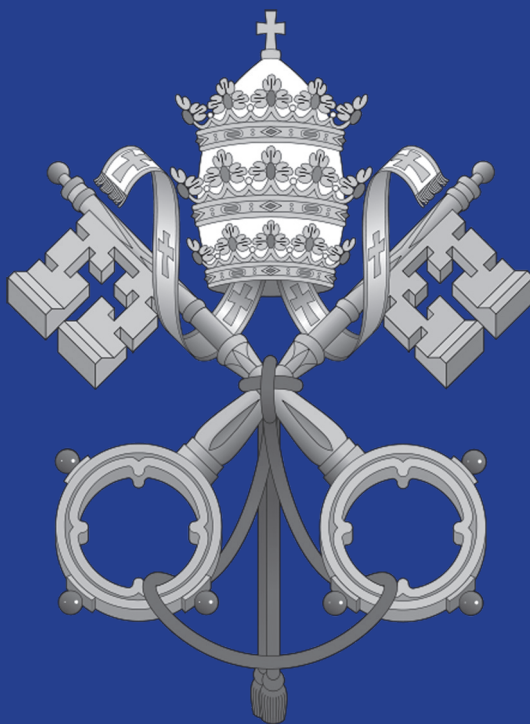


The Enduring Nature of the Catholic University

Commemorating the Anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI's
Address to Catholic Educators on April 17, 2008



A collection of essays on the renewal of Catholic higher education by
Most Rev. David Ricken, Msgr. Stuart Swetland, Rev. J. Augustine DiNoia,
Rev. Joseph Koterski, Rev. David O'Connell, and Dr. John Hittinger
with a foreword by The Hon. Kenneth Whitehead

The Enduring Nature of the Catholic University



The Cardinal Newman Society
Manassas, Virginia

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Manufactured in the United States of America.

Published by:

The Cardinal Newman Society

President, Patrick J. Reilly

Executive Vice President, Thomas W. Mead

The Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education

Director, Joseph A. Esposito

Deputy Director, Evangeline C. Jones

Layout and design by David J. Costanzo

Director of Communications

Dedicated to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI
with gratitude for his vision for Catholic higher education

Communion and the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian in Catholic Higher Education¹

Very Rev. J. Augustine DiNoia, O.P.

It should be admitted at the outset that the cozy juxtaposition of terms in my title, as much as they might reflect an ideal state of relations, do not fully correspond to the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves today in the United States of America.

For one thing, that the vocation of theologians is a properly ecclesial one has been and continues to be doubted, disputed, or denied. Even if it is conceded that the theological profession entails a calling of some kind, it is supposed that this would be primarily an academic or intellectual vocation, involving overriding allegiances, not to a church or denomination, but to one's scholarly guild and the larger academic community. The code of free inquiry upheld by these communities is thought to exclude in principle the intrusion of non-scholarly considerations (such as creedal or dogmatic ones) and even more so the interference of representatives of non-academic communities (such as bishops or the Holy See) in the pursuit of the theologian's specific intellectual vocation. In this perspective, if the possibility of an ecclesial vocation were to be granted at all, then it would presumably have to be defined and expressed in ways that did not contradict the supervening obligations of a strictly academic or intellectual vocation.

Furthermore, that the theologian has a place in higher education is a proposition that has not been self-evident at any time in the past hundred years, and that remains in doubt among Catholic and non-Catholic educators alike. The issue here concerns not theologians qua theologians but the field of theology itself. It may come as something of a surprise—especially to Catholics thinking of the historic importance of theological faculties in the great universities of western Europe—that theology found its place in American higher education only relatively late, with difficulty, and at a moment coinciding with the ascendancy of religious studies. With or without an ecclesial vocation, the theologian's place in Catholic higher education at the present can hardly be said to be a secure one.

Finally, that institutions of higher learning could maintain recognizable—not to say institutional—bonds to the Catholic Church and still be true to their mission as modern research institutions has been and continues to be questioned by many, both within the Catholic Church and beyond it. Behind this doubt stretches a long history of which the period since the publication of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* is but the most recent phase. The view that church affiliation and academic integrity might be incompatible with one another has led many Catholic and Protestant institutions of higher learning over the past century to weaken or dissolve the affiliations that bound them to their founding ecclesial communities. The pressure to pursue this course has perhaps been felt more acutely by Catholic higher education because the polity of the Catholic

1. This essay is revised from a lecture presented at the John Paul II Cultural Center on November 14, 2003, as part of a conference titled "The Call to Holiness and Communion: Vatican II on the Church" and sponsored by Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan.

Church, in contrast to that of most other churches and ecclesial communities, is perceived to allow for a more direct involvement in the life of the Catholic campus. In the years since *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, it has perhaps become clearer that the issue here is not just the maintenance of a Catholic identity but also participation in Catholic communion. Disagreements about how to track the relationships between the Catholic college or university and the Catholic Church influence perceptions of the theologian's vocation, as well as judgments about his or her place in Catholic higher education.

It is clear then that, far from announcing the exposition of truths concerning which there is an undisturbed consensus in Catholic higher education in the United States, my title in effect introduces a set of disputed questions about which there are widespread and persistent doubts even within Catholic circles. In the form of powerful cultural assumptions, these doubts have influenced the actual shape of Catholic higher education in this country.

Catholic higher education and the ecclesiology of communion

The Church's teaching authorities, while cognizant of these doubts, cannot be said to share them.

Consider higher education first. The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the traditional Catholic view of the possibility and character of Church sponsorship of colleges and universities.² Following upon and implementing the conciliar teaching were two companion documents: *Sapientia Christiana*,³ concerning the governance of ecclesiastically accredited institutions, and *Ex corde Ecclesiae*,⁴ concerning all other Catholic institutions of higher learning. These apostolic constitutions laid out the different ways that ecclesial communion is embodied by Catholic institutions of these diverse types. The publication of *Sapientia Christiana* initiated a period during which American ecclesiastical faculties brought their own statutes into line with the new legislation, while in 2000 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' application of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* received official recognition by the Holy See.⁵ What is more, within postconciliar teaching, theology and education have been regularly addressed by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI in their many discourses and encyclicals.

The call to holiness and communion is central to understanding the confidence—one could as well say the absence of doubts—with which the Church advances her vision of Catholic higher education and the place of theology within it. The ecclesiology of communion is of fundamental importance in sustaining this confidence and in articulating this vision.

2. Pope Paul VI, declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, October 28, 1965 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 10.

3. Pope John Paul II, apostolic constitution *Sapientia Christiana*, April 15, 1979 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979).

4. Pope John Paul II, apostolic constitution *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, August 15, 1990 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990).

5. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: An Application to the United States*, *Origins* 30 (2000), 68-75.

The gift of truth that we have received from Christ is this: to know that no one has ever wanted anything more than God wants to share the communion of His life with us. What Christ taught us and what we proclaim to the world is that the triune God invites all human persons to participate in the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and with one another in them. Holiness is nothing less than the transformed capacity to enjoy this communion, and ecclesial communion is at root nothing less than trinitarian communion.

This basic truth of Catholic faith unfolds in an ensemble of other truths about creation, incarnation, redemption and sanctification. The central truths of the Christian faith find their deepest meaning in the reality of trinitarian communion. Everything created exists so that the Blessed Trinity could realize this plan of love. Through the incarnation and the paschal mystery, Christ enables creaturely persons to enter into the life of the uncreated Persons. In the Church, the Holy Spirit unites all those transformed in Christ and draws them into the communion of trinitarian love. Ecclesial communion is nothing less than the beginning of our participation in the life of the Blessed Trinity.

Pope John Paul II repeatedly described this communion as a “participated theonomy” which draws us into the communion of trinitarian love in such a way that our full humanity is fulfilled and at the same time transcended. This theme, frequently reiterated in the Holy Father’s great encyclicals, is fundamental for developing a properly Catholic understanding of the place of education and scholarship in human personal, social, and cultural life. In Christian faith, the human reality is not suppressed but is fully realized. To embrace the First Truth and the Absolute Good who is God is not to accept constraints on human reason and desire, but to free them for their divinely willed destiny.

The Church’s teaching and legislation regarding Catholic higher education are unintelligible apart from the ecclesiology of communion.

Autonomy and institutional bonds of Catholic higher education

It is clear that a wide range of teaching activities is required if the Church is to be able to communicate the gift of truth she has received from Christ.⁶ The institutional expression of these teaching activities has taken many different forms throughout Christian history. In the field of higher education the evidence for continuing and vigorous Catholic presence is indisputable. Far from experiencing any doubts about this possibility, the Church assumes as her rightful role the establishment of colleges and universities, and the maintenance of appropriate relations with them.

From a theological perspective, the genius of Catholic jurisprudence in this area arises from its underlying Christian humanism. As personal and social beings, the Christian faithful possess an inherent dignity and autonomy which must be respected if ecclesial communion is to be realized. The reality of communion presupposes the reality of persons in communion and, in an ordered community like the Catholic Church, the reality of institutions in communion. It

6. J. A. Di Noia, “Communion and Magisterium: Teaching Authority and the Culture of Grace,” *Modern Theology* 9 (1993), 403-18.

would be self-contradictory to invoke the ecclesiology of communion as grounds for infringing upon the autonomy rightly enjoyed by persons and institutions, and thus juridically protected, in the Catholic Church. The very notion of being in communion presupposes the integrity and autonomy, if also the interdependence, of the participants in ecclesial communion. The concrete expression of a series of relationships by its very nature affirms the proper autonomy and distinctive competencies of the persons and institutions enjoying ecclesial communion.

Although the grace of ecclesial communion is in the deepest sense an invisible reality, it is not an abstraction. Catholic tradition insists that it must take visible form in concrete communities and in their social and institutional structures. In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, the Church has invited Catholic colleges and universities to internalize the renewed ecclesiology of communion in the structures of their institutions, and in different ways depending on whether they are ecclesiastically accredited or not.

The historical record in the United States supports the conclusion that, given the political and cultural pressures favoring increasing secularization over the past hundred years and into the foreseeable future, the Catholic identity of currently Catholic institutions of higher learning is not likely to be sustainable without concrete juridical bonds between these institutions and the Church. Naturally, in developing its teaching and legislation in this area, the Holy See does not have only the situation in the United States in view. But the practical implications of an ecclesiology of communion, formulated with the whole Catholic Church in view, nonetheless have particular urgency in a situation where “the disengagement of colleges and universities from their Christian churches” has become endemic.⁷ In his indispensable book on this topic, *The Dying of the Light*, Father James Burtchaell documented with considerable detail the informal arrangements by which hundreds of sincere and well-meaning faculty, administrators and church leaders of countless once church-related colleges and universities believed that they would be able to ensure the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, and other denominational identities of their institutions.⁸ Without the adoption of juridical provisions, and relying solely on the good will and sense of commitment of Catholic educators and bishops—as was strongly suggested by some—few of the currently Catholic institutions of higher learning in the U.S. are likely to remain distinctively and recognizably Catholic. Even with the adoption of something like clearly stated juridical provisions of the USCCB Application, it may be that the secularizing trends will turn out to have been irreversible in some of the two hundred or more Catholic institutions of higher learning in the U.S.

Recent studies, including those by Father Burtchaell, Philip Gleason, John McGreevy, Philip Hamburger, and others, have made it possible to identify with greater precision the cultural and political forces operative in the relatively swift transformation that has occurred in

7. James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), subtitle.

8. On these themes, see also David J. O'Brien, *From the Heart of the American University* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), and George Mardsen, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Catholic higher education in the U.S. since the 1960s.⁹ Significant anti-Catholic cultural assumptions, which in part contributed to shaping public policy towards education, gave prevalence to the notion that church affiliation, most especially in the Catholic ambit, inevitably compromised the academic excellence, research capacity, and institutional autonomy of institutions enmeshed in such relationships. In addition, it was widely held that, because of their submissiveness to church authority, Catholics could never fully internalize the valued American traits of individual autonomy and freedom of thought and expression that would make for good citizens of the republic. In so far as they were not actively anti-religious, these forces favored the development of a broadly enlightened form of religiosity, free of ties to particular churches or denominations, and of the dogmatic and institutional commitments entailed by these ties. The impact of these cultural and political forces was aggravated after the Second Vatican Council, not only by the collapse of a distinctively Catholic culture, but also by the uncritical embrace of the secular culture (mistakenly thought to be warranted by the council's constitution, *Gaudium et spes*).¹⁰ Catholic educators (and others) failed to recognize that the ambient culture, whose values they sought to embody institutionally, was not religiously neutral but often encoded with actively de-Christianizing assumptions. The call to holiness and communion, reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council and vigorously reasserted in the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, offers an opportunity for Catholic Church-related institutions of higher education in the U.S. to recover their distinctively Catholic identity and embody it in clearly expressed communal bonds with the Church. With a tradition of academic excellence and freedom of inquiry stretching back to the medieval universities, Catholic higher education should courageously address the range of anti-Catholic and, increasingly, anti-Christian prejudices that seek to exclude Catholics and other Christians from participation in public life and from influence on public policy. According to the Second Vatican Council, Catholic universities aim to ensure that the Christian outlook should acquire "a public, stable, and universal influence in the whole process of the promotion of higher culture."¹¹ As was true in the past, Catholic colleges and universities in the U.S. have an important contribution to make to the Christianization of American culture. George Lindbeck, the distinguished Lutheran theologian and astute observer of the Catholic scene, has written: "The waning of cultural Christianity may not be a good thing for societies. Traditionally Christian lands, when stripped of their historic faith, become unworkable and demonic... Christianization of culture can be in some situations the church's major contribution to feeding the poor,

9. Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 2003)

10. On American Catholic culture in the twentieth century, see Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), and William M. Halsey, *Survival of American Innocence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980). On the impact of *Gaudium et spes*, see Tracy Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2003). For a general view of Christianity and culture, see Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

11. Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 10.

clothing the hungry and liberating the imprisoned.”¹² Catholic institutions of higher learning can play a central role in helping the Church, as well as other Christian communities, to monitor the impact of mass culture on the communication of the faith and the expression of Catholic and Christian life in western postmodern societies.

The place of theology in Catholic higher education

In addition to articulating a comprehensive vision of Catholic higher education, both conciliar and post-conciliar teaching consistently assigned a central role to theology and its cognate disciplines in Catholic higher education. Following upon *Gravissimum Educationis* of the Second Vatican Council, the twin post-conciliar apostolic constitutions on higher education each assume that theology will find a place in the Catholic colleges and universities. As might be expected in a document that contains norms for ecclesiastical faculties and seminaries, *Sapientia Christiana* provides a complete picture of the curriculum of theology and its associated disciplines. But *Ex corde Ecclesiae* is no less explicit on the matter, even if it concedes that in certain situations nothing more than a chair of theology will be possible.¹³ Both documents affirm that the primary focus of theology is to investigate and explain the doctrines of the Catholic faith as drawn from revelation. It is assumed that this study will be pursued in a spirit of true freedom of inquiry, employing appropriate methods, and acknowledging the derived character of the knowledge sought and thus its dependence on divine revelation. Significantly, both documents ascribe important integrating functions to theology within the overall programs of Catholic colleges and universities, a traditional emphasis in the rationales for theology in almost all church-related higher education.

Studying these documents within the framework of Catholic history in western Europe, one might well expect the legitimacy of theology’s place in the curriculum of higher education to be self-evident. Indeed, as Cardinal Avery Dulles has noted, it is unrealistic not to include theology in the university curriculum since “the Church and the Catholic people legitimately expect that some universities will provide an intellectual environment in which the meaning and implications of the faith can be studied in relation to the whole realm of human knowledge.”¹⁴

Nonetheless, for a variety of reasons, which are lately being subjected to more systematic study, the study of religion and theology did not enjoy an unchallenged place in the evolution of church-related, and indeed public, higher education in the U.S. Two brilliant books—D. G. Hart’s on the history of Protestant rationales for the study of theology and religion and Philip Gleason’s on the history of Catholic higher education in the twentieth century—give the topic the attention it deserves and at the same time provide fascinating reading for anyone interested in understanding the current situation of the study and teaching of religion and theology in American higher education.¹⁵

12. George A. Lindbeck, *The Church in A Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 7. See also Aidan Nichols, *Christendom Awake: On Reenergizing Church and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

13. Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, 19.

14. Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 172.

15. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, and D. G. Hart, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1999), with extensive biblio-

Hart and Gleason show that in the United States throughout much of the nineteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant educators tended to view theology as a discipline that belonged in the seminary, not in the college or university. In church-affiliated Catholic and Protestant colleges, religious instruction was more likely to be seen as catechetical and moral formation than as properly theological inquiry. Later, with the emergence of the modern research university, Protestant educators struggled to legitimate teaching and research in the Christian religion while at the same time downplaying the particular denominational entailments such teaching and research might otherwise involve. Catholic higher education in early twentieth century America tended to give a central role to religiously colored philosophical studies rather than to theology itself. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, neoscholastic philosophy played an influential role in curricular integration in Catholic colleges and universities and in the provision of the self-understanding that gave Catholic culture its shape. During this period, theology properly so-called only gradually began to find a place in Catholic higher education, though kerygmatic, liturgical, and Thomistic approaches remained in contention as Catholic educators strove to identify the kind of teaching that would be appropriate for undergraduates. Inevitably, both Protestant and Catholic curricula were influenced by the teaching of theology as conducted in their seminaries. For different but related reasons, neither Protestant nor Catholic university theology enjoyed the undiluted respect of the broader academic community. With the erosion of the hold of neo-orthodoxy in Protestant theology and the collapse of the neoscholastic synthesis in Catholic higher education, the 1960s were a time of crisis for both Catholic and Protestant theological and religious educators. The 1960s set in motion powerful cultural and educational trends that eventuated in the widespread (albeit unstable) prevalence of religious studies in Catholic, Protestant, and public higher education.¹⁶

In Catholic higher education, the displacement of theology by religious studies poses significant challenges. Frank Schubert's important study of this shift covers the crucial period 1955-1985 and demonstrates the steady move away from courses engaging in appropriation of the Catholic tradition toward courses in the history, anthropology, and sociology of religion.¹⁷ While admitting areas of overlap between theology and religious studies, most scholars acknowledge the fundamental difference in perspective represented by the approaches to religious realities in these diverse fields. Whereas theology takes the claim to truth made by the sources of Christian revelation as its framework, the field(s) of religious studies systematically bracket the claims to truth made for contending religious traditions. For theology, revelation provides the principles for inquiry, and the truth of Christian doctrines is the basic assumption for this inquiry. For religious studies, the world's religions present a richly diverse set of texts,

graphy.

16. See Patrick W. Carey and Earl Muller, eds., *Theological Education in the Catholic Tradition: Contemporary Challenges* (New York: Crossroad, 1998); Patrick Carey, "College Theology in Historical Perspective," in Sandra Mize and William Portier, eds., *American Catholic Traditions: Resources for Renewal* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 242-71; Susan M. Mountin, "A Study of Undergraduate Roman Catholic Theology Education, 1952-1976," Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1994; Pamela C. Young, "Theological Education in American Catholic Higher Education, 1939-1973," Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1995.

17. Frank D. Schubert, *A Sociological Study of Secularization Trends in the American Catholic University* (Lewiston, Maine: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

institutions, rites, and other phenomena, which are studied employing a range of humanistic and social scientific methodologies.

In Catholic colleges and universities where this shift is complete and likewise unchallenged, it is difficult for theology to maintain its integrity and finality as *fides quaerens intellectum*. Apart from any other secularizing pressures that might be operative, in the midst of predominantly religious studies departments, theology itself can easily yield to the methods and perspectives of the study of religion. As we shall see shortly, the transformation of theology into a branch of religious studies makes it nearly unintelligible to claim for theologians any properly ecclesial vocation or even connection with the believing community.

The ecclesial vocation of the theologian

What must be surely regarded as among the most significant official documents on the place of the theologian in the Church appeared in 1990. It was prepared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was confidently entitled “The Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian.”

Although the documents of the Second Vatican Council mentioned theology and theologians at various points—perhaps most notably in the Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*),¹⁸ the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*),¹⁹ and the Decree on Priestly Formation (*Optatam Totius*)²⁰—the council did not make this theme the focus of an extended treatment.²¹ Given the impact that the council had on the work of theologians, this may come as something of a surprise—all the more so perhaps, since it was “the great blossoming of theology between the world wars which made the Second Vatican Council possible.”²² After the conclusion of the council the continuing contribution of theologians was institutionalized in a remarkable way when Pope Paul VI established the International Theological Commission in 1969.²³

The CDF Instruction reflects the Church’s renewed consciousness of the centrality of the role of the theologian in her life. Reprising significant elements of the Catholic tradition, as ar-

18. Pope Paul VI, dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*, November 18, 1965 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 23-24.

19. Pope Paul VI, dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), 23.

20. Pope Paul VI, decree *Optatam Totius*, November 28, 1965 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 12, 14-16.

21. For a helpful discussion of conciliar teaching regarding theology, see Anthony J. Figueiredo, *The Magisterium-Theology Relationship: Contemporary Theological Conceptions in the Light of Universal Church Teaching* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2001), 211-37; for the historical background and setting, 167-237; for the relations between bishops and theologians in the United States, 287-342.

22. Joseph Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 66. See also K. H. Neufeld, “In the Service of the Council: Bishops and Theologians at the Second Vatican Council,” in R. Latourelle, ed., *Vatican Council II: Assessments and Perspectives II* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 74-105.

23. Michael Sharkey, *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

ticated in conciliar and post-conciliar teaching, the Instruction forcefully argues that the theologian's vocation is a properly ecclesial one and, as in the case of Catholic colleges and universities, that the bonds of ecclesial communion implied by this relationship can be expressed juridically. The CDF Instruction may be taken as a robust reminder that the call to holiness and communion comes to theologians at least in part through the mediation of their ecclesial vocation precisely as theologians.²⁴

At the start of his splendid book, *The Shape of Theology*, Father Aidan Nichols asks the question: "What sort of person must I be in order to become a theologian?"—to which we might well add, "and in order to continue being one."²⁵ This, in effect, is the arresting question posed by the CDF document. In addressing this question, the Instruction takes up in turn the divine gift of truth, the vocation of the theologian, and the role of the Magisterium. Under its consideration of the role of the Magisterium, the Instruction gives extended attention to the problem of theological dissent.²⁶

But what is particularly noteworthy is that the Instruction begins, not with the Magisterium, but with the gift of divine truth. Indeed, the Instruction's Latin title is *Donum Veritatis*, "the gift of truth." Because theology is not simply an "ancillary function" of the Magisterium, we need to locate the theologian and the work of theology in the broader context of the life of Church, precisely as she is the locus of a truth which she did not generate but which she received as a gift. At the center of this truth is the person of Jesus Christ who reveals the divine desire to draw us into the communion of trinitarian love and, moreover, who enables us to enjoy this communion. The function of the Magisterium is to guard and teach this truth in its entirety which the Church received as a gift and is bound to hand on. For this reason, according to Cardinal Ratzinger, the Instruction "treats the ecclesial mission of the theologian not in a duality of Magisterium-theology, but rather in the framework of a triangular relationship defined by the people of God, bearer of the *sensus fidei*, the Magisterium, and theology."²⁷ In different ways, therefore, both the Magisterium and theology are servants of a prior truth, received in the Church as a gift.²⁸

Perhaps the most important contribution of the Instruction is to have secured in this way what Cardinal Ratzinger called the "ecclesial identity of theology"²⁹ and, correspondingly, the ecclesial vocation of the theologian. In the words of the Instruction itself: "Among the vocations awakened... by the Spirit in the Church is that of the theologian... [whose] role is to pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God found in the inspired Scriptures and handed on by the living Tradition of the Church... [which he does] in communion

24. For post-conciliar teaching on theology, see Figueiredo, 239-86.

25. Aidan Nichols, *The Shape of Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 13.

26. This discussion of dissent is perhaps the most complete to be found in any official Catholic document. For the setting of this discussion, see Figueiredo, 232-3; 254-60. It could be noted here that, for a Catholic theologian, the situation of being in dissent from Catholic doctrine is essentially an anomalous one and should not be allowed to frame the treatment of the ecclesial vocation of the theologian.

27. Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology*, 104-5.

28. See Di Noia, "Communion and Magisterium."

29. Ratzinger, 105.

with the Magisterium which has been charged with the responsibility of preserving the deposit of faith.”³⁰ The theological vocation responds to the intrinsic dynamic of faith which “appeals to reason” and “beckons reason... to come to understand what it has believed.”³¹ In this way, “theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith.”³² But the theological vocation also responds to the dynamic of love, for “in the act of faith, man knows God’s goodness and begins to love Him... [and] is ever desirous of a better knowledge of the beloved.”³³

The gift of truth received in the Church thus establishes both the context for the vocation and mission of the theologian, and the framework for the actual practice of the discipline of theology. This ecclesially received truth, as articulated in the deposit of faith and handed on by the Magisterium, constitutes not an *extrinsic* authority that poses odious limits on an inquiry that would otherwise be free but an *intrinsic* source and measure that gives theology its identity and finality as an intellectual activity. Hence, as Cardinal Ratzinger asks, “Is theology for which the Church is no longer meaningful really a theology in the proper sense of the word?”³⁴ Examined independently of the assent of faith and the mediation of the ecclesial community, the texts, institutions, rites, and beliefs of the Catholic Church can be the focus of the humanistic, philosophical, and social scientific inquiries that together constitute the field of religious studies. But Christian theology is a different kind of inquiry. Cut off from an embrace of the truth that provides its subject matter and indicates the methods appropriate to its study, theology as the Church has always understood it loses its specific character as a scientific inquiry of a certain type.³⁵ Its precise scope is to seek the intelligibility of a truth received in faith by the theologian who is himself a member of the ecclesial community that is, as Cardinal Walter Kasper has said, “the place of truth.”³⁶

The theologian is thus free to seek the truth within limits imposed, not by an intrusive external authority, but by the nature of his discipline as such. As the Instruction points out: “Freedom of research, which the academic community holds most precious, means an openness to accepting the truth that emerges at the end of an investigation in which no element has intruded that is foreign to the methodology corresponding to the object under study.”³⁷ Theology cannot “deny its own foundations,” to use the words of Cardinal Dulles; the acceptance of the authority and Scripture and doctrines in theology is “not a limitation but rather the charter of its existence and freedom to be itself.”³⁸ The freedom of inquiry proper to theology, is, according to the CDF Instruction, the “hallmark of a rational discipline whose object is given by Revelation, handed on and interpreted in the Church under the authority of the Magisterium, and

30. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Veritatis*, May 24, 1990 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990).

31. *Ibid.*, 6.

32. *Ibid.*, 6.

33. *Ibid.*, 7.

34. Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 323.

35. See J. A. Di Noia, “The Practice of Theology,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, eds. James J. Buckley, F.C. Bauerschmidt & Trent Pomplun (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 237-50.

36. Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 129-47.

37. *Ibid.*, 12.

38. Dulles, 168.

received by faith. These givens have the force of principles. To eliminate them would mean to cease doing theology.”³⁹ The principles of theology, as we noted earlier, are derived from revelation, and constitute the discipline as such. In accepting them, the theologian is simply being true to the nature of his subject, and to his vocation as a scholar in this field.

These elements of the Instruction’s account of the theological vocation are ferociously contested in today’s academy, largely on the basis of what Lindbeck has called the “individualistic foundational rationalism” which shapes the deepest cultural assumptions of modernity.⁴⁰ But the Church has a solid, well-substantiated, and historically warranted rationale for its account of the nature of theology as an intellectual discipline of a particular sort, and of the responsibilities of its practitioners. In the present circumstances, we need to make this case without apology. It is central to the convictions of the Catholic Church, and indeed of the Christian tradition as such, to give priority to a theonomous rather than to an autonomous rationality. It so happens that certain postmodern intellectual trends have begun to advance what Alasdair MacIntyre calls the traditioned character of all rational inquiry⁴¹ and Lindbeck calls the socially and linguistically constituted character of belief. This intellectual climate is, to a certain extent, more favorable to the defense of the principle of theonomous rationality that is crucial for the Catholic understanding of theology. But it must be recognized that the basis for this understanding is itself a properly theological one that is rooted in fundamental Christian convictions about the gift of truth and its reception in the ecclesial community.⁴²

The Church embodies her understanding of the nature of theology and of the ecclesial vocation of the theologian by, according to both the discipline and its practitioners, a role in Catholic higher education according to the principles of the ecclesiology of communion which we considered earlier.

According to *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and *Sapientia Christiana*, the standard theological disciplines include: sacred Scripture, dogmatic theology, moral theology, pastoral theology, canon law, liturgy, and church history. Those teaching these disciplines are invited to make a profession of faith and oath of fidelity in order to express the derived character of these disciplines and the ecclesial space they inhabit. These formulas in effect allow the scholar to express a promise to respect the principles of his or her field as well as the personal communion of the theologian with the Church. Viewed in this light, theological disciplines and their practitioners are in a situation analogous to other disciplines and to scholars in other fields which are supervised by professional societies, by peer review, and by a whole range of certifying and accrediting bodies who maintain the standards within these fields and the credibility which they rightly enjoy among the general public.

39. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Veritatis*, 12.

40. Lindbeck, 7.

41. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). See especially the essays by Jean Porter, Stephen P. Turner and Terry Pinkard in Mark C. Murphy, ed., *Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

42. See Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). For an excellent overview, see Bernhard A. Eckerstorfer, “The One Church in the Post-Modern World: Reflections on the Life and Thought of George Lindbeck,” *Pro Ecclesia* 13 (2004), 399.

In addition, the Church offers a canonical mission to theologians teaching in ecclesiastical faculties, and a *mandatum* to those teaching in all other institutions of higher learning. Although both the canonical mission and the *mandatum* have provoked controversy, the necessity of the canonical mission is perhaps better understood within the context of ecclesiastically accredited faculties. Here, I will confine my remarks to the *mandatum*.⁴³

The nature of the *mandatum* referred to in *Ex corde Ecclesiae* is best understood in the light of the Second Vatican Council's decree on the laity: "Thus, making various dispositions of the apostolate according to the circumstances, the hierarchy enjoins some particular form of it more closely with its own apostolic function. Yet the proper nature and distinctiveness of each apostolate must be preserved, and the laity must not be deprived of the possibility of acting on their own accord. In various church documents this procedure of the hierarchy is called a mandate."⁴⁴ (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 24). While the *mandatum* has a different juridical character from the canonical mission of professors teaching in ecclesiastical faculties as required by *Sapientia Christiana*, both express in a concrete way the ecclesial identity of the theologian. According to canonist Father Reginald Whitt, the above-mentioned mandate "refers to those apostolic activities that remain activities proper to the laity in virtue of their baptism yet joined closely to the apostolic ministry of the bishop." A Catholic professor of theology in a Catholic university is thus considered "as one of the faithful engaged in the higher education apostolate entitled and required to obtain endorsement from the competent hierarch."⁴⁵

In requiring the *mandatum* (and, for that matter, the canonical mission) the Church acknowledges that the Catholic theologian pursues his or her inquiries under the light of revelation as contained in Scripture and tradition and proclaimed by the Magisterium. In seeking the *mandatum*, the individual theologian gives a concrete expression to the relationship of ecclesial communion that exists between the Church and the Catholic teacher of a theological discipline in a Catholic institution of higher learning. The acceptance of the *mandatum* does not make the pursuit and recognition of truth a matter of obedience to authority: as we have seen, it is not that the doctrines of the faith are true because the Magisterium teaches them, but that the Magisterium teaches them because they are true. It is the Catholic conviction that the truths of faith point ultimately to nothing less than the First Truth itself, whose inner intelligibility constantly draws the inquiring mind to himself. The acceptance of the *mandatum* by a theologian is simply the public affirmation and social expression of this fundamental Catholic conviction.

Conclusion

We have considered the ecclesial vocation of the theologian in Catholic higher education and the ecclesiology of communion. We began with a series of doubts, but we end on a note of con-

43. For helpful discussions of the canonical mission and the *mandatum*, see Figueiredo, 185-87; 253-54; 374-80.

44. Pope Paul VI, decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, December 18, 1965 (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 24.

45. D.R. Whitt, " 'What We Have Here is a Failure to Communicate': The Mind of the Legislator in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*," *Journal of College and University Law* 25 (1999), 790.

fidence. Surely, if the example of Pope Benedict XVI teaches us nothing else, it should teach us confidence in the inherent attractiveness of the Christian faith, and, in particular, the Catholic vision of higher education and of the vocation of the theologian. While the assumptions of the ambient culture will not always be friendly to it, this vision nonetheless deserves to be presented fully and without compromise. Indeed, because the call to holiness and communion originates not with us but with Christ, our hearers deserve from us a confident and unapologetic invitation to share a vision of human life that finds its consummation in the divine life of trinitarian communion. Nothing less will do.

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