

## FOCUS SECTION—CATHOLIC STUDIES & CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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### The Development of Catholic Studies Programs in American Catholic Universities

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In the mid-1960s, Sr. Jacqueline Grennan (1968), president of Webster College, called for the education of Catholics, but not in Catholic schools. Her mantra, there is no such thing as a Catholic physics, became an invitation for Catholics to become a part of the mainstream of the American academy. She viewed the need for Catholic professional associations as passé, and recommended that Catholic academics take their rightful place. Forty years later, Grennan's Webster College has become a secular, private university, where Catholic influence effectively has been extinguished.

Frederick Erb III (2002), an independent scholar active in the American Maritain Association, has opined that the wisdom of the Catholic worldview has been shunned by a secular American academy, steeped in postmodernism and unwilling to envision or engage a worldview other than its own. However, Erb believes that the Catholic-scholastic-philosophical tradition has a potential opening at the beginning of the twenty-first century with the promotion of Catholic Studies programs at non-Catholic higher education institutions.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the hegemony of scholastic philosophy in seminary education, and more widely in Catholic higher education, was secured with the promulgation of Pope Pius X's (1907) encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, which condemned modernism, a compilation of heresies that embraced such varied errors as agnosticism, immanentism, and evolutionism. This encyclical mandated the study of scholastic philosophy and theology in seminaries and a rigid adherence to scholastic principles. Effectively, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* opened the door for the flowering of the neo-scholasticism of such authors as Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, and provided Catholic higher education with a continued common core during the first half of the twentieth century. Within the next fifty years, the Catholic intellectual tradition, expressed not only in scholastic philosophy, but also in literature, history, music, and art, had dissipated (Gleason, 1995).

The Catholic sector, which had long weathered the cultural vicissitudes of American life, was swept into the mainstream in the 1960s. Catholic higher

education responded to the call of the Second Vatican Council to engage contemporary society, to listen and to learn, but also to explore how the Gospel can best be proclaimed and lived in the current moment. Thus, Catholic higher education found itself thrust into the midst of American civic life, addressing issues as diverse as the civil rights movement, the gathering protest of the unpopular Vietnam War, and disgruntled segments of society whose protests oftentimes turned violent, resulting in riots, civil unrest, and assassinations. Student demonstrations and campus unrest soon led to a new curricular openness that ushered the abandonment of a common liberal arts core curriculum. The curriculum of Catholic higher education, which once required extensive general education programs, was replaced with programs that provided for a variety of general education electives. The structured core of philosophical and religious education that was common in higher education in the years just prior to the Second Vatican Council became a hodgepodge of courses selected at the student's whim.

American Catholic higher education, under the leadership of such luminaries as Father Ted Hesburgh, C.S.C., president of Notre Dame University, and Father Paul Rienert, S.J., president of St. Louis University, attempted to revise American Catholic higher education in light of the Council, and so willingly responded to the challenge of re-visioning Catholic higher education for the next millennium. The work of presidents of Catholic colleges and universities during this era provided a framework, although controversial in some quarters, for making Catholic higher education compatible with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. While the leadership reflected upon the nature of the modern Catholic university, faculty in Catholic universities—most having completed their advanced degrees at either state or Ivy-league universities—presided over the dissipation of the scholastic core, in favor of a more diverse, postmodern curriculum.

### **A Very Short History of the Curriculum of Higher Education**

The history of the curriculum in American higher education is a study not only of the changes in types of courses and programs offered in higher education, but also of the evolution of the purposes and goals of higher education that form the foundation for the choices made by various faculties and institutions. American higher education—private and public, Catholic and non-Catholic—has experienced a similar, though not always exact, history of curricular development. One realizes two things in examining the comparative curricular development of Catholic higher education and its non-Catholic counterparts: First, both had similar struggles and developmental moments. The social and cultural factors that shaped American society also shaped its higher education. Second, that

while non-Catholic higher education—both private and public—effectively succumbed to Charles Eliot’s elective system, Catholic higher education held on to its scholastic core until the perilous decade of the 1960s.

Higher education in the colonial period had the dual task of preparing ministers of the Gospel and the intelligentsia of the colonies. The end of the curriculum was to develop an educated and articulate person, versed primarily in sacred Scripture and classical literature. This uniform program of studies remained the same whether one were preparing to be a lawyer, physician, politician, or member of the clergy. The one-size-fits-all curriculum of Harvard University at this time found its basis in the classical liberal arts curriculum of the medieval *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy), language studies in both Latin and Greek, and the study of classical literature. One’s practical training in the professions was accomplished primarily through an apprenticeship (Cohen, 1998). Catholic higher education would not begin until toward the end of the eighteenth century with the foundations of Georgetown College and St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore (Hennessee, 1981). The curriculum of both institutions would be based upon the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*—which would look very similar to the classical curriculum of Harvard described above.

By the end of the eighteenth century and certainly by the beginning of the nineteenth century, colleges and universities began to expand their courses of study. Alternative courses of study that prepared individuals for the world of exploration and commerce in the new nation became the new focus. For a long while, the classical curriculum stood side by side with what became known as the commercial curriculum. Higher education maintained a hierarchical stance in evaluating its curricular programs. Preeminence and honor was given to the classical program. However, the commercial program, which taught such essential skills as surveying, agriculture, and modern languages, grudgingly took its place in higher education programming due to the demand for individuals knowledgeable in these skills (Cohen, 1998). Catholic institutions of higher education—primarily instituted for the purpose of preparing candidates for ordination to the priesthood—moved beyond the classical ideal of the curriculum to offer courses of study similar to their non-Catholic peers to lay students who matriculated in their college departments. Both candidates for the seminary and for the lay college often did not have the academic prerequisites to begin advanced study, thus these same institutions developed preparatory programs: high schools (Power, 1958).

Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University (1869-1909), implemented a program of electives at Harvard University. Believing that “there has been too much reliance on the principle of authority, too little on the progressive and persistent appeal to reason” (Kliebard, 1987, p. 11), Eliot was determined

to provide students with the opportunity to engage in ways that moved beyond mere memorization. In contrast, Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago (1929-1951), was an avid proponent of the Great Books Curriculum and sought to institute the program at the University of Chicago during his tenure (Tanner & Tanner, 1995). The curriculum of Catholic universities and colleges more closely reflected the vision of Hutchins over that of Eliot with the exception that primacy of place within the general curriculum was given to the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

In the middle twentieth century there were two watershed moments in higher education generally and Catholic higher education in particular: the end of the Second World War and the onset of the student unrest of the 1960s. Both events impacted higher education in ways that would never allow it to return to the “good old days” ever again.

At the end of the Second World War returning veterans were given the benefit of attending college on a full government scholarship. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (1944), known also as the G.I. Bill, provided returning veterans, many of whom would otherwise never have attended college, with the funds to continue their education. The number of veterans who took advantage of this benefit was gigantic. The lazy, small campuses of the pre-World War II college were suddenly bustling with more students than they could handle. Enrollments were at an all-time high. Religious communities in Catholic higher education were incapable of keeping up with the demand, and had to hire large numbers of adjunct, lay faculty to complement an already declining religious faculty. The hiring that took place opened the doors of Catholic higher education to a level of intellectual diversity that it had not previously experienced, nor in some cases expected (Dosen, 2007).

The 1960s, which began with such optimism in both the country and the Catholic church, turned into an era of disillusionment by the middle of the decade. The assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, campus protests over the continuing conflict in Vietnam, and conflict that arose from urban rioting when the nonviolent philosophy of the civil rights movement was shattered with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. barely scratch the surface of the social tumult of this decade. It is during this same time that university students found their voice and demanded a curriculum that spoke to their lives and times—rather than the traditional curriculum, which they deemed irrelevant (Cohen, 1998).

### **From Ethnic Studies to Cultural Studies to Catholic Studies**

As one result of student demands for a more relevant curriculum, faculty began offering courses that addressed the literature, history, and worldview

of those ethnic groups traditionally not represented by courses focusing on the Western heritage. These courses, whether ethnic specific or multicultural, were built upon the presupposition that

studying the culture of Western Europe is insufficient to understand modern America, that various other ethnicities, religions, and nations have a literature, history, and art that all people should learn in order to appreciate the contributions, background, and thinking of each. (Cohen, 1998, p. 360)

By the latter part of the 1960s, individual electives grew into programs that focused upon the history and culture of Americans of African descent and the oft-overlooked contributions of women (Bergquist, 1977; Cohen, 1998). According to Arthurs (1993), the gradually more descriptive movement from the title Black studies to “‘African-American studies’ and now to ‘Africana studies,’ which incorporates into the field the world-wide diaspora of Black peoples and the diverse products of that diaspora” ( p. 261), indicate a growth in self-understanding about the integral nature of the field in understanding not only the worldview of the African American, but also integrating it within a global context. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, similar programs developed around Hispanic, Latino, Asian, Islamic, and Native American studies, each contributing to the overall understanding of the complex culture of a contemporary global society. It is within this context that the concept of Catholic Studies was born.

### **Catholic Studies as an Academic Field**

Catholic Studies, as an academic endeavor, developed during the last 10 to 20 years. Like the other cultural studies programs mentioned above, the Catholic Studies program tends to be interdisciplinary—examining the influence and impact of Catholic thought upon the history and culture of Western civilization. A cursory examination of Catholic Studies curricula and faculty demonstrate a wide representation of academic disciplines. While Erb (2002) posits that Catholic Studies programs will be of greatest value at the nonsectarian university, the development of Catholic Studies programs has exploded at Catholic universities. Envisioning Catholic Studies as a means of enhancing its ecclesial identity while not overstepping the precarious church-state boundaries, Catholic universities fostered

the creation of various institutes for the study of contemporary issues from the perspective of the Catholic tradition. Several of these can be found at the University of Notre Dame—for example, the Cushwa Center for the Study of

American Catholicism, the Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the Erasmus Institute. St. Thomas University in Miami, University of San Diego, Marquette, DePaul, Holy Cross and Loyola of Baltimore, among others, give witness to the increased support for programs of Catholic Studies on campuses both large and small. St. Louis University has produced faculty and staff videos on the mission of the Jesuits and the showing is accompanied by small group discussions, relating the story to the university today. New publications such as those coming from the Interdisciplinary Program in Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas at St. Paul are spreading the word about the Catholic intellectual tradition. (Gallin, 2000, p. 181)

Neither Gallin (2000) nor Morey and Pideret (2006) believe that Catholic Studies is the panacea for addressing the issue of Catholic higher education's ecclesial identity. Catholic Studies programs do not resolve the competing interests of magisterial authority in theological matters and governmental queasiness over providing state and federal funding to educational institutions that are "too entangled" with particular ecclesial bodies. Nor does it provide, in and of itself, the overarching moral framework that is necessary to create a "Christian" atmosphere in the conduct of students on campus. However, what Catholic Studies programs do provide is a space within the Catholic university where faculty and students can seriously study and research the impact of Catholicism on the world.

### **Catholic Studies Programs: Models and Implications**

Hinsdale (1999) provides four models for developing Catholic Studies programs: the cultural studies model, the apologetic model, the Catholic intellectual tradition model, and the formative/formation model. Each model provides an alternate motivation for developing a Catholic Studies program and also helps to contextualize the program within the curriculum developer's worldview of Catholicism in the academy and the world.

The "cultural studies" model of Catholic Studies grows directly from the tradition of the ethnic/cultural studies programs that were discussed earlier in this article. It is viewed ostensibly as unbiased, however, by its presence—especially on Catholic campuses—cultural studies programs "suggest that this particular cultural identity (that is, Catholicism) has become marginalized, whether that be through some process of institutional secularization... or as a by-product of the assimilation of White, European immigrant Catholics into mainstream American culture" (Hinsdale, 1999, p. 7). The fact that the program is developed as an advocacy program is an admission on the part of the authors of the curriculum that the Catholic intellectual heritage has been marginalized, and needs to be brought once again to the fore.

The “apologetic” model unashamedly calls forth the best that Catholicism has to offer as an antidote to the rampant secularism of contemporary society. It seeks to provide a worldview that is Catholic and unified. By its very nature it draws upon the neo-scholastic tradition of Gilson and Maritain and the literary tradition of John Henry Newman, C. S. Lewis, and G. K. Chesterton. Its disciplinary focus is primarily in the areas of philosophy, theology, and English literature and its tone is a monochromatic form of Anglo-American Catholicism. While individuals from throughout the university would be invited to offer courses in the program, special care would be taken to recruit faculty whose views would resonate with the program’s educational objectives (Hinsdale, 1999).

The “Catholic intellectual tradition” model of Catholic Studies becomes an interesting mixture of the cultural and apologetic models. It takes the interdisciplinary nature of the cultural model and mixes it with the motivation of preserving and expanding the Catholic intellectual life. While the temptation of the apologetic model might be to preserve the idyllic past, the Catholic intellectual tradition model tends to push the boundaries of Catholicism in several ways. First, it gives voice not only to the great tradition, but also to the marginal voices within Catholicism: for example, women, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. It also seeks to explore the reality of Catholicism as a truly world religion. It attempts to study and discover how Catholicism integrates with Asian, African, and other Native American cultures, thus potentially providing non-Western models for understanding Catholicism (Hinsdale, 1999).

The final model of Catholic Studies programs, the “formative or formational” model, really is an additive model. The formative model allows students to receive a more holistic vision of Catholicism—and particularly the sponsoring congregation’s charism (whether it be Vincentian, Jesuit, or Holy Cross). The academic programming—which might take the form of any of the above three models—provides an intellectual framework for the varied service learning programs, service trips, and retreats that provide students with the life experience of Catholic commitment and institutional charism (Hinsdale, 1999). As is the case with models, Hinsdale’s models are not meant to be prescriptions to which curriculum developers must rigidly adhere. Rather, they become ways of thinking about why and how it is that we do what we do.

### **Conclusion**

This article, written by a student of curriculum history, has attempted to provide a framework for understanding the context of Catholic Studies within

the framework of the education curriculum of higher education. In the articles that follow, Father James Heft outlines the development and debate surrounding Catholic Studies programs, the value of these programs in Catholic higher education, and the challenges these programs face. Dr. Don Briel, director of one of the largest Catholic Studies programs in the country, responds to some of these criticisms and challenges by outlining the work done at the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas. This provides the reader with an opportunity to hear and engage with how the Catholic intellectual tradition is being passed on to the next generation.

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