

Benedictine University

The Development of Catholic Identity as Applied to Our Students' Education

August 26, 2005

Alicia Cordoba Tait, Chair of Steering Committee
Center for Mission and Identity
Al Martin and Martin Tracey, Co-Chairs

Committee Members:

Kevin Doyle, Julie Dugger, Patrick Flynn, James Iaccino, Daniel Julius, Eileen Kolich, Philip Timko, OSB, David Turner, OSB, Susan Mikula, and John Mickus

Outline of Paper

- I. Introduction
- II. History of Catholic Higher Education in America
- III. Development of Catholic Identity at Benedictine University
- IV. Conclusion
- V. Works Cited

I. Introduction

The following paper reflects the development of the Catholic identity of Benedictine University beginning with the questions asked by the monks of St. Procopius Abbey in the 1960s and continuing through the work of the Ex Corde Ecclesiae sub-committee of the AQIP Focus Group responsible for the Catholic and Benedictine Identity. As a discussion paper, it is intended to promote discussion on the Catholic identity of Benedictine University and how it relates to the educational mission of the university.

II. Primary Aim of Discussion

The mission and goals of Benedictine University are supported and informed by both the Catholic and Benedictine traditions of the institution. Since its inception, Benedictine University has incorporated elements of the Benedictine values into its mission. Inspired by the *Rule of St. Benedict*, the fundamental values espoused by the Benedictine monks and sisters have appeared to be more readily adaptable to academic acceptance. The universal quality of these basic values is accessible to students and faculty of all faiths, particularly in their relationship to the development of the whole person—mind, body and spirit.

The academic and administrative bodies of our institution have not as easily identified the implications of the Catholic nature of Benedictine University as related to the Catholic precepts of the Church. The Catholic Intellectual Tradition which extends back to the church fathers and the medieval university, although well documented and studied, is not as easily observable in the classroom nor as easily adapted to other facets of the university. With such a diverse campus as ours, the Catholic tradition often appears to be at odds with the faiths and traditions of others.

The primary aim, therefore of this discussion paper is to

- Present historical background pertinent to Benedictine University in this area
- Present potential ideas for future growth in the academic arena in regard to Catholic teaching.

The expected result if this paper therefore is to generate – or reignite – ideas for future planning. By considering past accomplishments and challenges, our current status, and ideas for future enhancement and/or contribution, we can better understand the paths we have taken and determine the direction we would like to go in the future.

III. History of Catholic Higher Education in America

Books are very important for the spiritual culture of a monastery. Therefore, medieval Catholic monks demonstrated a desire and need to devote themselves to intellectual development and literacy. Of particular importance to their mission was to study the liberal arts, as they were then understood, in order to understand the teaching of Scripture.

One of the main locations for literacy activity and historical preservation of important writings was located in Monte Cassino, Italy, the abbey of St. Benedict. The studies there were especially in areas of theology, historiography, and medical science. Education was seen as a tool to serve the Church, an opportunity to give the faithful an opportunity to enrich and deepen their faith every day.

Beginning in the 13th century, many religious orders were founded in the Catholic Church as variations of the monastic model to meet particular apostolic needs. Many of these orders were engaged in education. They were not as concerned with the level of teaching but with the improvement of the local culture, the deepening of the faith, and the increase of religious vocations.

Continuing the European legacy of improving literacy and faith, many religious orders came as missionaries to the United States in the 1700 and 1800s. Their original focus was to convert indigenous peoples and teach “civilized” culture. As more immigrant populations arrived in the 19th century, many religious founded schools to meet the needs of the children of immigrants.

However, in the beginning, these schools were not as concerned with the quality of teaching as with attracting vocations and improving their students’ way of life. When institutes of higher learning began to be developed by the various Catholic orders, they were often criticized for their poor teaching quality and low educational standards. (Rogalski, 78)

However, with time the standards improved and teaching to a higher intellectual level furthered the devotion of religious communities to literacy. By the twentieth century the development of the Catholic university in the United States, as an education institution became a way to continue to assure the role of shaping a more humane society through the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (CIT). The CIT incorporates the ideals of the Church in a focus on: the dignity and worth of each person, solidarity of the human race, goodness and sacramentality of creation, and interconnectedness of truth, and the harmony of faith and reason. However, they needed to keep improving the level of teaching to avoid the criticism that “poor quality” was the “tradition” of Catholic education. (Rogalski, 78) But this had to be done without losing sight of the fact that the Catholic community and its hierarchy valued their schools for the contribution they made to the development and morality of the students. (Gallin, 17)

In 1962 Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council, called to up-date and renew the Catholic Church. Two major themes of intellectual ferment preceding the council were incorporated into Vatican II: the need for the church to recognize the autonomy of scientific knowledge in the search for truth and a conviction that the gift of human freedom demanded respect for individual consciences even in the process of evangelization. (Gallin, 22)

Through their meetings, the Council agreed on the need to motivate Catholics to renewal in these particular areas:

- Sense of Church and its inner life and mission
- Understanding roles of clergy, religious and lay people
- Church as primarily a community of faith rooted individuals guided by the mystery of God as given by Christ and in the Spirit.
- More active role of the laity in church life and mission. (Distinctly Catholic, p.31)

The focus of many of the Council’s documents dovetails with that of *Person in Community*, a theme of human rights and human dignity that is central to the Church’s social teaching. Through the work and rediscovery of the Council, the Church realized that it had developed a body of teaching about political,

social, and economic issues facing the contemporary world. Catholic Church sees the value of all life and promoted the development of the “God-given gifts” of each person for the service to the common good.

“The community of the church will only be what it is meant to be when such gifts are recognized and nourished and when those who are endowed with them are stimulated to find creative and positive ways to use them. (Donovan, 31)

A theological shift after 1960 occurred in the Church’s teaching which impacted the Catholic universities. Incorporating the document *Gaudium et Spes* (The Church in the Modern World), the Church expected that Catholic schools in their teaching of scientific knowledge of the “natural” world included a religious understanding of human person. (Gallin, 1)

In addition, Catholic schools after 1960 were expected to have a more ecumenical outreach. This had a tremendous impact on higher education in that

- Fewer Catholics registered at Catholic universities
- Student applications not as vigilant for catholic
- Enrollments in Catholic high schools declined
- Catholic college curriculum revised in order to offer theology or religious studies options to both Catholic and non-Catholic students
- Campus liturgies altered to be more ecumenical
- Hiring non-Catholic faculty to offer greater variety of content and points of view
- Admission of non-Catholic students (Gallin, 24)

In addition, a more diverse student and faculty population offered opportunities to

- Lead interfaith dialogues
- Create bonds among church-related colleges
- Find commonalities of academic mission
- Work towards joint efforts in areas of theological inquiry, study of history and socially benevolent activities (Gallin, 25-26)

Neutrality of faith, however, was not an option for the schools according to the Second Vatican Council.

According to its teaching, to truly live the Gospel, it is our civic responsibility to maintain:

- The right to life (oppose abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment)
- Promotion of human life and dignity (oppose racism, poverty, hunger, underemployment/poor employment conditions, lack of education, inadequate housing, lack of healthcare, discrimination of the disabled)
- Provide social services (to eliminate poverty, violence, injustice)
- Resist violence of war (Gallin, 22)

In institutes of higher learning, the core curriculum was to have courses available to provide an understanding of the Catholics faith—doctrinal teachings, social teachings, and moral precepts -- an emphasis on ethics and values.

Pope John Paul II sought to further develop the Catholic university and its expectations. In 1990 he wrote *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, his Apostolic Constitution on the Catholic University. In it he addressed issues regarding faculty, curriculum, academic freedom and reflections of the teachings of the Church. Ideas represented in the document are:

- Faculty determine character of the university – should not oppose mission but understand and support it.
- Academic freedom necessary for search for truth.
- Engages differences to promote confidence that ultimately only one truth especially through plurality.
- Not religious function or role but within Christian understanding
- Premise that knowledge is all one truth; all ways to truth are one because the Author and the End of truth is One.

- Comprehensive account of reality – what of things and why, knowing how and asks what for. Sciences of meaning (theology and philosophy) at center of universe. (Himmelfort, 21)

Finding it difficult to associate the Ex Corde constitution with the government demands and populations represented in Catholic universities in America, “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: Application to the U.S.” was approved by the U.S. Bishops Conference (November 17, 1999). Among the expectations of this document for implementation are that mission statements should include ideas to represent universal spiritual goals of educational efforts within an operative level for students, faculty and staff, curriculum, research, campus ministry, and extra-curricular activities. (Pittau, 6) To pursue these goals, the document suggests that each school:

- Needs an influential Catholic core of faculty and administrators
- Incorporate a synthesis of discipline and the Catholic faith
- Maintain high standards and achievements in teaching, research, and publications. (Pittau, 6)

The document addresses the need for pluralism of faith to be represented but not all ideas and religions are true – each person of faith has the right to express their own opinion but not that their opinion is right. (Pittau, 8)

Catholic identity according to the document is:

- Not to be used as an alternative to academic excellence.
- Not an addition to academic excellence.
- Not an obstacle to academic excellence.
- Must be integral component of the expression of academic excellence (Hayes, 58-60)

To establish high academic excellence, recruitment of academically distinguished faculty should occur despite their personal faith commitment but faculty members should understand the faith commitment of the institution and participate in aspects of mission that are most appropriate to their beliefs and should demonstrate commitment to their own faith. It is noted that there must be a “crucial number of Catholic faculty: “If Catholic scholars become a minority on the campus [or their number is diminished] in that there is less attention to scholarship in areas which explore Catholicism or the relationship between faith and culture, [the institution] may lose its uniquely Catholic aspect of academic excellence.” (Hayes, 59)

“What makes scholarly work distinctly Catholic is its Christian inspiration and its concern with understanding the ultimate unity of knowledge reached through faith, reason, and culture. There is serious attention to the human relationship to God and its significance at the core of all understanding. A broader distinction of Catholic academic excellence includes scholarly work that contributes to the promotion of peace, justice, charity, human dignity in addition to work more directly focused on the Catholic faith.” (Hayes, 60)

It is thought that the number of Catholic students does not create a Catholic identity. It is the intellectual, liturgical and community life that is defined by its Catholicity. (Hayes, 66) Academic excellence that is “distinctly Catholic” is traditionally thought to be in theology or disciplines that have relationships with faith and culture. However, integration of Catholic thought can occur through dialogue between Catholic views and other perspectives and disciplines to ultimately develop knowledge to serve humanity and where scholarship can be to promote the development of a more humane and a more just society. This can occur in a variety of areas such as:

- Social sciences – shared humanity within diversity
- Science – research aimed at procuring knowledge that ultimately can be applied to heal the sick.
- Economics – studies to promote justice
- Arts – leads the human spirit to reflection on the divine
- Political science – working for peace. (Hayes, 66)

In addition, Catholic Studies is a vehicle that can provide students regardless of faith commitment with knowledge of Catholic cultures, imagination, heritage, and traditions, focusing on Catholicism's place in history and the manifestation of Catholic life in art, music, literature and everyday culture. (Hayes, 66)

John Paul II continued to develop the idea and the need for the work of the Catholic university to serve the church and its mission. He

- Emphasized that “within the Catholic University the evangelical mission of the Church and the university mission of research and teaching become interrelated and coordinated.” (Eccles Function, JP II)
- Believed there should be more collaboration between the ecclesiastical offices and the university (JP II)
- Argued that Catholic universities are well suited to address the concern of human dignity through commitment in dialogue with science that:
 - Recognizes and promotes value of knowledge
 - Should be mindful of limitations of science in such a way as to benefit the human person
 - Cooperate in development of technological means to overcome disparities – but with understanding of those less fortunate – socially and politically—as more ethical than technological
 - Cultivate spritsail, moral and religious values
 - Weigh all in light of the Incarnate Word.
 - Deepen and strengthen the catholic character
 - Responsibility for verifying what is authentically moral and human progress that is balanced and shared. (John Paul II, 153)

Since the Second Vatican Council and the *Ex Corde* Apostolic Constitution, many schools throughout the United States and in Europe have attempted to identify the means by which to address many of the recommendations. Alice Gallin, past president of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities has provided strategies to convey Catholic tradition and address concerns of the strict nature of the document. She maintains that Catholic schools should provide:

- Excellence but not elitism
- Produce scholars who study and write about the tradition.
- Provide an environment which lives the values of tradition (Rogalski, 78)

Others maintain that the Catholic tradition does not imply pluralism in opposition to Catholic unity. According to The Rev. Dr. James J Bacik, in a lecture he presented at the Corpus Christi University Parish in Toledo, Ohio, it is possible to focus on the most important truths of the faith rather than on secondary doctrines formulated in distinctive language of particular theological school. (Bacik, *Reflections*)

He also suggests that Catholic imagination, which recognizes the sacramental character of the world, maintains universal truths:

- Appreciation for the value of traditions
- A positive view of human existence lived in community
- Treasures reason and philosophy in defending and promoting the faith (Bacik)

Therefore, through the work presented it becomes apparent that the term “Catholic,” as applied to the university, is not just adjective and not just the presence of chapels, campus ministry and theology courses. The term “Catholic” in higher education implies that we:

- Must embrace teachings, values and traditions of the Church
- Be a faith-filled community of learners seeking intellectual understanding of the content of our faith
- Are not the Church nor does it speak for the Church
- Strive to give intellectual life to the mission of the church within culture
- Research and teach within environment of academic freedom and civility

- Maintain university activities including curricula that develop intellectual fascination and spirituality

Thus, affiliation alone does not make a university Catholic. Ultimately we are all accountable for its manifestation on campus and in the curriculum, part of the mission of the Church, and we are expected to discover and transmit the truth and cultivate life of the mind. (DeThomasis)

IV. Development of Catholic Identity at Benedictine University

The Benedictine monks of St. Procopius Abbey founded what is now known as Benedictine University in 1887 as St. Procopius College in Chicago, moving to Lisle in 1901. The purpose of the school was to educate men of Czech and Slovak descent. They followed the original missions of the Benedictine order in the United States, which was to serve the immigrant church. As an order, their desire was to establish schools alongside monastic communities. Intended to be means of preserving the Catholic faith, schools were founded to provide a place of learning and to provide vocations to priesthood and monastic life. Unfortunately, many were of questionable standards. (Rippinger, 116)

Immigrants who sought the advantages of higher education without the exposure to dangers to their faith and were not necessarily concerned with the level of advanced study. (Gallin, 1) However, a concern for the level of teaching through American Benedictine education was developed. Thus from 1919-1942 the National Benedictine Educational Association was created. The members of the association worked towards affiliating with national accreditation organizations such as North Central Association. (Rippinger, 125) Ultimately their work was reflected in the creation of specialized colleges, co-educational institutions, adult and community education centers. (Rippinger, 125)

St. Procopius Abbey and its members were no exception to the desire to improve the educational standards of the then St. Procopius College. Members of the monastic community were sent to study at University of Illinois before WWII. They were sent with the intentions of studying enough to create summer programs for teachers at St. Procopius (1921-1922). Abbot Valentine Kohlbeck later sent monks to obtain doctorates at University of Chicago and Illinois to further increase the excellence at the university and to continue to participate in the movement to improve the state of American Catholic Education in general. (Rippinger, 125)

Although the standards of education continued to improve at the university, the monks of St. Procopius Abbey were concerned about their Catholic identity. After Vatican II, Abbot Valentine Skluzacek requested the university to re-identify and re-define its Catholic identity. However, at this time, St Procopius College as other schools and parishes thought much of their Catholicity was gained and understood through “osmosis.” Little therefore was done other than to maintain daily Mass and continued to have an active presence of the monastic community on campus and through interaction with the students. The education however, was clearly guided by the Catholic traditions –

Benedictine University is guided by the Roman Catholic tradition which fosters a dialogue between religious and secular cultures, while promoting ecumenical and multicultural understanding. This type of education is designed to broaden and deepen a person's visions of reality, to help all understand the dignity and uniqueness of each human person and at the same time to place an emphasis upon the demands of freedom and social responsibility. In this environment, religious faith and science are both directed toward the pursuit of truth, and both are strengthened through research and study. Central to the University's educational tradition is to the rigorous investigation of questions that deal with the ultimate purpose of life.

In 1997, in support of the university's strength in the sciences within a “value-minded” tradition in the liberal arts, lay faculty members at the university founded the Institute for the Study of Science and Values (ISSV). From its inception the ISSV was organized to foster a dialogue, both at Benedictine University and in the wider community surrounding Benedictine University, between the sciences (including the most recent scientific-technological enterprise and research) and the humanistic, value-minded interests traditionally associated with the liberal arts.¹ From its conception and formation in 1997, the institute

sponsored conferences, workshops, public lectures, symposia, colloquia, and other avenues of academic intervention in an effort to promote this unique dialogic goal.

Despite the work of the ISSV and the clarity of the university's mission and allegiance to its founding Catholic body, it was not until 1998, with a new strategic plan, that the university took an active interest in its Catholic and Benedictine identity. An analysis of the university's goals and objectives led to an appreciative inquiry to clarify our understanding of our Benedictine identity. Discussions and seminars ensued by faculty and administrators interested in gaining a greater understanding of the Catholic Intellectual. Even a video expressing our thoughts and the integration of Benedictine values into our curriculum was created.

With the creation of a Vision Statement, in 2001, renewed discussions were pursued to evaluate, understand and determine university priorities on Catholic and Benedictine traditions within the curriculum at this institution. A committee was created to discuss the various elements stated in the original vision statement. An outside interview process was made to determine the significance of parts of the statement. In 2002, a new statement was created that was approved by the faculty and thus implemented:

Benedictine University, a Catholic University in the Benedictine Tradition that provides a Values-Centered Liberal Arts Education enriched by our Excellence in Science

From the original Vision Committee, two focus groups were formed in 2003. They were charged with explaining, implementing and assessing the two major components of the vision statement. Focus Group No.1 has since worked on the Catholic and Benedictine identity of the institution. Focus Group 2 has worked on the integration of faith and reason (science and values), much of the work being accomplished through the NEH-ACTC Grant and its yearly seminars. The Benedictine Center for Science and Values was created to oversee the work of the two focus groups. (See attachment regarding university statement on Catholic identity.)

AQIP (Academic Quality Improvement Program) as new strategic and assessment plan was implemented 2004. As the university began this new assessment plan, the Focus Groups were incorporated into project management teams. Focus Group No. 1 became the steering committee for Criterion No. 3 Other Distinguishing Factors. Focus Group No. 2 also part of Criterion No. 3 worked towards the goal of defining an interdisciplinary course and describing how to teach it in order to bring about curricular integration.

AQIP Focus Group No. 1 has thus been responsible for maintaining the quality of the Catholic and Benedictine character and identity of the university. Projects implemented or supported by the committee include:

- Soup and Substance
- Religious Education minor
- Visiting Scholars in Catholic Thought
- Catholic Identity Day
- Ex Corde Committee
- Participation in Catholic or religious affiliated conferences – Lilly Fellows, Collegium, Convocation for Catholic Faculty (Chicago)
- School functions – daily Mass, Opening Convocation, Campus Ministry, Office of Institutional Mission, Institute for the Study of Science and Values, Core Goal No. 3

AQIP Focus Group No. 2 determined that an interdisciplinary course must:

- be taught by faculty who have demonstrated significant interdisciplinary scholarship and/or be team taught.
- be taught by faculty who have participated in a workshop for developing interdisciplinary courses

- require the study of primary texts in two or more different fields
- be about the intersection of disciplines or ideas rather than simply attempting to find interdisciplinary connections for a traditional course
- fit criteria for existing programs (such as gender studies or world literature, etc.)
- be taught by a team of faculty who have significant interdisciplinary interaction outside the classroom, who would meet regularly to discuss interdisciplinary courses and learn from each other since the process is better done in context than in isolation.

At this time, 2005, the university is in the process of disbanding the two focus groups in favor of one active body to be known as the **Center for Mission and Identity** (CMI). It will be responsible for

- To develop a roadmap which will result in a plan to promote and operationalize Benedictine characteristics and values in all facets of campus life. (The group will return to the President in regard to what it believes would be feasible for a discussion at the opening day convocation).
- To develop common terms and understandings of the values set forth in the report distributed by the President and, as well, a plan to communicate and assess such values and characteristics at the University.
- To present the plan and common understandings, as discussed above, to the general faculty during Fall 2005.
- To develop a comprehensive plan for a conversation on Ex Corde with the faculty and university community.
- To review the results of the recent UCLA study on faculty attitudes at Benedictine University and to assess how the committee might tailor its discussions, activities, and plans in light of the UCLA findings (the survey has already been distributed to the committee members).

V. Conclusion

As a Catholic institution of higher learning, Benedictine University has a legitimate role and expectation to support the Catholic character and traditions of its historically religious background.

Benedictine University faculty, staff, students, and administrators have long since embraced the Benedictine values. As we move into a new era for the university, we hope to continue to incorporate those values while embracing the Catholic context from which they were derived. Combining therefore the Catholic Intellectual Tradition which this paper has attempted to explain with the Benedictine Wisdom Tradition of which we are familiar. In so doing, we can take pride in accomplishing what our founders created while moving towards a Benedictine University whose excellence in science is truly enveloped in the Catholic and Benedictine tradition.

VI. Suggested Further Readings (Attachments to website)

- Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*
- *Ex Corde* and Its Application to Benedictine University (Assessment). The Content in which *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* was Written (Ex Corde Sub-Committee, 2004, update 2005)
- Notes on Underlying Assumptions, Implementation, and Flexibility, (University Seminar, "The Catholic University and the Catholic Church), R. Meeker (2002)
- AQIP Re-Accreditation and the University-wide Strategic Planning Process (updated 2005)
- History and Heritage of Benedictine University (university website)
- Mission of Benedictine University (university website)
- Report of the Committee on Benedictine Intellectual Tradition, April 2005

VII. Works Cited

- Bacik, The Rev. Dr. James. "Reflections on the Catholic Tradition." 1993 Corpus Christi University Parish, Toledo, Ohio. Part of lecture series on current trends in Catholic thought.
- "The Benedictine Life." Saint Procopius Abbey. 1960s.
- DeThomasis, Brother Louis. "What makes a Catholic College Catholic?" *At Issue*. Saint Cloud Visitor, March 21, 1996, p.7.
- Donovan, Daniel. *Distinctively Catholic. An Exploration of Catholic Identity*. New York: Paulis Press, 1997.
- Ex Corde Ecclesiae: The Future of Catholic Higher Education. Catholic International*. Quarterly published by *The Catholic Review*. May 2000. Vol. 11, no.2. Contains multiple articles regarding the document, its meaning and implementation.
- Gallin, Alice, O.S.U. *Negotiating Identity. Catholic Higher Education since 1960*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000.
- Hayes, Alice B. "Academic Excellence." *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*. Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Vol. 20, no. 2, Spring 2000.
- Himmelfarb, Gertrude. "The Christian University: A Call to Counterrevolution."
- John Paul II. "The Ecclesiastical Function of a University." *Ex Corde Ecclesiae: The Future of Catholic Higher Education. Catholic International*. Quarterly published by *The Catholic Review*. May 2000. Vol. 11, no.2.
- Long, Edward Leroy Jr. *Academic Bonding and Social Concern. The Society of Christian Ethics 1959-1983*. Syracuse University, NY: Religious Ethics, Incorporated, 1984.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. "The Christian University: Eleven Theses."
- Pittau, Most Reverend Giuseppe, S.J. "Catholic Colleges and Universities for the 21st Century." *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*. Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Vol. 20, no. 2, Spring 2000.
- Rippinger, Joel, O.S.B. *The Benedictine Order in the United States. An Interpretive History*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990
- Rogalski, Edward. "Tradition." *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*. Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Vol. 20, no. 2, Spring 2000.