

The Open Circle: The Catholic University and Academic Freedom

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Introduction

It is a privilege to be invited to speak at this conference on the topic of academic freedom and the Catholic university. Academic freedom is, has been, and always will be a contested issue. Nearly 20 years ago, Evangelical historian, George Marsden, who taught many years at Notre Dame, asked a provocative question: “Are there historical forces operating that make it virtually inevitable that Catholic universities will follow the path taken by formerly Protestant universities in moving away from meaningful religious identities?” More specifically he asked, “Will Notre Dame become, say, within two generations, another Duke or Syracuse?” I will argue in this paper that the jury is still out when it comes to giving an answer to that question. There are some positive signs, due in part to St. John Paul II’s 1990 Apostolic Exhortation on Catholic higher education, *Ex corde ecclesiae*. There are also continuing threats. But the secularization of Catholic higher education is not inevitable. Some critics point to the AAUP definition of academic freedom as one of the threats to Catholic identity. In this paper, I will argue that when we understand academic freedom and a Catholic university correctly, we find that academic freedom is an important part of the heritage of the American Catholic university in a way that will help it be more, rather than less, Catholic. This happy outcome will, I believe, enrich all of American higher education.

Current State of Catholic Higher Education

I would like to begin my presentation not with a discussion of the AAUP’s understanding of academic freedom and the Catholic university, but rather with a brief summary of three recent assessments of how Catholic colleges and universities seem to be doing with regard to their distinctive mission. I realize that it is dangerous to make generalizations about a group of

institutions, nearly 230 of them in the United States alone, 1/6 of all those in the world, simply because they are so different in size, endowment, academic programs, graduate programs, and even their vision of Catholicism. Some struggle every year just to keep their doors open, while others are among the most sophisticated and respected in the world.

That said, the first two assessments offer us some indication of current trends and challenges. In 2012 the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities released a report produced by a task force assigned to identify the distinctive characteristics of Jesuit higher education, along with the challenges that their institutions face. Their list of distinctive characteristics is articulate and extensive. The second assessment is based on a discussion of the board of trustees of *Collegium*, founded and still led by Tom Landy of Holy Cross College. Each summer, it organizes a week-long gathering for young scholars who are encouraged to examine their professional lives as vocations. They are also encouraged to find positions in higher education that support a religious vision of the academic life. In preparation for their 25th anniversary next year, the board members of *Collegium* assessed how things had changed since it was founded (full disclosure, I was one of the founding board members). Both the conclusions of the Jesuit task force and the *Collegium* board members identified similar trends.

Both groups are seriously concerned about sustaining a robust Catholic identity, and identified various initiatives that support that effort. But their list of what has changed in Catholic higher education, and the challenges they face, include the following: religious illiteracy among not only students but younger faculty; the marginalization of the liberal arts by professional education; lay leaders who are not very knowledgeable about the Catholic intellectual tradition; the information revolution and scholarly specialization that make building community and integrating knowledge more difficult; and the tensions that arise from the promotion of vigorous debate on contested issues that make Church officials anxious. The Jesuits, along with all the other religious orders who have founded over 90% of all Catholic colleges and universities in the United States, worry about their decreasing membership.

With regard to academic freedom, the authors of the Jesuit task force stated that “there is, at times, mutual misunderstanding both from the bishops and the universities on

what ‘academic freedom’ requires of Jesuit Catholic universities.” They stress that a Jesuit and Catholic university cannot be considered excellent “unless it fulfills its mission to be an excellent university within the American academy, and therefore values highly academic freedom and peer review.” I will return to this statement when I discuss the AAUP’s version.

Allow me to cite one other recent assessment of the state of Catholic higher education, this one provided by a 2013 survey of presidents of Catholic universities. Conducted jointly by Boston College and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, this survey reveals another troubling trend. The researchers asked presidents how they dealt with the “Catholic dimension.” Unfortunately, they never asked the presidents what they understood that dimension to be. What they did ask, however, was the extent to which various campus constituents understood and promoted it. Nearly all the presidents were in agreement that not many of their faculty really helped students understand the “Catholic dimension.” In fact, the presidents thought that the faculty contributed the least to carrying out this responsibility, a particularly sobering assessment, since faculty have tenure, remain in their positions longer than most administrators, shape the curriculum, and interact daily with students. In short, the presidents reported faculty were at the bottom of their list when it came to promoting their institutions’ Catholic dimension (see *American Catholic Higher Education in the 21st Century: Critical Challenges*, edited by Robert Newton, Linden Press, 2015, pp. 92-93, in an essay on leadership in Catholic higher education by James Heft).

In summary, all three assessments focused on the problems, even though they identified some positive movements as well, such as the creations of Catholic studies programs and the appointment of mission officers. In the midst of all these concerns, and given the theme of this conference, it needs to be asked how academic freedom might threaten Catholic identity, or actually strengthen it. To answer that question requires, of course, a closer examination of what is meant by academic freedom.

The AAUP Understanding of Academic Freedom

I think it would be difficult to argue that the AAUP has played a major role in creating all the challenges I have just listed. After all, most Catholic universities never adopted policies of

academic freedom and tenure until the 1960s, when the Church as a whole took a more positive stance towards the world. By already, long before the 1960s, the dominance of science, technology and commercialization of life was well underway. But once the 1950s and 1960s arrived, the extensive professionalization of Catholic higher education began, various forms of faculty governance established, along with local chapters of the AAUP began to appear. Taken together, these developments were described by Christopher Jencks and David Riesman as the “academic revolution.” At the turn of the 20th century, the AAUP form of academic freedom began to defend professors against sectarian forms of Christianity that were especially threatened by scientific theories of evolution and higher biblical criticism. The AAUP found its main religious opposition from evangelical and fundamentalist Christians; Catholicism has the intellectual resources to address these developments without becoming secular or sectarian.

From the time of its founding in 1915, the AAUP has dedicated itself to defending the rights of individual professors against arbitrary actions of administrators, board members, politicians and, in general people with power who are not part of the academy. Between 1890 and 1915, several professors in well publicized cases were dismissed or resigned from universities on account of their views on evolution, pacifism and economics. Of the original 13 professors who signed the 1915 statement on academic freedom, eight had studied in Germany and seven were social scientists. Focusing on the academic freedom of the professor, as distinct from that of students, their 1915 Declaration of Principle declared that in all disciplines “the first condition of progress is complete and unlimited freedom to pursue inquiry and publish its results,” adding that “such freedom is the breath in the nostrils of all scientific activity” (AAUP, 164,167-168). They acknowledged that the board of trustees of a “denominational college” had the right to govern according to its religious tradition, but made it clear that they had serious reservations about the academic quality of such institutions. They confidently, some might say arrogantly, claimed that such colleges did not “advance knowledge through unrestricted research and unfettered discussion of impartial investigations,” and that therefore “they should not be permitted to sail under false colors.”

In 1940, the organization returned to the topic of denominational colleges, recommending that they should make clear at the time of faculty appointments the “limitation in academic freedom because of religious and other aims.” The recommendation became known as the “lim clause.” And though in 1970 they said that most religious schools no longer needed to state such limitations, by 1982 they changed their mind, stating that “a college or university is a marketplace of ideas, and it cannot fulfill its purpose...if it requires conformity with any orthodoxy of content or method.” This line of thought was expressed once again when, in 1988, an AAUP subcommittee submitted a report which concluded that the 1940 statement was essentially right on two points: “(1) the prerogative of institutions to require doctrinal fidelity; and (2) the necessary consequences of denying to institutions invoking this prerogative the moral right to proclaim themselves seats of higher learning.” The entire membership of the AAUP never endorsed the report. Nevertheless, it should be obvious that the AAUP would have a hard time including theology as an authentic academic discipline since, in their view it would “require creedal orthodoxy as a consequence of its singular religious mission.” It can be presumed that the AAUP advocates opposed “creedal orthodoxy” that ruled out critical analysis. Operationally, the AAUP’s understanding of academic freedom also called for the practices of peer review, due process and tenure. Had the Jesuit task force made the distinction between the operational and epistemological dimensions of the AAUP’s understanding of academic freedom, it would make clearer how a Catholic university should understand academic freedom; namely, by welcoming its operational while broadening its epistemological dimensions. There need be no opposition between welcoming theology, for example, as an authentic and rigorous academic discipline, and affirming the importance of due process, peer review and tenure. I doubt, however, that if Catholic colleges and universities were to make that distinction, it would end debates about where to draw the line between the rights and the prerogatives of those who seek to emphasize an individual professor’s rights and those who emphasize the distinctive mission of the institution.

My argument, then, is that peer review, due process and tenure are important. In its 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, the AAUP also drew attention to responsibilities that faculty have as professionals: they “should be at all times accurate,

should exercise appropriate restraint, should show respect for the opinions of others, and should make every effort to indicate that they are not speaking for the Institution.” They are also not to introduce into their courses controversial issues extraneous to their courses. Catholic universities should, I believe, embrace these common sense guidelines. On the other hand, the problem for Catholic Universities is the narrow epistemology that restricts without good reason what counts as scholarship. That narrow epistemology is deeply informed by an over-extension of the scientific method. The 1915 AAUP stated that in questions about the “spiritual life” and the “general meaning and ends of human existence,” “...the first condition of progress is complete and unlimited freedom to pursue inquiry and publish its results.” Putting aside what “unlimited freedom” might mean, the statement continues, as I have already mentioned earlier: “Such freedom is the breath in the nostrils of all scientific activity.” Legal scholar Michael McConnell thinks that the authors of this statement took their image of life giving breath directly from Genesis 2:7, in which we read that God “breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils.” It is at this point, namely when the AAUP assumed that the scientific method produces the only form of real knowledge, that I part company with them.

Such an assertion does not represent even good science, which knows its limits. Rather, it represents scientism, a particular methodology that has morphed into metaphysics. When properly employed, the scientific method has produced extraordinary results over the past two centuries. One need think of the great advances in recent years in the fields of biology, genetics, neuroscience, astronomy and physics. Catholics should celebrate the achievements of scientists and commit themselves to the practice of the scientific method for the study of nature. It has proven to be a wonderfully productive way to learn about God’s creation.

Other cultural and financial developments have shaped the academy during the past century in ways that Catholic colleges and universities need to be cautious about. By the end of World War II, the U.S government began to pour extraordinary amounts of money into universities to further their own federal research priorities. Needless to say, next to none of this money was earmarked for research in the humanities, and certainly, given the separation of Church and State, not a penny supported research in theology. Consider the following statistics:

in 2012 the National Endowment for the Humanities received \$146 million compared to the 30.9 billion for the National Institutes of Health and 7.033 billion for the National Science Foundation. The NEH figure represents 0.38% of the federal allotment to these three agencies and 0.1% of the total 2012 federal funding for research and development, including also such agencies as the Department of Defense. By comparison, in Germany between 2008 and 2012 the humanities received approximately 9% of federal research funding (email from Mark Roche, 9/1/15). Two consequences flow from this powerful trend in the United States: (1) most universities, especially research universities, have become commercial enterprises, pursuing scientific objectives determined by the government and private enterprise, powerful institutions which, ironically, are external to universities; and (2) research judged to have commercial value gets nearly all the funding. In such an academic environment, scientific and professional education marginalizes the humanities, while theology becomes irrelevant.

Considered from another angle, the freedom of professors to pursue questions for which there is no immediate answer, to seek the truth of things simply for the purpose of knowing the truth, to spend time reflecting on why there is anything rather than nothing—disappear from their research. The philosopher Denys Turner writes that such commercial and theoretically positivist pressures have unfortunately persuaded most academics that they have ended up limiting their questions to only those which they “know in advance [they] have the means in principle to answer—sensible questions whose route to an answer is governed by agreed methodologies.” A great danger is embedded in this powerful trend: namely, continues Turner, that academics will “reverse the traffic between question and answer so as to permit only such questions to be asked as we already possess predetermined methodologies for answering, cutting the agenda of questions down to the shape and size of our given routines for answering them” (*Faith Seeking*, p. 136). Wrestling with the so called “big question,” many of which are theological by their very nature, finds little support.

This narrowing of epistemology is all the more dangerous to a Catholic university. The AAUP claims that it trusts only “complete and unlimited freedom” —uncontrolled by the distortions that ideologies—orthodoxies external to the academy—make inevitable. But as

theologian Michael Baxter writes, “every intellectual tradition places some constraints upon academic freedom, including that liberal tradition which disavows all such constraints, for this very disavowal excludes the understanding of freedom embodied in Catholic tradition,” Or as Jaraslov Pelikan pointedly put it, “With a naiveté matching that of many believers, the secularist critics of religious belief have sometimes proceeded as though assumptions a priori that cannot be proven were exclusively the property of believers, and therefore as if their [own] scholarship and their university were free of presuppositions” (*The Idea of a University—A Re-examination*, 1992, p. 47). In insisting on a narrow epistemology, the AAUP actually takes an illiberal stance, which for a liberal organization is ironic. It has arbitrarily excluded the excellent and influential work both on religious and non-religious topics produced by scholars of many faith traditions.

In focusing on the rights of individual professors, the AAUP’s leaves out two other important forms of academic freedom: that of students and that of the institution. I must leave the academic freedom of students to another time. Now I simply ask: do not institutions, especially those with distinctive missions, also have rights?

Corporate and Individual Academic Freedom

If we understand academic freedom so that it embraces both the procedural dimensions of and a broader epistemological framework, how does that change the picture? Catholic universities need to affirm their corporate freedom, that is, the institutional space necessary to explore as a community fundamental questions. The mission of a Catholic university emphasizes both the rights of individual professors and the rights of the university to be what it claims to be. However diverse they are in other respects, Catholic universities must, as institutions, enjoy a freedom to be themselves, all the while respecting the rights of individual professors. Few observers of American higher education would disagree that diversity of institutions is one of its greatest virtues and distinctive strengths. Why should that strength not be embodied in an especially valuable way by Catholic universities?

I think that we can distinguish at least three different models that colleges and universities have taken in the United States. We can think of the university as a market place of ideas (the AAUP version), a closed circle (a sectarian college that allows only faculty and

students of that faith community), and an open circle (a model that I will offer as that of a Catholic university). In its 1982 statement the AAUP used the economic metaphor of the university as a “market place of ideas.” I assume that this economic metaphor is supposed to ensure that all ideas are taught, examined and debated, while the institution itself never represents a position or privileges a particular philosophical or theological tradition. This model might be most appealing to those Catholic universities that aspire to be respected like elite secular institutions that claim to take no position as institutions, but rather simply foster open debate. Most thoughtful observers realize that it is hard, if not impossible, to think without presuppositions. As the philosopher Thomas Nagel puts it, a “position from nowhere” does not exist. The more established and well-endowed Catholic universities might be more tempted than most Catholic universities to be seen as prestigious secular institutions. As Alisdair MacIntyre observed, the most prestigious Catholic universities uncritically aspire to imitate their secular betters: “So we find Notre Dame glancing nervously at Duke, only to catch Duke in the act of glancing nervously at Princeton.”

A very different way of thinking about a university, particularly appealing to some Catholic colleges that want no doubt about their catholicity, is that of the closed circle. In this case, the leadership of such institutions expects full agreement on all significant aspects “related to” the religious mission of their institution, inviting to campus only speakers who represent their version of Catholic teaching, and locate their Catholicity primarily in moral teachings, supported directly by Campus Ministry and the theology department. Little research is done at these universities, and fidelity to the Catholic tradition as interpreted by the *magisterium* is seen as the most important indicator of their orthodoxy. Typically, the theologians of these institutions happily and publically apply for the *mandatum*.

For those academics who prefer the marketplace of ideas, the closed circle looks like a place that “subsidizes the promotion of opinions held by persons usually not of a scholar’s calling.” And for those who prefer “closed circles,” the marketplace of ideas looks like the institutional embodiment of a chaotic relativism.

There is a third model for a Catholic university, what I call the “open circle.” I am still not satisfied that I have found the best name for this model, but will go with it for now. In this model, the faculty and student body need to be sufficiently circumscribed to sustain a community with a common discourse, but also open enough to examine a wide variety of ideas. Grammatically, the metaphor “open circle” is both a noun and an adjective. To be a circle, a Catholic university needs to foster a particular tradition, the Catholic intellectual tradition. In other words, the circle ensures that there will be a community of discourse which will make it possible for vigorous and informed discussion. Without that circle, almost every discussion will be in search of first principles and often not arrive at compatible ones. The smaller a circle is, the closer the community is (literally), and the larger the circle, the more diverse it can be. A Catholic university in the modern world wants to mediate between the two (thanks to an email from Mark Roche).

To be open, the university also has to value the contribution of every member of the academic community—those who form part of the circle and those outside of it, precisely in order to engage more comprehensively the great questions that humanity faces. The voices of scholars from other religious traditions who respect the Catholic tradition enrich the discussion. In a number of ways the Enlightenment, as Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor reminds us, defended human rights and freedom of conscience. Had not the Enlightenment broken away from the structures and claims of Christendom, Taylor explains, certain facets of the Christian life would not have been carried further than they were, or could have been taken, within Christendom. After all, it was only in 1965 that the Catholic Church officially endorsed religious freedom, understood as the right not to be coerced in matters of religious belief. The open circle is strengthened by engaging in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. In his encyclical *Fides et ratio*, Saint John Paul II called on Catholic scholars to include in their research the study of African and Asian philosophies. From this perspective, a Catholic university is neither secular nor sectarian. It is not secular because it affirms the importance of the religious realm as an area of scholarship. It is not sectarian because an integral part of being Catholic is seeking truth wherever it can be found, be it in the study of other religions and welcoming as colleagues scholars from other religions.

To sustain the “market place of ideas” model is to embrace modern culture. To keep a closed circle is to oppose modern culture. To create and maintain an open circle is more difficult than either embracing or rejecting modern culture. Given all the forces of modern culture, and the current fragile state of Catholic universities that want to remain Catholic, we might ask again whether these “open circle” Catholic universities may just end up where major Protestant universities found themselves a hundred years ago: rapidly becoming institutions wedded to the dominant secular culture.

Keeping a Circle that is Open

What might Catholic universities do to sustain their Catholic identity and genuinely welcome the participation of people of other and even no faith? How should they deal with the powerful secular forces of academic culture which, as Charles Taylor reminds us, is more secular than that of the general public? If this wider definition of academic freedom takes deeper root, what are its implications at Catholic universities for faculty, curriculum and the kind of intellectual resource a Catholic university can be for the Church and for the world?

In a Catholic university, one should be able to find a more robust atmosphere supporting research on religious and ethical topics that would be less welcome in other secular universities. Moreover, in an open circle, one which welcomes people of other faiths, and even of none, who wish to contribute to such an educational mission, the kinds of research and discussions can lead to a richer and more critical examination of the Catholic intellectual tradition than would be the case if Catholics engaged only other Catholics in their research. Augustine enriched the Catholic tradition through what he learned from secular rhetorical schools. Thomas Aquinas’ extraordinary contribution to the intellectual life of the Church drew deeply and critically on the writings of the pagan Aristotle, the Jew Moses Maimonides and the Muslims Averroes and al Ghazali (see David Burrell, *Faith and Freedom: an Interfaith Perspective* Blackwell, 2004). In an “open circle,” Catholic scholars would not only be studying the texts of thinkers from other religious traditions, but would be welcoming them to their universities so that such a rich dialogue might take place in “real time.” Such diversity also aids learning, so it helps students as well.

It should be obvious that for this model of a Catholic university to thrive, the careful hiring of faculty must be the central preoccupation. The “open circle” depends upon the presence of Catholic intellectuals who welcome inter-disciplinary and inter-religious dialogue. A circle that is open is sustained in large part by hiring Catholic intellectuals, who are, unfortunately, fewer in number than Catholics with doctorates. Catholic scholars approach their disciplines with certain presuppositions: that the more deeply they explore what it means to be human, the more inescapable are religious questions; that the more deeply they plunge into any area of scholarship, the more likely they will find it necessary to make connections with other areas of knowledge. Catholic intellectuals realize that any intellectually vibrant religious tradition learns from and influences the larger culture in which it is located. The doctrines of creation and the incarnation, the Word made flesh, remain for Catholic intellectuals the theological focal points for all these suppositions.

One of the major challenges that Catholic higher education faces today is finding, hiring, and growing such intellectuals. If instead they give priority only to diversity in hiring, then we will have diversity within each faculty, but eliminate diversity among faculties. A genuine pluralism of higher education ceases to exist. Legal scholar John Noonan writes that it is “unquestionable that corporate bodies have religious freedom protected by the First Amendment” (“Religious Law Schools and the First Amendment”, p. 45, *Journal of College and University Law*, Vol. 20, No. 1). The AAUP does not deny that corporate bodies have this right; but they do deny to religious universities with a distinctive, religiously grounded, intellectual tradition the right to call themselves true universities.

On a more personal note, I might add that while serving for eight years as provost of the University of Dayton, I interviewed hundreds of faculty candidates. I never asked any of them if they were Catholic; I did not need to. I could usually tell whether they could flourish in and contribute to the mission of the university—especially in the case of senior hires. We all know faculty who, though from other religions and even no religion, contribute to the research and conversations that are essential to the mission of a Catholic university. These scholars keep the circle open.

Of course, after hiring faculty, it is just as important to give them opportunities to become more familiar with the distinctive mission of the university through, for example, research support and faculty seminars. To affirm the obvious, a Catholic university needs to spend considerable time and money to support such intensive forms of faculty development, not for purposes of indoctrination, but rather for deeper religious literacy, for an increased ability to see connections between disciplines, and for deepening the important links between liberal and professional education.

A second way of sustaining this “open circle” model requires the creation of a core curriculum that represents the priorities of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Revising core curricula is a regular contact sport for faculty: turf fights erupt; religious zealots claim the high ground, and professional faculty rest secure protected by their large numbers of majors and the protection they receive from their accrediting agencies. If the mission is not understood in compelling and distinctively intellectual ways, there is little hope that the development of a core curriculum will embody a sense of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Research interests influence the courses that faculty prefer to teach. If the core curriculum, degree programs majors and minors, are structured to embody a distinctive mission, the university is more likely to interest faculty whose research supports these academic priorities. There is no need to think of such academic priorities narrowly. Pope St. John Paul II outlined a broad and rich research agenda in paragraph 32 of his 1990 Apostolic Exhortation, *Ex corde ecclesiae* that includes: “[T]he dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the worlds resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level.” All of these priorities rest firmly on Catholic philosophical and theological principles. A sustained reflection on such issues exposes students to ways of thinking that are constructive and transcend the sterile culture wars that polarize Catholics in the United States. It would be a mistake to think that theology and philosophy alone carry the mission; they are indispensable but not the exclusive, and even sometimes, the most effective means of imparting a sense of the Catholic intellectual life. Many excellent suggestions for a distinctive curriculum have already been made by Mark Roche, most recently

in his article “Principles and Strategies for Reforming the Core Curriculum at a Catholic College or University” (*Journal of Catholic Higher Education*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Winter 2015). The process of hiring faculty and shaping a distinctive core curriculum that adequately embodies a Catholic vision of education takes years. There is no quick fix in these matters.

My third and final recommendation is that Catholic colleges and universities should not lose their living relationship with the global Church. The Catholic Church, with its 1.2 billion members, is the largest multi-national organization in the world. While we in the United States talk a great deal about the necessity of “diversity” among our faculty and students, that diversity hardly reflects the truly expansive character of global Catholicism. Bishops are important, but Catholicism is much more than the hierarchy, which blessed John Henry Newman reminded us constitute less than one percent of the Church. What’s more, following the vision of *Ex corde ecclesiae*, the authority of bishops over non-pontifically chartered Catholic universities is indirect. That means that in over 90% of the 230 or so Catholic colleges and universities, bishops do not have the authority to hire or fire anyone. *Ex corde* affirms that Catholic universities enjoy both institutional autonomy and academic freedom—“so long as the rights of the individual person and of the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good.” I hope that my critique of the AAUP notion of academic freedom reflects the importance of both the rights of the individual and of the community. A Catholic university recognizes that bishops have the responsibility to determine, in consultation with other bishops and ultimately with the entire Church, what can be described as authentically Catholic. There have always been tensions around whether the judgment of an individual bishop (e.g., Bishop Tempier who in 1277 condemned a series of Thomas Aquinas’ statements), and the process by which that judgment has been reached, are fair. That said, Catholic time stretches out at great length and, with eternal vigilance and the occasional martyr, learns to correct itself and to embrace, as it is doing now under Pope Francis, the global experience of Catholics.

It would be unwise for a Catholic university to unhitch its future from the life of the Church. To paraphrase St. Peter, to whom should Catholic universities look? We need only

remember the two thousand year old Christian intellectual tradition (actually four thousand years if we include, as we should, the Jewish tradition), the great theologians, philosophers, artists, scientists, musicians, saints and sinners—all of whom need to be part of our conversation and research today. Surely it would be a mistake to wed ourselves only to contemporary academic culture and trends, or to government and proprietary funding priorities. If Catholic higher education is to contribute to the pluralism of education in the United States, then let that contribution be in the form of a distinctive intellectual vision and carefully argued moral judgments. I for one am proud to be a member of a religious tradition that opposes abortion and capital punishment, that grows increasingly doubtful that war can be a just response to political conflicts, and that most recently calls all of us to care for the gift of God's creation. At the same time, I believe that the Catholic university can enrich the rest of the Church through its practices of due process, open debate, studies of the natural world, participation in and influencing the incredible advances in the fields of genetics and neuroscience, and of vibrant theological and philosophical debates.

Conclusion

Will Catholic colleges and universities go the way most Protestant universities have gone? I hope not. But to make it less likely that they will, they must exercise serious, sustained and strategic vision. Academic freedom with a more capacious epistemology than that afforded by the AAUP will actually strengthen and contribute to the deepening of the mission of Catholic universities. In turn, Catholic universities need to hire carefully, invest in extensive faculty development, create distinctive core curricula and signature degree programs, and retain a living link with the global Church. If they are able to do that, they will foster a distinctive intellectual mission but also make an important contribution to the pluralism of higher education in the United States, and beyond.

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