

The Identity of a Catholic University: Nature and Objectives
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Universities were not a part of the Semitic world in which Jesus lived and ministered, but scholarship was. Jesus held religious scholarship in high esteem throughout his lifetime. He clearly learned the holy books and quoted from them with ease. The story of a young Jesus' slipping away from his parents to spend time in the company of religious scholars expressed his hunger for knowledge and the thrill many of us know of spending time in the company of experts (Luke 2: 41-52). That early respect for the roles and contributions of scholars continued throughout Jesus' adult life, but more often than not was expressed in his dismay with the ways in which these scholars failed to rise to their noble purpose.

When John Paul II titled paragraphs 12-20 of *Ex corde Ecclesiae* as 'Nature and Objectives', he sought language for the noble purposes played by Catholic universities. In a few sentences, he attempted to name what was most central to the task, as well as most universal across the vast variety of institutions and missions that they offered the world. He sought, too, to tie the collective work of those scholars, now housed institutionally within modern universities, to the work of the Church. It was an encouragement born of concern that these institutions—or at least individuals therein—might not always see the connections of their work to both Christ and Church.

The components he mentions are repeated elsewhere in the document at more length, but they invite reflection right from the start. All of it is holy work. Some of it is religious.

An Academic Community of Teaching, Research, and Various Services

Catholic universities may provide a home for evangelization in their campus ministries, but their primary work is not evangelization. They may powerfully and effectively educate the poor so that these individuals may rise from poverty and enter the mainstream of economic life, but their primary work is not social service. Catholic universities are universities, first and foremost. They are in service of the intellectual life, where ideas matter.

Catholic healthcare is similar. The Catholic Church is the largest provider of healthcare to the world outside of government sources. Catholic hospitals provide pastoral accompaniment so that people's faith can be reassured and strengthened in their most vulnerable moments of sickness and dying. But their primary purpose is not pastoral ministry. Catholic hospitals care for the poor whom other hospitals not infrequently turn away, but their primary purpose is not to serve as a backstop for the social provision of healthcare. Catholic hospitals are hospitals, first and foremost. They are in service of curing the sick and ameliorating suffering when no cure is possible. Were that reduced merely to these actions, it would be enough. Healing the sick is a work of mercy done from the heart of Christ for the good of God's children in need.

Catholic relief services are no different. The Catholic Church, through Caritas International, is the largest provider of relief services outside of government sources. It provides relief funding and on-the-ground expertise to victims of earthquakes, famine, war, and any number of natural disasters. The money may

come from Catholic donations, but it does not serve only needy Catholics or seek the religious conversion of those it assists. We do this work, not because the recipients of our service are Catholic, but because *we* are Catholic. We extend the loving and caring heart of Christ to the humanitarian crises of this moment in time.

Similarly, the Catholic Church is the largest provider of primary, secondary, and higher education outside of government sources in the world. Higher education is complex work and rarely profitable without the assistance of charitable donors. We do it as a gift to the world. Why? Because ideas matter.

We mathematically model the world around us. We discover how regeneration of tissue in some animals might be used for human healing. We find ways to farm in growing drought conditions. We identify how economic systems redistribute human wealth. We watch how children learn. We document social conventions and disparate treatments along lines of caste, race, gender and more. We seek to understand how political theories are used and corrupted by those seeking power, and how such corruption is most effectively countered. We note differing conceptions of God across time and culture, and even within religions, and the ways the human community is changed by them.

We prepare the next generation of teachers. Professional social workers. Nurse practitioners. Business leaders. Accountants. Political advisors. Communications professionals. Counsellors. Ministers. Scholars and more. To the degree they are well prepared not only professionally, but also in understanding the complex world around them through the many disciplines within a 'liberal arts education', our graduates are gifts given to the world for its improvement and good functioning. The knowledge they carry within them—as well as the skills they develop for lifelong learning—provide the 'ideas that matter' when the world relies on them for their professional expertise.

We enable the experts we have assembled in hundreds of fields to consult broadly. The United Nations turns to a Catholic university for international homelessness policy advice. Courts of law use our scientists and psychologists to evaluate evidence. Governments invite faculty to help prioritize scientific research. Corporations seek training for their leaders in the latest techniques and discoveries from our institutions. The International Court of Justice relied on a U.S. Catholic university's legal experts, among others, to write its codes and procedures and provide training. China relied on that same university's aviation experts to improve its aviation safety. Bishops use our colleges of education to provide professional training for their schools and independent outcomes research.

All of these examples barely scratch the surface of the myriad ways in which Catholic universities powerfully shape the world through research, teaching, and services with ideas that matter. This is their primary contribution. If this were all they contributed, it would be enough. It would be a blessing.

Jesus himself thought it was worth spending the great bulk of his time teaching, seeking to shape existing ideas about the purposes of life, the social order, organized religion, and more with better ideas that led toward human flourishing. Jesus was not a scholar in the modern sense, but he knew that ideas mattered.

Protecting and Advancing Human Dignity

Not all ideas advance human dignity. One need only observe Hitler's concept of a master race or discarded conceptions of women's lesser intelligence to know that our ideas can limit human flourishing and protect the power of those benefitting from the present social consensus.

In 2008, Pope Benedict addressed the United Nations about an idea from 1648. From that time, and for centuries following, the Peace of Westphalia was thought an extraordinary advance in human thinking whereby national boundaries came to be respected and honoured. That concept of territorial sovereignty ended 80 years of war, and perhaps avoided uncountable others. As Pope Benedict observed, however, the 1648 concept was problematic in 2008 when minority populations inside nations were being eliminated by the duly recognized government in power. Ethnic cleansing and genocide required the world order to reconsider border sovereignty as less than absolute—introducing the new concept of a 'Responsibility to Protect', whereby neighbouring governments could step in to protect those who have no protection from their own government. One need only look back on the Holocaust to see Pope Benedict's point, but the decimation of Syria's population in recent years suggests that the old concept has not yet fully given way to the new one. Time will tell if this new 'responsibility' will take hold.

It can take centuries for ideas to change. Intellectual history exists as a field of study precisely because ideas change, and precisely because ideas have effects that can be observed over time, and then rejected, adapted, and even embraced more fully. The hope is that ideas will prove more enlightened over time. Such is the hope for the intellectual work done at a Catholic university.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops added to the Church's official social teaching when it wrote, 'Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation'. In *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, John Paul II is consistent with this hope when he suggests a primary objective of a Catholic university is precisely this protection and advancement of human dignity.

To accomplish that end, Catholic universities frequently hire faculty whose commitment to human dignity in their field of expertise is well known. They host research projects, conferences, and publications to push good ideas forward. They loan faculty experts for international relief projects and myriad other good works being conducted elsewhere.

Catholic universities shape their professional training in ways that advance human dignity. Nursing students are taught to care for their patients in ways that go beyond excellent medicine, but make patients feel known, cared for, and even loved. Lawyers are taught to advocate for the poor. Students being prepared for the hospitality industry are taught to treat the cleaning crew with the same respect as the wealthiest guest. Service learning is introduced throughout the curriculum so that all students can practice putting their fields of study to good use for their local communities. Ethics is taught in all professional fields lest students simply adopt industry practices without thinking about the larger impact of their work and decisions.

If Jesus' life demonstrates anything, it is selfless kindness to those whom society despises. The story of the Good Samaritan and its lesson of caring for those we do not know but who are in need, becomes a

template for intellectual work. *Ex corde Ecclesiae* asks nothing less than that our work protect and advance human dignity. It considers it a constitutive dimension of a Catholic university.

Protecting and Advancing Cultural Heritage

In the past decade alone, the world has stood witness as ISIL destroyed museums, tombs, mosques, churches, historic towns, and wholesale evidence of past cultures as it attempted to secure leadership over the territories it desired. China has unrelentingly erased evidence of Uighur, Tibetan, and other Chinese cultures, substituting and imposing the Han culture unilaterally throughout its borders and sometimes even beyond those borders. Turkey erased evidence of Armenian culture as it also pursued the genocide of its people. Numerous nations eliminated native populations and all evidence of their cultures, including the United States. Such actions led the Hague Convention (1907), Geneva Conventions (1949, 1977) and United Nations to declare destruction of cultural heritage a war crime, and UNESCO to establish a Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

Universities, like libraries, are inherently conservative. We teach ancient languages so that the world can continue to learn from ancient writings. We study their philosophy and history so that we can understand their actions and learn from them. We study their art and literature so that we can understand their most basic commitments, be inspired to emulate the best in their cultures or at least not repeat their mistakes. We go further and protect scrolls and ancient books in climate-controlled rooms so future generations will have them. We translate them and republish them for broader distribution. We protect precious artifacts and host exhibits in our museums.

We protect, publish, and display the artifacts of current cultures, turning them into learning opportunities so we appreciate those who are different, creating a more understanding world. We are home to departments of Irish Studies, African Studies, Near-Eastern institutes, and so much more. We record and perform their music. We study social arrangements and political structures. In so doing, we show humanity to humanity.

Even more, we advance the cultural work of the present. We teach artists, musicians, poets, writers, historians, philosophers, architects, and all the many disciplines through which the variety of human culture and self-understandings come to life, deepen, come into conflict, and enrich one another in new and creative ways.

Most importantly, we bring the ideas of past cultures to bear upon the present. For those who would ask if one can do good with an evil act, we introduce Plato's dialogue, the *Crito*. For those who would ask about the limits on war, we introduce Thomas Aquinas and his thoughts on what constitutes a Just War. The blessing of recent decades has been the movement to introduce students to continents and cultures beyond a Euro-centric one, to find evidence of women's roles throughout history, and to examine cultures from the perspective of the ordinary person rather than those in power.

Cultures can be lost, but they can be protected, rediscovered, and even advanced. Such work by a Catholic university is its own gift to a larger world.

Confronting the Great Problems of Society and Culture

Pope John II was keenly aware of the ways in which a university might serve the needs of its society when he authored *Ex corde Ecclesiae*. His beloved Catholic University of Lublin had operated in secret after it had been closed during the Nazi occupation and some of its faculty executed. Under subsequent communist regimes, Lublin had held its ground against all manner of government surveillance and even wholesale removal of academic programs. Dissident students who had been removed from other Polish universities found themselves welcome at this one, a protected space where they could speak—if only quietly among themselves—about the social repression and how Poland need change.

The future pope accepted the chair in ethics in the mid-1950s, joining a small faculty determined to put a theological and philosophical education to the purpose of improving the social fabric of their beloved country. John Paul II's official biographer, George Weigel, explained it thus,

[The future Pope and his faculty colleagues believed that] ideas had consequences, for good and for ill. The history of the twentieth century's various torments proved that defective understandings of the human person, human community, and human destiny were responsible for mountains of corpses and oceans of blood. If they could help the world get a firmer purchase on the truth of the human condition, in a way that was distinctively modern and grounded in the great philosophical traditional of the West, the future might be different.ⁱ

Communism was not only an 'unsatisfactory, reductionistic account of things-as-they-are and a crude caricature of humanism; communism's totalitarian politics stripped men and women of their power of choice, of responsibility, and thus, of their humanity'.ⁱⁱ

The young ethics professor was determined to educate both undergraduates and future professors (through work with his doctoral students) in a manner that showed them a broader, more satisfying concept of humanity and society than they had been given in their government-sponsored education to date. To that end, he took traditional Thomistic categories and supplemented them with the questions and insights of the Phenomenologists he had come to know and appreciate in his own graduate work. He asked them to focus on what made people fully human and what social philosophies enabled the same. In so doing, he set them on a path fundamentally at odds with the Marxist culture around them, hoping one day to change the direction of that society and culture.

Today, Pope Francis also sees universities as places that should advance thought on the most pressing issues of our time. He points out the limitations of modern capitalism, and especially how its incentives turn a society away from caring actively for the poor. He challenges universities to turn their students' and faculty's attention to climate change and the not unrelated migrations of peoples. In a 2019 address given to members of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, he noted:

[Catholic universities, in particular, need to become places] 'where solutions for civil and cultural progress for individual persons and for humanity, marked by solidarity, are pursued with perseverance and professionalism', he said. We need to remember that all teaching 'entails asking ourselves about the why', he said. 'It requires a reflection on the foundations and purposes of every discipline'. Abstracting knowledge from its ethical dimension would mean abandoning the task of teaching, said the Pope.

Facing the questions of 'why' involves the 'typically epistemological character of education which concerns the whole span of knowledge', continued Pope Francis. 'The link between knowledge and purpose refers to the theme of intentionality and to the role of the subject in every cognitive process'. Completely impersonal experiences do not exist, he said.

In this light, universities have 'an intellectual and moral energy whose responsibility goes beyond the person to be educated and extends to the needs of all humanity', added the Pope.ⁱⁱⁱ

This concept of universities as a blessing for culture and society, then, is more than simply the good work that is done by experts in varying fields to advance society in myriad specific ways. That is a blessing to be sure, and no small contribution. John Paul II's vision for a Catholic university, however, goes deeper into the fundamental ideas that shape culture and society, asking us to see them with clarity and critique, and then to see how the Church's centuries-long reflections can challenge, expand, even redirect a society towards ideas that more fully humanize us and that create social structures that enable us to form true community.

Reflection in the Light of Catholic Faith; Fidelity to a Church-mediated Message

These 'ideas that matter' are spread not only across centuries, but within a broad array of human intellectual endeavour. Scripture with its canonical choices, scholarly translation, and interpretation is foundational, holding as it does the faith community's core story and stories of God's creation, relentless reclamation through the prophets and salvation through Jesus Christ. For the Church—for us—it serves as the surest lodestone of human meaning and purpose, but also something more: a seed (to use Jesus' own image) that wants to take root within us and lead us to Godhead. We use the word *inspiration* here in a way we use it for nothing else. To read or hear the scriptures is more than encountering a history or finding accumulated wisdom; it is an experience of God's reaching into our hearts and moving us into grace itself.

Theology is a reflection on that fundamental experience of the ineffable. It serves as our feeble attempt to find language worthy of naming God's character, action, and expectations as we have experienced them for ourselves, but more how WE as a community over millennia have come to some common understanding of God's movement, intervention, blessing and, yes, love. Over time, less apt formulations give way, as no-longer useful, culturally bound formulations. Language is found that carries the ancient intuitions within the contemporary world's language and understandings. Like other scholarly endeavours, single opinions are debated, adopted, rejected, and modified in ways that the larger community of theological experts and the body of believers find compelling. Individual thoughts become OUR thought, but within a refining process that never ceases.

Applied theology ventures further, thinking about how our conceptions of God affect our myriad of life decisions and social structures. Ideas of eternal life coming into contact with medical decisions to end treatment. Wonderings about the use of war and large-scale weapons when confronted with evil. The implications of our conceptions of God—not to mention the criteria to be used in the Last Judgement—extend in every direction. The work is tentative at best, prone to delusion, and desperately needs a community—and experts—to prevent it from becoming its own form of violence wherein 'God's voice

and intention' is claimed too easily or, worse, imposed violently. There is hardly a king who went to war who did not claim God's approval.

Philosophy thinks about our thinking, understanding our methodologies and our fundamental convictions around which other ideas form or fall. It names 'schools of thought' where it finds consistency, and explores fresh lines where new voices and ideas challenge what came before. When it comes into contact with religion, it wonders if it can come to similar conclusions without assuming God. It wonders what difference assuming God makes. Here, too, the intellectual community serves well to locate mistakes and inconsistencies in reasoning and point out unwelcome implications of lines of thought. Here, too, the Church and its experts consider how schools of thought, political philosophies, economic philosophies, legal philosophies, and more lead to human flourishing or do not, seeking ways to reconcile, bolster, or even reject philosophies that run counter to God's intent for creation and especially humanity. Here, too, centuries of Catholic scholars' work can be brought to bear. Here, too, the Church's community of experts and its body of believers test and improve the work.

The light of Catholic faith, however, extends far beyond the disciplines of theology and philosophy. Art, architecture, music, literature, poetry, memoir, biography, and more all convey faith, even if they are less subject to formal review for orthodoxy. Schools of spirituality offer a broad array of practices and imagery into the sacred. Saints and heroes of all stripes show very different paths all leading toward holiness. The community's life and worship bear within them the heart of faith at its most transformational. Catholic universities house and convey them all.

'Church-mediated' is more than a set of approved or forbidden ideas or a canon of approved texts. It is all the many ways that convictions and commitments are embodied in the Church's life. It is seeking where God's voice can be found within the inspired community over the centuries. 'Reflection in Light of the Catholic Faith' in this context is the joy of searching through the Church's intellectual treasure house and growing in wisdom, integrity, and grace because of it. It is opening oneself to better ideas, better ways, and in short, the wisdom of the community. 'Fidelity' in this context is the humility of crediting the community's longstanding creeds, formulations, and practices before crediting one's own ideas. It is also an acknowledgement that the community (with its experts and community of believers) remains the arbiter of what ideas are indeed outside the community's mind.

To that end, the Catholic Church has separated its formulations into categories of dogma, doctrine, Church teaching, theological speculation, and more, each with varying expectations of assent. To question the tri-partite God or the dual-nature of Jesus understandably puts one outside the communion. To ruminate about the meanings of those formulations—such as the meaning of 'person' when one acknowledges three persons in one God—is to be a welcome participant in the Church's intellectual life.

All this requires discernment of the highest order, and the hard work of an informed conscience. Moreover, it draws upon the intellectual virtues, especially that of intellectual humility. None of us dare speak for God, nor presume to know God better than others. We only dare speak of this because, how can we not speak of the Ground of our Being, the End toward which our lives point, that which gives us life and purpose? And so, we depend upon experts, the community, and yes, leaders appointed to the purpose. They may be as intellectually fallible as the rest, but we value traveling together and holding together as a communion. Doctrinal watchdog offices, whether in the Holy See or bishops conferences, provide a valuable braking function, as well as a unitive function. Mistakes are made and less apt ideas can feel slow to give way to better ones, but these internal Church structures force us to travel together.

Catholic universities may be a locus of the Church's thinking, but they are not its final arbiters. That role belongs to the larger Church.

It is no small matter to wander into contested terrain, but that is what Catholic universities do each time they assemble a wide array of experts and invite reasoned thought on the largest issues facing humanity. The Church's intellectual life is thrilling and maddening. It is both fallible and suffused with grace. It is a group effort that begins and ends with the humility of all involved. And it is the primary hope of both *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and the Church that its universities be dedicated to this purpose.

A Community-based Christian Inspiration

Tertullian described his Christian community in Carthage in the year 197 AD, noting that, 'It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. "See how they love one another", they say, for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred; "how they are ready even to die for one another", they say, for they themselves will sooner put to death'.^{iv} The insight echoed the words and hopes of Jesus, of course, whom the evangelist John quoted as saying, 'I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13: 34-35).

Academic disciplines have their own cultures: scientists, for example, have a way of being and acting that is fundamentally different from artists. Religious congregations also have their own cultures: Jesuits and Franciscans are both extraordinary, but hardly similar. Universities, too, have cultures; some prize research over teaching, while others prioritize the time spent instructing and personally mentoring students. Into this great diversity of purposes and swirling mix of cultures, the Church asks that the characteristic culture of a Catholic university take its lead from the heart of Jesus Christ.

One need only read the gospels to see that heart, to see the ways in which Jesus is willing to be interrupted at any moment human need presents itself. The ways in which he is willing to decry social wrong. The ways in which he crosses traditional boundaries to affirm the humanity of those who are rejected in his time. The ways he casts aside rank and privilege, whether washing the feet of his disciples or telling the stories of who will sit at God's right hand. The ways he rejects insider status, whether in the stories of his early temptations or his endurance of the political wrongs that led to his execution. The time he prioritizes time for friendships. His daily life of teaching, focusing people on what was most important in life. Jesus epitomizes life given in service. Selfless love. Particular care for those on the margin. All this and more is the stuff of a Christian community and inspiration.

In 1920, the French Dominican, Pere A.G. Sertillanges, authored a small book reflecting on the intellectual life. He began by observing that one's moral character has a profound effect on one's academic work, and upon the academic community that is created. He said, 'The qualities of character have a preponderant role in everything. The intellect is only a tool. The handling of it determines its effects'.^v

The idea of virtues (and their related vices) appropriate to academic life is worth lingering upon. In a more modern time, these might include:

- The humility and inner freedom to jettison one's ideas when better ones emerge.
- The desire and work to understand another's perspective.
- Giving credit where credit is due for the research and ideas upon which one's work depends.

- The discipline and asceticism required for research and writing.
- Assisting the professional advancement of colleagues and students.
- A willingness to assist other scholars through reading and commenting upon their work.
- Treating adversaries and unpleasant colleagues with love without condition.
- Treating students with attention, interest, and kindness.
- Seeing that the advantages bestowed by the education being provided are always made available to the poor and those without easy opportunities for societal advancement.
- Creating the conditions for both solitude and community as the places where inspiration occurs.
- A spirit of gratitude towards all those who trained and assisted us in this work.
- A spirit of gratitude to the One who gave us life, intellect, heart, and especially this vocation that is ours.

Tradition names seven 'Deadly Sins' and, of these, perhaps Envy and Sloth are the two that most characteristically tempt academics, but the 'cardinal sin' most damaging to the intellectual community has always been Pretention. Rooted in common insecurity, academics spend their lives ranking their work and worth against one another, trying to convince their colleagues of their place in the pecking order. Which academic rank they've achieved, which institution they work at, which conferences accept their papers, which journals publish their articles, and more. Such concerns may create a valuable drive and inner push to raise the quality and quantity of one's work over time, but it also gets in the way of collegial behaviour that would itself be helpful. A certain shame is attached to needing help, to not being as expert as one wants others to believe. A culture of criticizing absent colleagues adds fear for those who don't want to be so criticized. Complex, opaque language pushes aside simple language and formulations in some disciplines, as the words simultaneously obfuscate and offer the impression of fresh ideas. Intellectual work that becomes useful and well-known popularly can be derided simply because it is not theoretical enough.

More can be said, of course. The point is a simple one. Academics and academic communities are fallible not only in their ideas, but also in their moral foibles. They are also noble and virtuous in the ways they undertake this work and create their communities. *Ex corde Ecclesiae* encourages us to attend to the ways we shape our communities for the work we undertake, in short, with a Christian inspiration not only towards the topics we pursue and the work we do, but also in how we treat one another.

Not all faculty or students are Christian, of course. Nor is educating Catholics even the mission at most. For many, the institution's mission is directed to larger populations, such as the poor, women, or ethical leaders for a society in desperate need of the same. Those same institutions welcome people of every faith and none to join the effort, so long as they in turn respect the work and the manner in which we choose to shape our academic community. Whatever the faith of those involved, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* expects that outsiders such as those described by Tertullian will look at our institutions, feel their culture, and say, 'They truly embody the heart of Jesus Christ; for love is present here.'

Serving People's Search for Meaning

During World War II, Jacques and Raissa Maritain, the French philosopher and his equally brilliant and philosophically trained wife, found safety in New York City. He taught and she undertook her long-

planned memoir. She titled chapter three of Book 1 'The Sorbonne', but immediately subtitled it 'Adolescence'. She begins:

Seventeen! Only seventeen, and already the deepest needs of the mind and soul are raising their voices... Truly adolescence confronts the universe, challenging it to appear in court, to render its account, to explain and justify itself, for already youth indicts life. Youth confronts its teachers, with clear eyes, with ardent spirit, its hands open wide, empty as yet of all the fruits of knowledge and learning, but clean as the gaze of its eyes. If only teachers would remember a little of the soul of their own youth, how they would tremble before that ingenuousness which comes to them with the confidence still of the child, but possessed now of the rights of a just judge.^{vi}

She picks up the story of being bored in the sciences as her teachers examined the details of visible phenomenon, while dismissing her larger questions about life, purpose, and meaning as 'mysticism'. To her, the world as she saw it was absurd and cruel and she was seeking someone—or some course of study—who could tell her otherwise.^{vii}

Her first dive into philosophy was not an immediate success, however, for she met philosophers of scepticism and relativism, both of whom 'despaired of truth', and neither of which engaged her larger questions. Blessedly, she had met Jacques at a social justice rally, and together they heard of lectures across the street at the College of France, which they squeezed into, and discovered a whole world of thought they had never known: centuries of reflection on meaning and purpose, thinking about sin and evil in the world, thinking about the world's many structures.

She and Jacques met the Catholic novelist Leon Bloy, along with a succession of professors, writers, artists, and others all working for social justice, all of them uniting faith, intellectual reflection, and the kind of action for change that inspires the young. They were captivated especially by Bloy, who spoke so compellingly of Catholicism and its way of seeing life and the world. Quickly, faith became something purposeful, meaningful, and a way of driving change with ideas that mattered. They were hooked, and indeed pushed the Thomistic frontiers of that thought forward in years to come. From that point forward, life became something to be examined, turned over, debated, rethought in light of new minds and writings being brought to bear, and being part of the fray themselves. Theirs was a shared intellectual vocation, rooted in the violence and injustice they saw around them.

For our many students, in their many disciplines, we have the opportunity to discover what our students are seeing of the world around them, inviting their questions, their doubts, and helping them discover others who speak to those questions—all the while encouraging them to become actors in the world. To take their training and knowledge and put it to use on things that matter. We can provide sufficient information to make them hireable by their first employers, or we can offer something much more exciting—a chance to think about the world, introduce them to really bright thinkers who are also thinking with them, and then, push toward that world.

Today, as for the Maritains, such outcomes are more happy accidents than structured-by-design educational outcomes. Students are fortunate to bump into professors who take them seriously, respect the students' questions, and point them towards writers and actors who can further lead them down the proverbial rabbit hole. We shape liberal arts curriculums in the model of Cardinal Newman, hoping that somewhere along the way, students will catch fire. Sometimes, we encourage our faculty to consider this as part of their vocation. Professional programs like Collegium in the United States

attempt to equip faculty in this regard. We provide service-learning opportunities so that students' learning can be put to use immediately in a way that serves the human community. Yet, when all is said and done, such outcomes still remain a happy accident.

Most of us working in Catholic higher education had our own moments of knowing a professor who took us seriously, who listened and thought about what we needed to read after hearing us. Most of us found a life's calling of meaning and purpose. Most of us, to one degree or another, have found faith wrapped up in all this. *Ex corde Ecclesiae* seeks as many of those moments as possible for our students, which is no small encouragement for us to provide. It asks us to provide the elements that lead students to account for faith in a way they find compelling. Those elements are more than the right books or readings, but require professors who accompany students through THEIR questions, and the kinds of inspiring people who show students that lives of vocation, purpose, and meaning are not only possible, but also the best possible way to live one's life.

Prepared to Give Witness to Their Faith

Pope John Paul II knew personally the slow, long secularization of Europe, North America, and the territories to which so many had emigrated. He experienced the decline of vocations in those same areas, saw the inability to provide pastors for parishes, and therefore understood the challenges facing the Church in the long term if those trends were not reversed. Those trends, of course, have only continued in more recent years.

Ex corde Ecclesiae's call for Catholic universities to prepare students 'to witness to their faith' is heard in this context. Even if raised in self-identified 'Catholic households', students have not necessarily attended Sunday Mass, been confirmed, or even been catechized. Catholicism for many of them is more of a social identification with some residual cultural practices (e.g., Christmas gift exchanges) than a faith tradition in which they participate. This provides a challenge far greater than when *Ex corde Ecclesiae* was written and presents a particular challenge when bishops fasten upon Catholic higher education as a last key moment for the young to meet Catholicism.

University presidents are often perplexed by expectations that they 'succeed' where Catholic parishes and grade schools have failed, especially as universities are not designed for evangelization on a scale that would meet the present need. Nearly all Catholic universities provide campus ministry and are able to accompany individual students who present themselves for initiation sacraments or basic catechesis. Many are less comfortable with reconfiguring the curriculum so that all students are introduced to Catholicism as part of their required courses of study, if only because large parts of the student body are not Catholics at all and would benefit from courses that present their religious traditions in more depth. Even those universities that require an introductory course in Catholicism are well aware that this is not the same as accompanying someone through an inner personal search for faith.

And so, universities provide all sorts of voluntary opportunities for students to choose, or not: lectures, retreats, Eucharist on campus, spiritual direction, sacramental formation, opportunities for faith-specific services. They often provide opportunities for students to lead groups of their peers at retreats, bible studies, and other types of faith-themed social gatherings, and thereby become both comfortable and skilled at witnessing to their faith. A handful of Catholic universities strictly recruit Catholic students and faculty and thereby create a strong Catholic culture, as well as a strong basis of faith upon which they

can build further. Here, preparing students in advanced apologetics works effectively, but it remains a very small part of Catholic higher education, just as it is a small portion of the larger national culture.

Research in the United States shows that Catholic alumni of Catholic universities are more likely to practice their faith as adults and raise their children as Catholics than are Catholic alumni from government-run or other private universities. Any hope that Catholic universities can evangelize the great majority of uncatechised students at a scale that reverses the secularizing trends in some meaningful way, however, is elusive. This goal envisioned by *Ex corde Ecclesiae* remains unfulfilled.

The Church's Heart

The intellectual life has periods of great solitude, but it is not a solitary endeavour. On the contrary, the intellectual life is designed such that better formulations can emerge when many minds and hearts work to understand the world and life together. Sometimes the participants happen to be alive at the same time. Often, they commit writings and artistic expressions to posterity so that the conversation can be enriched across generations.

Long has the Christian community described the yearning of all creation towards its completion, and found the source and fulfilment of that yearning in the deepest experience we name God, whom we profess to know best through the person of Jesus Christ. Catholic higher education brings these worlds together, inviting both the young and the world's eminent scholars to explore the deepest recesses of our hearts in its journey toward fulfilment and meaning, even as it probes and discovers every corner of human experience and the physical universe in which we live.

This Church uses the image of the Body of Christ to refer to the entirety of those who believe. Like the intellectual life itself, any authority that is established for good functioning gives way when ideas are explored, where the only final authority is the *sensus fidelium*, 'the supernatural appreciation of faith on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals'.^{viii}

When *Ex corde Ecclesiae* refers to Catholic universities as coming from the heart of the Church, this is the Church to which it refers. The entirety—over time—yearning, seeking, studying, debating, adopting ideas only to set them aside for better, doing this at prayer and in love for one another. Laity and ordained together, connected to those who came before and working for those who will follow us. This is Christ's heart, alive in His Church, as we love God with all our minds.

ⁱ George Weigel, *Witness of Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 134.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 132.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pope to Catholic Universities: Educate students to social, relational responsibility', Vatican News, 4 November, 2019, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-11/pope-francis-catholic-universities-purify-all-knowledge.html>.

^{iv} *The Apology of Tertullian*. Translated by Wm. Reeve, AM. London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, 1889, chapter 39. https://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm.

^v Antonin Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, and Methods* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, reprinted 1998), 17.

^{vi} Raissa Maritain, *We Have Been Friends Together & Adventures in Grace* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, reprinted 2016), 29.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, 30.

^{viii} Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, reprinted 2019).