Catholic Colleges and Universities: Options for Survival

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The questions I shall address about Catholic colleges and universities parallel in many ways those I asked in a 1975 article about Catholic hospitals. [See "The Catholic Hospital: Options for Survival," Hospital Progress, February 1975, pp. 42-52.] What precisely is their place in the late twentieth century's democratic, morally pluralistic, secular-humanistic society? Can we justify their existence when so many alternatives are available and when there are so many other needs in the Church? Has not their former mission to Catholic ethnic and immigrant groups been fulfilled amply? Do not intellectual respectability and academic prestige demand increasing autonomy from the institutional Church? Is it not enough to be a university of the first rank academically? Must we not, inevitably, follow the evolution of Protestant-sponsored colleges and universities toward independence of Church sponsorship and identity?

The range of responses to these questions among Catholics is broad, especially since Vatican II. Some feel that Catholic universities have so completely defected from their Catholic character that only a return to a preconciliar model will do. Others see no future for these institutions at all; they insist that academic freedom is impossible in a Church-sponsored institution and that this fact, together with a lack of fiscal resources, must forever militate against having truly first-class Catholic universities. Some see universities as instruments of indoctrination; others see them as the arena for questioning those doctrines; some even confuse liberal education with liberal politics. Some say we must not have professional schools; others assert nothing is more important in our postindustrial society. Equally divergent views exist on every aspect of the evolution of Protestant-sponsored colleges and universities toward independence of Church sponsorship and identity.

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Underlying these differences are unresolved fundamental questions of theology, ecclesiology, canon law, and educational philosophy. Many of the difficulties of Catholic higher education can be attributed to these divergent views' coexistence, not only among the Catholic laity and clergy but also on the same campus—a

Technology without humanism and the ability to make moral judgments can threaten the quality of our lives. Catholic universities, traditionally reconciling faith and reason, can help us to resist partial humanisms and to approach our technological society's profound value questions.

Catholic Universities' Unique Role

I will state my own position at the outset: I am convinced that true universities, truly Catholic, have an indispensable and unique role to provide in our times, not only in the intellectual ministry of the Church, but in preserving our whole culture's intellectual integrity and democratic institutions. I say this precisely because our times are characterized by a technological, democratic, and morally pluralistic ethos. Rather than ensuring Catholic universities' demise, as some would believe, such an ethos demands their renaissance, albeit in a refurbished form.

Our entire society has urgent need of a clear and unequivocal witness to the intellectual power of the three strands that have run through the fabric of Catholic education for 1,500 years: the tradition of the liberal arts joined to an integral humanism and exemplified in a community of faith. These three elements are vital for nonbelievers as well as for believers.

All humankind strives for a truly human response to our times' and culture's exigencies and so requires communion with the tradition of Christian Catholic humanism: whether to agree with it, modify it, question it, or dissent from it. Believers need to know wherein their beliefs are founded; nonbelievers need to know from what they are dissenting.

A liberally educated mind, guided by an integral philosophy of humankind and a way of authentically living that philosophy, is the element essential to the proper education of all humans as humans. They enable us to deal with the profound value questions posed by technological capabilities; to guard against the usurpation of value decisions by the experts who control those
American Catholics have come of age intellectually and economically. . . . (1) we can follow the example of America's premier institutions and develop academic excellence divorced from our religious origins; (2) we can retreat from higher education . . . ; or (3) we can address the far more difficult task of supporting first-rank universities that are also Catholic and part of the institutional Church.

The Intellectual Ministry in Historical Context

The Church recognized from its beginning that teaching, along with healing, ministering, and preaching, was integral to its mission to all humankind. The ministry to the intellect, by which I mean teaching and forming minds in faith by reason, has had two expressions: as dialogue and dialectic, with the dominant ideas and beliefs of each era; and as a formal educational program seeking to reconcile faith and reason in preparation for life in both the world and the Church.

When Christ confronted the elders in the temple or responded to the Pharisees' legalisms, and when Paul preached before the Greek, Roman, and Hebrew audiences, they were meeting ideas with ideas, the concepts of the Gospel with those of the Old Law or the pagan philosophers. The writings of the Patristic age are a record of the confrontation, refutation, and partial reconciliation of Christian teachings with ancient philosophy, religion, and literature. That tradition continues in the work of every Catholic intellectual, whether it is expressed in theology and philosophy or in literature.

The second and more formal aspect of the Church's intellectual ministry, the education of the young in schools, dates at least from the monastic schools of the ninth to thirteenth centuries. This aspect came to full flower in the founding of the medieval universities in Europe and was exported to the New World soon after. Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Santo Domingo, and La Plata, for example, had universities by the middle of the sixteenth century.

In colonial America, Protestant and Catholic denominations established colleges under religious auspices. Their purpose was to prepare an educated ministry and a learned laity, schooled in the faith. With the religious revival and evangelism of the early nineteenth century, hundreds of Church-related colleges were established by both Catholics and Protestants. Religion influenced both the teaching and the comportment of students and faculty; compulsory attendance at worship was common. Despite our contemporary misunderstanding of
for the most of our history, coexisted and reinforced each other's values. The older and more prestigious Protestant institutions gradually assumed greater autonomy, relaxing rules on attendance at worship along with the denominational conformity of their faculties. Today, those universities, especially those in the first rank, are as vigorous in their assertion of independence from the Churches that founded them as from government.

Catholic colleges and universities in contradistinction have maintained their formal association with the institutional Church. Despite this, they too, in the last two decades, have made important compromises in their religious character. In response to fiscal exigencies and cultural pressures, they have laicized their boards, appointed lay presidents, employed large numbers of lay and non-Catholic faculties, broadened the spectrum of religious beliefs of their students, reduced requirements for theology and philosophy, and made attendance at religious services optional. Student and faculty life styles have approximated ever more closely those on secular campuses.

Catholic universities, especially since the campus convulsions of the 1960s, are recapitulating the evolution toward secularism and autonomy of their more prestigious Protestant counterparts. The pace among Catholic institutions is slower, and the patterns of autonomy are more variable and more subtly stated. Quite a few refer to themselves as "under Catholic auspices" or "affiliated with the Catholic Church," instead of plainly calling themselves Catholic colleges or universities. The trend, however, is the same.

The move toward greater academic respectability is of necessity tied to deeper commitments to research, scholarly productivity, more selective admissions policies, more eclectic faculties, and less traditional curricula, as well as freer inquiry in theology and philosophy. Catholic institutions have been supplanted by public institutions as the entry point to higher and professional education for immigrant and ethnic populations. Commitment to education of native-born minorities, while exemplary in a few places, has not been of the same order as the earlier commitment to immigrant minorities.

Forces Transforming Catholic Universities

Complex and interacting forces are transforming Catholic colleges and universities: fiscal survival, relevance to the "needs" of contemporary students, the effect of Vatican II, the deficiencies of overly traditional curricula closed to currents of contemporary thought, loss of interest of the young in religious formalisms, and many more. Moreover, a growing conviction exists among some educated Catholics that academic freedom and respectability are incompatible with too close an alignment with the institutional Church. Catholic universities' professional schools already place scholarship and professional excellence first and emphasize their Catholic character little, if at all.

It is not my purpose here to examine the validity of each of these forces as justification for change. Some are valid, others are only partially so, and still others are serious misreadings, not only of Catholicism, but of contemporary intellectual trends. The exigencies of the 1980s—especially the expected drop in enrollments and rising costs—will call for further transformations in all "middle-level" institutions, those without the great prestige and endowments of the Ivy League institutions or the low tuitions of the community colleges and state universities. Most Catholic colleges and universities are in this category, and a significant number have gone out of existence in the past decade.

Catholic institutions must face these dilemmas encumbered by the additional uncertainty about their mission's utility and uniqueness. If they survive by moving toward secularization, they lose their unique claim for Catholic support; if they revert to the educational style of pre-Vatican II days, they isolate themselves from currents of contemporary thought and weaken their intellectual ministry. Survival demands jettisoning...
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something of the old forms, but precisely what can be jettisoned without losing the character of a Catholic institution?

This question cannot be answered without reference to the academic and intellectual state of universities today. They have survived the campus convulsions of the late 1960s; students and faculties seem once again to be concentrating on academic matters, leaving aside the activism and politicization that entranced them a few years ago. They now suffer from a less violent but perhaps more serious malady: a debility in their central enterprise, a loss of faith in, and confusion about, what constitutes an educated person. There are three cardinal signs of this disorder.

The first is a decay in the liberal arts, those tools of learning that are the common possession of educated human beings. Even the best schools lament the fact that most of their students are not well schooled in the arts of the word, lack a capacity for critical thought, and are unskilled in making moral and aesthetic judgments. These are the "arts" that enable minds to be free. These are the mind's safeguards against inundation by the information industry—the glib and the plausible, though unproven, assertions of the official opinion makers and quick-study experts.

The second sign, which inevitably follows the first, is a pervasive antirationalism about human values and purposes. This takes two forms in academia. One is a studied moral neutrality in the name of democratic approaches to learning. All values are presented as tenable at one time or another because they are socioculturally determined. Some values are more useful because they confer greater survival potentiality on the species, but these values can change. What is denied is a metaphysical grounding for values that can be rationally discovered, and what is especially rejected is a source of values that transcends humankind.

A second form of antirationalism is the commitment to some intuitively justified ideology that measures reality and overrides mere reason. Charles Reich's attack on rationalism, Herbert Marcuse's "negative dialectic," Skinnerian behaviorism, Marxism, and now Wilsonian sociobiology all offer substitute ways to measure human existence. These ways sharply counter the more traditional views of human existence and its purposes.

It is not wrong to teach these doctrines. Universities are, after all, the crucibles for testing ideas, all ideas. What is wrong is to teach any value system with pious disclaimers about objectivity without exposing that system to the challenge of more traditional or religious views of reality and the meaning of human existence. The claim to moral neutrality is, in any case, an illusion. It is a rare teacher who does not battle for students' minds as strongly as the most ardent believers of old. Value systems, therefore, are taught in every classroom, even in those institutions presumably dedicated to moral neutrality. In nondenominational institutions, the dominant value system is that of democratic, secular humanism, which is taught without the advantage of critical challenge to which even this secular ideology should be subjected.

The third sign is the absence of an integral humanism: a philosophy of humankind from which values are derived and justified. Humanisms exist in profusion, but they are all partial humanisms; each is founded on the universalization of some special disciplinary view of existence and being. Psychologism, democratic liberalism, scientism, historicism, social darwinism all take some valid observations about humankind and transform them into a metaphysics.

Students seek some synthesis, some grasp of the whole of human existence and being. They will never find an absolutely closed and complete humanism, but they do expect one that accounts for more of humankind's existence than any of the partial humanisms are capable of doing.

These three deficiencies—erosion of the liberal arts, moral skepticism and antirationalism, and partial humanisms—often coexist with high degrees of excellence in professional education and scholarly endeavor. As a consequence, the distinction between being a specialist or professional and being educated could hardly be more sharply drawn. It is becoming daily more evi-
dent that the professions, the scholars, and the technologists are urgently in need of the capacity for critical reflection on values, ends, and purposes that only a liberal education can provide. Herein lies the source of the current upsurge of interest in the ethical problems of medicine, biology, technology, or public policy. We have come to the sad realization that professional competence without a liberal education produces specialists whose knowledge can as easily threaten as enhance our lives.

Students, parents, and educators themselves now realize the dangers of so-called value-free (or, as I prefer to put it, one-sided) teaching about values. This is very probably why enrollments in many Catholic and other Church-related universities have been maintained despite a growing tuition gap between private and public education. If we are to sustain this interest in the difficult years ahead, we must clarify and unify our conceptions about precisely what it is Catholic universities and colleges have to offer that is uniquely fitted to remedy the deficiencies perceived in alternative forms of education. This is not to suggest that public institutions are not important. In a democratic society, public, private, and Church-related education are all obligatory and serve different functions.

Let us turn now to a more specific examination of the form and content of the ideal we seek: a true university, truly Catholic.

**A Catholic University for the Twenty-first Century**

It is unlikely there will be a more articulate expression of the idea of a university than Cardinal Newman’s. All who write on the subject end up with footnotes to his monumental essays, and in far less pellucid prose. The next section of this paper, therefore, owes much to Newman’s exposition and the loftiness of his ideal notwithstanding, we must remember that the ideal itself never came to full fruition. When his term was completed, the Catholic University of Ireland began a series of transformations, eventually becoming the Dublin branch of the National University of Ireland. Its failure was attributed in Fergal McGrath’s fine analysis to a combination of factors: lack of government support, lack of endowment, Newman’s differences in educational philosophy with some of Ireland’s bishops, disputes over lay participation in governance, inadequate appreciation by middle-class Irishmen of Newman’s lofty ideal, and Newman’s own deficiencies as an administrator.

Catholic universities bear a tradition that combines the two missing elements contemporary education has allowed to deteriorate: the liberal arts and a framework of coherent and integral humanism. Therein lies their intellectual endowment, their uniqueness.

The dissolution of Newman’s ideal has much to teach us and many analogies with some of today’s problems. The ideal of a Catholic university like Newman’s, to which verbal assent is so easy, has yet to become a reality, although today’s cultural milieu imposes an even heavier obligation to actualize the ideal. The Church’s intellectual ministry depends on its universities, and every age is compelled to define the ideal in its own terms.

Today’s times, troublous as they are, are propitious for another attempt. In 20 years, two of Western civilization’s most cherished institutions—the university and the Church—will begin new millennia: the Church its third, the university its second. The Church was mother to the medieval university; and though their relationship has often been uneasy, they are inextricably bound to each other. Both are under attack in contemporary society, but both hold the only viable alternative to a less-than-human, self-centered, and ultimately self-destructive world order. Indeed, Catholic universities bear a tradition that combines the two missing elements contemporary education has allowed to deteriorate: the liberal arts and a framework of coherent and integral humanism. Therein lies their intellectual endowment, their uniqueness, and their essentiality—not just to Catholics, but to the whole of modern culture.

Twenty years ago Daniel Bell hailed universities as the “prime institutions of postindustrial society.” High expectations and unparalleled public support made that prophecy seem unassailable. Suddenly, within a decade, Utopia became Armageddon. Universities were almost overwhelmed. The seismology of those academic tremors is still problematic. Two impressions of those days are fixed in my memory: 1. Students’ frustration with their own lack of preparation to make moral judgments; and
We are now a society of experts... each in possession of some partial view of humankind. A civilized society is impossible without experts, and universities must continue to train them. But universities are also responsible for helping us locate ourselves as persons. By ‘locations’ I mean the points at which we stand with reference to the critical issues of our time.

2. Students’ disillusionment with their teachers’ moral confusion.

The issues facing society then, as now, were moral issues, but they were confronted politically and emotionally. Our failure at genuine moral discourse was itself morally culpable.

Universities survived, but the moral malaise continues. We are very much in the position of Abel Sanchez, Unamuno’s hero, who asked:

What good our having tasted the fruits of knowledge, good and evil, without freeing ourselves of the evil?

Politics, economics, technology, and medicine have enormously expanded our knowledge of the good and evil possible to humankind. Our culture has yet to assimilate, sort, and order those possibilities, and the university has been inadequate in preparing students for the constructive criticism of culture a healthy society demands.

Democratic societies cannot survive unless citizens’ minds are free and informed enough to guide governments and experts in the humane use of human knowledge. Political freedom ensures that we are free to express our opinions, but it cannot guarantee that the opinions we express are freely chosen. A liberal education is the surest guarantee of a free society.

A democratic and civilized life, therefore, is impossible without certain skills in the acquisition, use, and criticism of human knowledge. An authentic university imparts these skills, but it never exalts one at the expense of the others.

Knowledge without criticism makes for directionless minds and a directionless society, pulled hither and yon by every new technique and every new world view. A directionless society’s citizens easily become the slaves of each other’s expertise. Without the capacity to judge values and morals critically, we become the victims of rhetoric and demogoguery.

Our most searing national experiences attest to this incapacity: Vietnam, Watergate, the dubious ethics of some public figures, our confusion over energy policies, the uses of medical technology, our whole oscillation between technological pessimism and optimism, even the terrible experience of the People’s Temple in Guyana. Where the critical intelligence is weak or inoperative, even the demonic will fill the void.

Universities’ Function

Alfred North Whitehead’s observation that the function of a university is “to create the future”14 may seem pretentious. Today’s present, however, is the future created by the universities of two decades ago—universities excelling in the acquisition and use of knowledge and techniques, but overcommitted to moral neutrality about its use.

We are now a society of experts—physicians, lawyers, engineers, businessmen—each in possession of some partial view of humankind, each ready to universalize some small parcel of knowledge to fashion the good life or to explain human existence. Even the humanists are specialists in a discipline: possessors of a fragment of the cloth of reality, no longer teaching what all educated people should know.

A civilized society is impossible without experts, and universities must continue to train them. But universities also are responsible for helping us locate ourselves as persons. By “locations” I mean the points at which we stand with reference to the critical issues of our time.

To locate ourselves we need two things: a critical intellect and a set of values to test, and be tested by, the claims other minds make on our own. The liberal arts can free our minds because they can teach us how to define terms, to tell fact from opinion and the proven from the plausible, to discern and challenge arguments, and to judge and to tackle new subjects on our own, freeing us even from our teachers. These are the essential tools of all learning.

Every subject can be taught liberally, the sciences as well as the arts. Each makes some claim about what is good, true, or beautiful. The sciences, however, excel at acquisition and use of knowledge, while the humanities, properly taught, open up the entire range of
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human values from which each of us must choose our own. Every philosopher makes claims on our ideas, every writer on our imagination, every artist on our sense of beauty, and every historian on our sense of continuity. The humanities criticize our use of knowledge by criticizing our culture, "that system of ideas by which a period lives," quote Ortega y Gasset. "We must," he says further, "return to the university its cardinal function of enlightenment."16

"In this distribution of functions the scholar" is, indeed, as Emerson said, "the delegated intellect. In the right state he is man thinking. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking." The university owes a democratic society the assurance that its citizens will not be parrots.17

Too much has already been written about today's crisis in the humanities to vex this topic further; suffice it to say that teaching the humanities only as specialties and confusing scholarship with education and general education with the liberal arts are the cardinal sins whose penance is that loss of influence on life the humanities suffer today.

To criticize any culture constructively, we need the interaction of reason with faith and belief. Criticism without belief is mere analysis; belief without criticism is merely free assertion, freely deniable. Each alone is lethal for any kind of enlightened life. As the Hasidim say:

To attain truth, man must pass forty-nine gates only to arrive finally before the last gate, the last question beyond which he cannot live without faith.

An act of faith is at the root of every construction we put on reality, secular or religious. The man of religious faith would say with Etienne Gilson:

What is reason but the rational understanding of faith?18

The man of science would agree with Victor Weiskopf:

We believe in the fundamental laws that govern everything in nature.19

What happens when those two faiths seem to converge? The evidence of science now points to a finite cosmos with a beginning in time, to the wonder of some and to the unbelieving consternation of others. Is one faith to be abandoned for the other? Or are they complementary constructions of the same reality?

Reconciliation of Faith and Reason

We are entering an era in which the conjunctions of faith and reason will promise to be more frequent because our knowledge is more fundamental. It is precisely in those conjunctions that Catholic universities, provided they are true universities and truly Catholic, are indispensable to culture and learning. The Church has always taught that faith leaves reason intact and that their reconciliation is fundamental to its intellectual ministry.

In the earliest days of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed Catholic universities' responsibilities for an apostolate of culture, stating their mission as follows:

To make a specific contribution to the Church and society—thanks to a really complete study of the different problems—with the concern to show the full significance of man regenerated in Christ and thus permit his complete development; to form pedagogically men who, having made a personal synthesis between faith and culture, will be capable both of keeping their place in society and of bearing witness in it to their faith; to set up, among teachers and students, a real community which already bears witness visibly to a living Christianity.20

Specifically, the pope rejects all partial humanisms:

In the midst of the swarm of present day approaches, which too often lead, moreover, to a minimizing of man. Christians have an original role to play, within research and teaching, precisely because they reject any partial vision of man.21

In his profound and richly textured first encyclical, he delineates the integral humanism that is the foundation of the Church dialogue with all human beings and their needs. He expresses special concern for the menace of technology and the need to inform technology with ethics.22

It is not difficult to see why an intellectual ministry is crucial to a Church whose mission is to speak to all persons in the name of a special set of values and beliefs.
But why is that ministry so important to secular society and secular universities as well?

For one thing, a university under religious auspices helps people to locate themselves in a most important dimension of human experience. No person is educated who has not formed an opinion about the divine and the transcendental. That opinion should be informed and authentic. It is the responsibility of Catholic universities to preserve, enrich, and examine the set beliefs that constitute Christian Catholic humanism for all who wish to examine it and to see it exemplified.

Universities under other religious persuasions have a similar responsibility to represent their doctrinal tradition and bring it into dialogue with secular value systems. A genuinely pluralistic society needs authentic expressions of the roots of its pluralism. Ezra Pound put it tersely thus: "A man wanting to conserve a tradition would always do well to find out first what it is." This is good advice for believers as well as for nonbelievers.

A similar responsibility pertains to the traditions of Western culture. The Church has been the prime transmitter of the Roman and Greek cultures, enriched in the Middle Ages and Renaissance and still shaping modern society. Integral to that tradition are the liberal arts, which have come to us from classical antiquity through the monastic schools and the medieval universities. These arts are essential to the criticism of our culture. All universities benefit when these arts are authentically taught.

As the bearer and interpreter of Christian Catholic humanism, our Catholic universities offer an integral system of human values against which to criticize contemporary conflicts of technology and values. The design of any future society must take into account our beliefs about humankind. How we use medicine—to start, prolong, or abort life; to care or cure; to change human nature—depends upon a philosophy of humankind. We must choose, from all the things technology can do, those that most clearly fulfill our rational, social, and spiritual beings. Choice is impossible without being grounded in a philosophical conception of humankind.

Society also needs to see, concretely and realistically, that a system of beliefs does in fact modify human relationships and that a system of Christian beliefs leads to Christian behavior. Catholic universities have an obligation to become communities of faith that exemplify Christian and Catholic beliefs. This is a most difficult condition to satisfy because Christ, the model we follow, demands so much love, sacrifice, and charity. To teach charity in the classroom, however, and violate it in our relationships with students, faculty, and those with whom we disagree is to fall into pharisaism of the worst kind. Catholic universities, therefore, can bring two strengths to their dialogue with society and other universities: an unbroken continuity with the tradition of the liberal arts and an integral set of beliefs about humankind. Both are essential to a reconstruction of the neglected university function of the criticism of culture.

If this is to be done convincingly, Catholic universities must expect to receive and sustain criticism themselves. Out of their exchanges with persons of learning they, too, will learn. Christianity without true dialogue is a message whose mission is thwarted.

To be truly universities, Catholic universities must recognize more clearly the conditions that define a valid intellectual mission infused by faith. Reason and faith have been, and will often appear to be, in conflict. . . . Catholic universities must learn to speak with authority and without authoritarianism, of morality without moralizing, of the spirit of the law without idolizing the letter."

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In theological matters, Pope John Paul II has emphasized that Catholic universities must "safeguard their
own character." That character finds "its source and its regulation in Scripture and tradition, in the experienced decisions of the Church handed down by the Magistrum throughout the course of the centuries." To safeguard that character, we are required to avoid worship of the extremes of those antinomies so beguiling to human minds.

**Freedom and Obligation**

His Holiness reemphasized the Catholic theologian's need for both freedom and obligation in his address at the Catholic University of America in October 1979, saying, "It behooves the theologian to be free but with the freedom that is openness to the truth and the light that comes from faith and fidelity to the Church."  

A Catholic university's students and faculty need not and should not all be Catholic. That would constrain scholarly excellence, inhibit the internal dialogue upon which our intellectual growth so much depends, and frustrate those outside the Church who want to see us "up close." All faculty should, however, believe in the validity of our mission as part of the Church. Minds must meet or learning cannot occur; faculty and students must examine meanings and values in the subjects they study. Faculty should express values and exchange their views with each other and with students; students should be encouraged to examine their own. Every question about faith is not a harbinger of heresy. As Thomas Merton said, "The man of faith who has never experienced doubts is not a man of faith."  

Some popular academic antinomies must also be eschewed. To place the liberal arts, and especially theology and philosophy, at the center of Catholic universities' uniqueness does not demand a repudiation of professional and technical schools. In a technological society, no error is more damaging to our mission. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, and some businessmen influence our lives in the most profound ways. They make value decisions daily for individuals and for society; they are the opinion and decision makers of our time, and the views they hold shape the kind of society we are. Not to equip our professionals with the skills for moral decision making or a framework of values is to deepen the conflict between moral and technical authority and expand the "menace of technology" that Pope John Paul II fears. Two decades devoted to teaching the humanities in medical schools allow me some small authority for this statement. Indeed, I submit that integrating the humanities into professional education offers the best chance for renewing their pristine place as teachers of us all.

Our Catholic universities must assist in the spiritual formation of all their students. The aim of that formation is not the mindless certitude of unexamined beliefs, but the growth of the student's mind and heart in a faith that gives meaning to earthly existence's inevitable anguish.

The same avoidance of antinomies applies to working with the communities in which we reside. When our intellectual resources are those most appropriate to a problem, we should not fear involvement as long as we do so with the stance appropriate to a university: systematically, critically, and with an aim to learning. The unrealistic expectation fostered within and without universities a decade ago must not drive us away from selective participation in meeting society's needs.

Finally, the person of true faith leaves natural reason intact and does not rush to the barricades every time a speculative suggestion questions old values or opens avenues for thought. As St. Cyprian warned, "Custom without truth is the antiquity of error."  

It is a mark of intellectual growth to be able to tell mere custom from truth. The person of faith respects a person whose ideas he or she may repudiate through the knowledge that inherent in the love of all learning is the hidden desire for God. That desire shines through all the things about which we can learn, no matter how we learn them. He shares, too, with all who love learning, the hope for a true humanism. Christian humanism offers an integral synthesis that avoids the dangers of all the reductionist humanisms so tantalizingly held before us. Camus, commenting on some of the atrocities of our times, warned us that "the executioners of today as everyone knows are humanists."  

Our questions about humankind can be enriched only when reason informs faith and faith informs reason. Faith and reason complement each other. George Santayana related them by saying that "science is the reason, art the joy, and religion the harmony of life."  

The harmony of life does not reside in an idyllic and ataractic existence free from all disquietude. Thomas Merton reminds us that "the concrete situation in which man finds himself as a nature created for a supernatural end
makes anguish inevitable. Our Catholic universities must assist in the spiritual formation of all their students. The aim of that formation is not the mindless certitude of unexamined beliefs, but the growth of the student’s mind and heart in a faith that gives meaning to earthly existence’s inevitable anguish.

The intellectual ministry of the Church has an intrinsic validity that transcends Catholic universities as such. It is conceivable that some other institutional form of that ministry may emerge in the future, but I cannot conceive of workable alternatives at the moment. Although they may become debilitated, Catholic universities will survive. It is crucial not only that they survive but that they serve their ministry as effectively and vigorously as possible.

I believe American Catholics, in the last years of this century, are ready to comprehend and to support more vigorously as possible. The intellectual ministry of the Church has an intrinsic validity that transcends Catholic universities as such. The uniqueness of our academic mission—the liberal arts taught in a framework of Christian Catholic humanism, and exemplified in a community of faith—is indispensable for the Church and for the world. Catholic universities remain the most substantial witness of the continuity of an intellectual and spiritual tradition in Western culture, which must be witnessed unapologetically, yet charitably.

We cannot say American Catholics are confronting a choice to have or not have Catholic universities. The very nature of our democratic, morally pluralistic, technological, and secular society demands their presence and removes the possibility of choice if the Church is to fulfill its mission to teach all humankind. Catholic universities must be part of its intellectual mission.

It is our moral responsibility, within what is really a theology of education, to support Catholic institutions of higher learning. American Catholics are financially and educationally capable of doing so. It is Catholic educators’ responsibility continually to refine the ideal of true universities, truly Catholic. Together the educated laity and the Catholic educator might just be able to actualize, in the twenty-first century, the ideal Cardinal Newman so brilliantly articulated in the nineteenth. I do not believe we have a morally defensible alternative. *

FOOTNOTES
5. Daniel P. Moynihan, “What To Do When the Supreme Court Is Wrong?” The Public Interest, Fall 1979, pp. 3-24.
18. Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revolution in the Middle Ages, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York City, 1954, p. 28.
20. Pope John Paul II, from an address on Feb. 24, 1979, to the members of the Council of the International Federation of Catholic Universities and Rectors of the Catholic Universities of Europe, meeting in Rome, as quoted in L’Osservatore Romano, March 5, 1979, p. 6.
21. Pope John Paul II.