work-a-day existence of most of our graduates. While some of our graduates will go on to place in research-intensive institutions where teaching is more or less an afterthought, the vast majority will be placed at institutions where teaching is either on par in importance with research, or is the central focus. This fact cannot possibly mean that we "soften" the features of our PhD programs that equip students with finely-hewed skills for academic research and publishing; but it very well might mean that we more thoroughly incorporate within our programs (including our doctoral seminars) the development of skills related to teaching excellence. That is an agenda item I should like to set for our proceedings: namely, how can we more seamlessly blend the development of those skills that constitute the teaching profession with those that constitute the life of research? Can we do this in our seminars? In the way we frame comprehensive examinations? Our assistantships? Through the active use of teaching centers? Individual mentorships? Workshops? Symposia? If so—and I believe we can—there are a few other things that we very much ought to include.

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When pre-Consultation questions were circulated about what might set up our agenda, I especially appreciated this question: "What has been the biggest surprise or unexpected challenge that you have encountered as you have taken up a career in teaching Catholic theology?" My response was simple: the positive shock of learning just how fragmented my time and energies would become as I tried to generate several new courses while staying on top of a research agenda worthy of tenure. Committee work and personal responsibilities further intensified the fragmentation of time and energy. Now, very few graduates are unaware that a new professor must try to balance competing demands—competing goods, really. Research, teaching, and service: virtually everybody understands that the earliest years of the professorate are perhaps the most daunting of one's career. But nobody, and I mean nobody can possibly anticipate what it is actually like to juggle these multiple tasks on a day-to-day basis, especially if it is genuine excellence that one should like to pursue in each of them. It is the dailyness of the work that most surprises, and potentially most disorients. Graduate school usually affords extended periods of uninterrupted time to work on single projects. Yes, there is stress. Yes, students must balance teaching with research, especially later in their programs. But, generally speaking, it is possible to partition tasks in ways that allow for significant continuity. It is hard to appreciate just how fragmenting a typical day at the office can be. Especially when quality research, writing, and course preparation require ample time for rumination, the frequent diversion of attention that comes with this work can take its toll. Whether or not it is ever really possible to prepare students for those first few years, our PhD programs can serve their students well by providing workshops, colloquia, and mentoring relationships that help them identify, openly discuss, and perhaps begin to incorporate actively the kinds of habits and techniques that will help the learning curve be less precipitous. I realize this is easier said than done; but if this is not a major agenda item for our PhD programs, then it seems to me we are not properly forming our students.

I could easily marshall more examples about the mechanics and pressures involved in transitioning from doctoral studies to one's first academic post, but I would like to conclude with two final observations that strike me as central to Anne's address, particularly as she reflected with us as a pedestrian among pedestrians. I was especially challenged by Anne's discussion of how courses in theology at Catholic institutions tend to be some of the very few places where students are afforded opportunities for formally integrating their academic studies. My own experience of working on curriculum committees and as the undergraduate program director for my department has made this unique

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challenge all the more real to me. Theology departments should be at the cutting edge of interdisciplinarity in our colleges and universities, not just as a service to their institutional missions (a caveat that sometimes bears repeating to administrators), but because of the very nature of theological inquiry itself. Perhaps as Catholic educators we might feel a nagging unease among our colleagues in other departments who may wonder whether theology is a properly academic discipline at all. Indeed, perhaps within our own departments we might squabble over whether a particular form of research or approach in the classroom meets the kinds of criteria that put the "academic" in "academic theology." To this I say, let us celebrate and emphasize the genuine strangeness of our discipline. As Karl Rahner regularly observed, theology is not simply one discipline among others. It is not a "regional" anthropology, but must ceaselessly relate the whole panoply of regional anthropologies (be they chemistry, biology, psychology, history, philosophy, etc.) to the infinite horizon we name "God." By its very nature, theology must presume to speak of the most "cosmic" of questions, and to do so in a way that hopes to be interdisciplinary and integrative, even if it does not often lead us—perhaps it never does—to nice and tidy conclusions for our weighty considerations. This means, I think, that as Catholic educators, we are summoned not only to be academics, but *intellectuals*, by which I mean people who, though trained in a unique discipline with its own sources, methods, and means of communication, is more thoroughly itself precisely as it engages the gamut of human experience and self-understanding. Nothing should remain uninteresting or beside the point to a theologian. We should all be unrepentant dilettantes. Only this can put the "catholic" into "Catholic theology."

And finally, I return to the point made earlier that, as Catholic educators, we must be as mindful as ever on the *style* (and not just the *content*) of our work in and out of the classroom. Whatever particular model might best describe our respective home institutions (immersion, persuasion, diaspora, or cohort), and however varied our personalities that inevitably shape how we teach and mentor—thank God there is no definitive "mold"—we should heed the challenge Anne sets before us as she spoke about creating an "open space" in the classroom that is exploratory, pastorally sensitive, and shaped by a "community of learners." This may mean, as Anne points out, letting go of control, which I take to mean allowing the flow of conversation to follow of its own accord so that students feel more deeply implicated in a process of discovery. This willingness to "let go" is something I have learned increasingly to do as a young professor. It is so very easy to assert control in the classroom in order to buffer oneself from the fear of being

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exposed. The classrooms, halls, and offices of the academy are often thick with an atmosphere of fear, as we all know. But a willingness to allow learning to become an "event" is one that casts out such fear. I take heart in continually discovering that my best moments as a Catholic educator have come when I was not quite sure what I was doing, or where my students and I were going as we together chased a question, a vague intuition, or "rediscovered" the startling strangeness of something we thought we already knew. Perhaps we can all take heart in knowing that the gospel's insistence that we only "find" ourselves by "losing" ourselves is as applicable to the classroom as anywhere else.

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