

Reflections on Pope Benedict XVI's Address to Catholic Educators

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Text of the Address to Catholic Educators

By His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

This special publication of The Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education is issued following Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the United States. It is designed to provide reflections on his historic April 17, 2008 meeting with Catholic college presidents and diocesan education officials.

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Truth and Freedom in the Catholic University

By Dr. Brennan Pursell

No one should be surprised that Pope Benedict XVI, during his meeting with Catholic educators, did not utter the words “*Ex corde Ecclesiae*” and “*mandatum*.” The Holy Father, himself a former professor, came as a leader, a guide and a shepherd, not as a controlling, bureaucratic administrator. His speech at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., was vintage Ratzinger: clear and concise, yet dense and thought provoking.

The text stands firmly in line with scripture, tradition, the works of his predecessor and his own corpus. He complimented his audience members where praise was due, but laid out in no uncertain terms what the challenges are and the main ideas behind them. The Holy Father’s view of the situation is as realistic as it is inspiring. I expect he hopes that faculties and administrators across the country will use his speech as the departure point for numerous, substantive discussions about their universities’ identity and mission.

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Dr. Brennan Pursell is an Associate Professor of History at DeSales University and a Newman Fellow of The Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education. His new book is *Benedict of Bavaria: An Intimate Portrait of the Pope and His Homeland*.

In brief, he exhorted the assembled presidents of American Catholic colleges and universities to make sure that their institutions are today akin to what universities were when they first appeared in the High Middle Ages: *communities of scholars and students in search of truth, through reasoned dialogue and analysis of evidence*. Everything else about them—student life, sports, administration, *et al*—is merely supportive or peripheral.

From a faculty perspective, the most problematic word in the definition above is also the most vital, but truth should make no one nervous. It is a sign of the times that faculty usually fall silent and sometimes begin to squirm at the mention of truth, goodness and beauty, especially with regard to mission statements and “learning outcomes.” “You can’t assess those things” is the common retort, or even one hears the relativist mantra, “Everyone has their own truth.” But while people certainly have their own minds, it cannot be that there are five or six billion truths, most of which would be in total opposition to the others. No, we are all united in the common experience of humanity; the truth of simple reality is what undergirds our existence.

No one “has” the truth. It is an infinite mystery, not a mere possession. It is certainly the case that truth in its totality can never be reduced to assessable “learning outcomes,” which are a bureaucratic necessity in our day and age. We must make do with them until they go by the wayside, but in the scholarly enterprise, we must always aspire to something greater. The inherent limits of assessment metrics are no reason to abandon the search for truth in our university communities! Truth is a path, a way of life, and as Catholic educators we must strive to lead our students toward it.

The other main concern some faculty members will inevitably raise against clear statements of commitment to truth in the university setting is, unfortunately, the inviolability of academic freedom. But this is a contemporary and common misconception of the notion of liberty. It is a truism that liberty without limits is merely license. Every single one of us learns from our families that no freedom is totally unrestricted, except for silent thought.

Academic freedom, which is the best environment for the search for truth through dialogue, should allow for anyone, in speech or in writing, to voice any *question* whatsoever. The ability to question is a quintessentially human trait, and it should be granted total freedom. Questioners show themselves open to correction and willing to persevere in dialogue. To make a *statement*, however, is another matter.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM, WHICH IS THE BEST ENVIRONMENT FOR THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH THROUGH DIALOGUE, SHOULD ALLOW FOR ANYONE, IN SPEECH OR IN WRITING, TO VOICE ANY *QUESTION* WHATSOEVER...TO MAKE A *STATEMENT*, HOWEVER, IS ANOTHER MATTER.

In the United States, it is not permissible in public settings to deny the Holocaust, deride another person on the basis of race or gender, make sexual innuendos that induce a “hostile” work environment or disturb the peace. Some of the richest and most “liberal” universities in the country have offices and staff members devoted to protecting certain groups from hearing statements, and even questions, that they find objectionable. At Catholic institutions of higher learning, aspects of the Catholic faith should receive similar protection. Statements, declarations, exhibitions and performances that denigrate the Church and all things holy are simply unacceptable. They stifle dialogue. Measures to guard against them are reasonable and not intolerant. Faith needs protection from slander, but not from questions.

Faith stimulates reason and elevates it. Faith allows us to see the unitive nature of truth, goodness and beauty, and the mysterious person who embodies them. Faith provokes good questions. It demands “why,” beyond the “how much,” “what,” “where,” “when” and “how.” All such questions are part of the great and timeless search for truth.

At the start of his pontificate, John Paul II told the faithful, “Be not afraid!” After the great Pope’s death, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger began his homily at the funeral Mass with the words, “Follow me.” May all faculty, students, staff and administrators at Catholic institutions of higher learning hear and heed Pope Benedict XVI. There is no reason why we should not. He is as qualified and brilliant as any number of us put together. And there is nothing to fear.

A Mission of Hope

By Father Charles Sikorsky, LC

In his address to Catholic educators, Pope Benedict harmonized his thoughts on education with the general theme of his visit to the United States, “Christ our Hope.” Specifically, he focused on the relationship between truth and hope. He made this point near the beginning of his address when he said, “Set against personal struggles, moral confusion and fragmentation of knowledge, the noble goals of scholarship and education, founded on the unity of truth and in service of the person and the community, become an especially powerful instrument of hope.” In order for our institutions to fulfill their calling to be instruments of hope, the Holy Father challenged us to focus on mission, conviction and love.

First, he emphasized the crucial role that Catholic education plays in the Church’s mission to evangelize. Much more than simply developing the intellectual capacity of students, Catholic institutions are called to help their students discover and accept the truth in a way that has consequences for their lives. Contact with the truth should move the will so that students live and experience more fully the joy and challenge of following Christ and of becoming His witnesses to the world.

Second, the Holy Father stressed that the Catholic identity of an institution is fundamentally a question of conviction and faith. Are we really convinced by Christ? Do we really believe that a vibrant life of faith is necessary for our institutions to flourish? The answers to these questions define who we are and whether we offer a real alternative to non-Catholic institutions.

It must be noted that the much-awaited address was made not only to university presidents, but also to the superintendents of Catholic schools at the diocesan level. Most likely for that reason the Holy Father did not specifically mention John Paul II’s apostolic constitution on Catholic universities, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, or its General Norms. The point of the address was broader, giving insight into Benedict’s thinking on Catholic identity for Catholic educational institutions at all levels.

Even so, the address was helpful to understand Benedict’s view of what a Catholic university should be. His mention that Catholic identity goes beyond statistics and doctrinal orthodoxy puts the legal norms of *Ex corde* into their proper perspective. Those norms, such as the need for the university president to be Catholic, the requirement that majorities of faculty and governing boards be Catholic and the necessity of the *mandatum* for theology professors, need to be understood as a starting point. To be a truly Catholic university, the institution must strive for much more than this.

According to Benedict, it must be a place where conviction leads to

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a faith that reverberates in each and every aspect of university life. It must be a place “to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth,” and where personal encounter with Christ, knowledge and Christian witness come together “to ensure that the power of God’s truth permeates every dimension” of the institution. In short, the root of the crisis of truth in today’s world is a crisis of faith. If a Catholic university seeks to be part of the solution to that crisis, it must be a place where faith is vibrant and alive.

Speaking specifically to faculty members at Catholic colleges and universities, Benedict’s treatment of academic freedom, one of the most important and tendentious issues facing many Catholic universities, was also revealing. Like John Paul II in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, Benedict recognizes the value of academic freedom and the call to “search for the truth wherever careful analysis of evidence leads you.” At the same time the Holy Father pointed out that appeal to academic freedom in order to justify positions contrary to the teachings of the Church cannot be justified. Such a use would be antithetical to the university’s identity and mission. While we should purposefully and joyfully pursue the truth, we are called to accept the whole and integral truth, whether we find it through reason or God’s Revelation as communicated through the Church’s Magisterium.

Finally, it struck me that the Holy Father sees the educator’s responsibility to lead others to the truth as a requirement of love. He called it “intellectual charity.” What a beautiful way to synthesize the mission and vocation of Catholic education! It brings to mind St. Bernard’s famous quote:

“There are some people who want to know only so as to know. This is misguided curiosity. Others want to know in order to be known. This is misguided vanity. Others want to know in order to sell their knowledge, for example, for money or for honors. This is misguided profit. But there are others who want to know in order to build. This is charity.”

At the Institute for the Psychological Sciences we are committed to serving our students and the Church with the “intellectual charity” to which Benedict and St. Bernard referred. Without question his address is a stimulus for us to develop and be nurtured from the heart of the Church. As a Catholic graduate school of psychology offering master- and doctoral-level degrees, our mission is to harmonize the scientific advances of modern psychology with the Christian vision of the human person.

While our program is empirically driven by wherever the finest scholarship leads us, it is always guided by the truth about the human person and within the moral framework proposed by the Church. As Benedict mentioned in Washington, truth should serve as the basis of praxis. This approach enriches the discipline and practice of psychology by respecting the transcendent destiny of each person, by understanding the relationship between freedom and responsibility, and by seeing virtue, faith and moral convictions as indispensable to the healing process and true human flourishing.

For us and for all Catholic educational institutions, achieving the high goals mentioned by the Holy Father is certainly a challenge, but it is also an opportunity. This is an opportunity to grow, to heal a hurting world and to become instruments of hope.

Small Is Still Beautiful—And the Font of Hope

By Jeffrey O. Nelson

As with so many of Pope Benedict's statements and writings, his recent "Address to Catholic Educators" at The Catholic University of America is hard to paraphrase, since in itself it is so compact, dense with insight and rich with provocations for further thought. When one searches for telling quotations for inclusion in an essay, the number of phrases worth repeating and considering simply piles up—until at last you are tempted simply to reprint the entire document. Instead, I will do my best to reflect in brief on the parts of his message that seem most pertinent to my own role as the leader of a small Catholic liberal arts college.

He said, "First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4)." A central truth, and yet one that it is all too easy to forget, particularly when the daily task entails managing an institution, planning budgets, juggling numbers, raising funds and organizing all the necessary but seemingly impersonal aspects of any going concern.

Yet, this statement of Pope Benedict is so important it might be worth putting onto a plaque that sits on my desk—the reminder that amidst all the noble abstractions and the reams of information which students must master in various fields, their task is also starkly simple: Learning the Truth by meeting a Person. A Person who does not just speak the truth—like many prophets and philosophers—but One Who simply, mysteriously embodies the Truth, or better, is the Truth embodied.

His actions as well as His words, the shape of Whose life and death and return to life limns out for our deepest reflection the Truth itself. Since each of us is the image of God, every encounter with a student who—however imperfectly—comes to us in search of the beautiful and the true is, conversely, helping to create another encounter with Christ. Thus, in every honest academic dialogue, in some sense, Christ speaks to Christ.

But to quote the Bible, "What is truth?" Pope Benedict answers this perhaps waggish, perhaps even sarcastic question: "Truth means more than knowledge: knowing the truth leads us to discover the good. Truth speaks to the individual in his or her entirety, inviting us to respond with our whole being.... Far from being just a communication of factual data—'informative'—the loving truth of the Gospel is creative and life-changing—performative" (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 2). This assertion condenses in a very few words a crucial distinction upon which we as Catholic educators must insist—not only over against the technocrats

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in secular institutions—but also against the “inner technocrat” with which most of us must contend as moderns.

Having grown up in a civilization that has willfully turned away from ultimate questions—supposedly for the sake of peaceful coexistence—we encounter an internal resistance to such a lofty conception of our task as teachers. We grow up prematurely jaded, and must spend our maturing years recovering the innocence of youth, the phase of life that naively, but correctly, believes that ideas (wrong ones or right ones) change the world; and that mind is the master of matter. How much more true this becomes when we think with the mind of the Church, which partakes in the Logos that pervades and orders creation. By meditating on this, we can with time, become “young” enough to serve our students.

Then Pope Benedict hits us with this: “When nothing beyond the individual is recognized as definitive, the ultimate criterion of judgment becomes the self and the satisfaction of the individual's immediate wishes.” This statement should sting, since it cuts across the grain of nearly every aspect of our contemporary culture—from the craze for self-assertion that permeates the biosphere to the proliferation of electives in our colleges.

WHILE WE MIGHT NOT LEGALLY STAND ANY LONGER *IN LOCO PARENTIS*, AND WHILE OUR MISSION CALLS US TO LEAD IN THE FORMATION OF *THE MIND*, WE STILL RETAIN MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DOING ALL WE CAN TO FORM AND PURIFY YOUNG PEOPLE'S WILLS AND TO UPLIFT THEIR SOULS.

Our entire economy, it might be argued, rests on the “the satisfaction of the individual's immediate wishes,” and the process of globalization consists in bringing this alternative “gospel” to the poor. Perhaps this tendency is the one we will find most challenging to our students, most of whom have grown up without any reason ever to question this premise. Only the beauty of truthful teaching, of leadership bravely exercised with respect for human dignity, can help tug at this veil that obscures the vision of Truth from the eyes of the young who hunger for it.

With his professorial clarity, Pope Benedict digs deeper than ideology or economics, to hit the nub of the modern disorder: “Yet we all know, and observe with concern, the difficulty or reluctance many people have today in entrusting themselves to God. It is a complex phenomenon and one which I ponder continually. While we have sought diligently to engage the intellect of our young, perhaps we have neglected the will. Subsequently we observe, with distress, the notion of freedom being distorted. Freedom is not an opting out. It is an opting in—a participation in Being itself.” Not just the intellect, but the will—the essence of our freedom, the nexus of choice, the part of ourselves which is so mysterious that our brain scientists try to argue it away. It is in the will that the self says “I will” or “I will not.” *Serviam or non serviam.*

The almost mystical reality we face as educators is the fact that we must help to train our students' wills while leaving them free. It is not for us to go further than God, Who leaves each of us with the final say—or nay-say—for our soul. But that does not mean we can simply shrug and watch our charges stumble through error into evil; that way has been tried for a generation at Catholic colleges, and we have all seen where it leads. While we might not legally stand any longer

in loco parentis, and while our mission calls us to lead in the formation of *the mind*, we still retain moral responsibility for doing all we can to form and purify young people’s wills and to uplift their souls.

In an age of bigness, when our youth stand as isolated and seemingly insignificant individuals before the modern behemoth university, this is best done in small-scale educational communities, where the individual intellect can be engaged and the individual will can be challenged with the truth. In small communities it is still possible to do this daily, with specific regard for each human person. The order of love reposes on specific knowledge of each specific person within the community. We must ask ourselves, is such knowledge, and thus such love, possible at the behemoth university?

Yet even within small communities, the world is ever with us. Wherever and whenever we engage the person, it must be done against the backdrop of a culture which discourages even self- (much less external) control and worships the colossal, the powerful and the impersonal. Truly, the only “hope” for us is the Hope that began the entire enterprise of Catholic education—which, it is worth recalling, started with a small community gathered in the upper room.

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- ✓ The transcript of a panel discussion on **“Academic Freedom at a Catholic University”** held in the wake of the Holy Father’s address to Catholic educators and co-sponsored by The Heritage Foundation.
- ✓ The Center’s first publication, **“Pope Benedict XVI and Catholic Higher Education: Commentaries in Advance of the Holy Father’s Address to Catholic Educators.”**

Evangelical Praise for the Pope's Remarks

By Dr. Hunter Baker

When my mother was growing up in small-town Alabama, she commonly heard anti-Catholic slurs. In that same town, the pastor of the First Baptist Church delivered some extraordinary remarks upon the occasion of Pope John Paul II's death. He stated up front that he had some theological disagreements with the Catholic Church, but went on to say that as Christians we should all pray that the next pope would be as great a man as John Paul II had been for the pope is seen as the representative of Christianity to the world. Pope Benedict is now that man.

As an evangelical Christian in the academy, I find myself grateful for Pope Benedict's leadership in higher education. There is a continuing question echoing through the halls of our buildings: "What's a Christian college for?" The old view that education is a commodity and that a school maintains its faith by having a Christian president or by hosting devotional exercises on campus has plainly failed to resist the secularizing trend. The Pope clearly recognizes the core of the problem when he asks, "*Are we ready to commit our entire self—intellect and will, mind and heart—God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools?*"

Unless we agree with the Pope, we find ourselves wondering why we as Christians—Catholic or Protestant—should continue to maintain private schools in competition with state-subsidized counterparts. If we provide the same old cake with a different colored frosting, then our entire project comes into question. The challenging reality is that we not only must re-dedicate ourselves to understanding what it means to be a Christian university offering a Christian education, but we must also find a way to better fund our universities.

We should be able to educate more students and have more scholarship dollars to bridge the gap in price with state schools. Our professors should have lighter teaching loads so they can participate in the worldwide scholarly conversation through research and publication. And—dare I say it?—we should be in the business of doctoral education much more ambitiously than we have to date. Christians who have spent five years pursuing a doctorate without benefit of supportive mentors often have little idea of what it means to integrate faith and scholarship.

The simple truth is that Richard John Neuhaus is correct when he says, "There is no such thing as a university plain and simple." Pope Benedict obviously agrees as he charges the presidents of Catholic colleges with pursuing a brand of education that is confidently and distinctively Christian.

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“Were Not Our Hearts Burning As He Spoke?”

By Jeffrey J. Karls

I write this reflection in New Hampshire shortly after Pope Benedict XVI completed his first visit to the United States, April 15-20. Although the Alitalia flight nicknamed “Shepherd One” returned to Rome with the Holy Father aboard, he is still very much present in America. Many who encountered Pope Benedict through the media or directly in Washington D.C., or New York could not help but echo the beautiful sentiments of the Emmaus disciples: “Were not our hearts burning as he spoke?”

Pope Benedict’s visit to America filled me with great joy, because I am not only a lay member of the flock he shepherds, the Catholic Church, but also the president of a Catholic college born from the heart of that Church. The Holy Father’s “Address to Catholic Educators” was especially poignant. He disappointed some media critics who were expecting to meet a vicious “German Shepherd,” the former “Panzer Cardinal,” by being the humble, intelligent and fatherly servant his associates have always known him to be. At the end of the evening, I strolled around Washington with several Catholic college presidents who also attended the meeting and we reveled in the strength and inspiration we drew from the Holy Father’s wisdom.

The text of Pope Benedict’s address is a key point of reference for the identity of Catholic schools, colleges and universities. Three points made by the Holy Father seem particularly crucial for Catholic colleges:

First, Catholic schools are places of evangelization:

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord’s disciples, the Church.

Catholic colleges strive to prepare students for professional, parish and family life; yet their primary reason for being is to offer students a place to grow in personal intimacy with Jesus Christ. In these remarks Pope Benedict is echoing the Second Vatican Council teaching that “the fruitfulness of the apostolate of lay people depends on their living union with Christ.” (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, no.4)

The second point from the Holy Father closely follows the first: Christian living is communal. The word “community,” overused these days, often denotes a group of individuals assenting to the same idea. Pope Benedict makes it clear that God is the source of unity in Catholic schools and a dynamic personal and communal relationship with him

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must be visible on campus:

This unique encounter is sustained within our Christian community: the one who seeks the truth becomes the one who lives by faith (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 31). It can be described as a move from ‘I’ to ‘we’, leading the individual to be numbered among God’s people.

This same dynamic of communal identity—to whom do I belong?—vivifies the ethos of our Catholic institutions. A university or school’s Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction—do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22)? Are we ready to commit our entire self—intellect and will, mind and heart—to God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools? Is it given fervent expression liturgically, sacramentally, through prayer, acts of charity, a concern for justice, and respect for God’s creation? Only in this way do we really bear witness to the meaning of who we are and what we uphold.”

Not surprisingly, Pope Benedict points to the liturgy as the first place where students can discover their identity and belonging. The liturgical life on Catholic college campuses liberates the individual by integrating him or her into the worshipping community: “a move from the ‘I’ to the ‘we.’”

Finally, Pope Benedict reminds us that Catholic colleges assist young people to exercise their freedom by entrusting themselves to God.

Only through faith can we freely give our assent to God’s testimony and acknowledge him as the transcendent guarantor of the truth he reveals. Again, we see why fostering personal intimacy with Jesus Christ and communal witness to his loving truth is indispensable in Catholic institutions of learning. Yet we all know, and observe with concern, the difficulty or reluctance many people have today in entrusting themselves to God. It is a complex phenomenon and one which I ponder continually. While we have sought diligently to engage the intellect of our young, perhaps we have neglected the will. Subsequently we observe, with distress, the notion of freedom being distorted. Freedom is not an opting out. It is an opting in—a participation in Being itself. Hence authentic freedom can never be attained by turning away from God. Such a choice would ultimately disregard the very truth we need in order to understand ourselves. A particular responsibility therefore for each of you, and your colleagues, is to evoke among the young the desire for the act of faith, encouraging them to commit themselves to the ecclesial life that follows from this belief.

Many young people shaped by the “dictatorship of relativism” have difficulty seeing freedom as anything but a force for self-seeking. The Holy Father shows us—most especially by the way he radiates faith, hope and charity—that a Catholic college must help students to discover “the joy of entering into ‘Christ’s being for others.’”

Pope Benedict arrived in America at the time of year when the sun begins to warm the New Hampshire ground after a long winter. We rejoice that Pope Benedict has strengthened America’s Catholic colleges as they strive to hasten the new springtime for the Catholic Church.

Thoughts From the President of a New College

By Father Robert W. Cook

As the founding President of Wyoming Catholic College, I am often asked the question: “Why another Catholic college? Aren’t there enough? You are so small, and it is such a difficult task. Why are you doing it?” In a way, the answer is simple: There are *not* enough boldly, radiantly Catholic schools in this country, particularly at the collegiate level. Young men and women who are seeking a rigorous education of their minds *in truth* and a prayerful formation of their hearts *in charity* have precious few options available to them.

The world of Catholic education has had forty years in which to demonstrate the glories of autonomy, secularization and the conventional trade-oriented and cafeteria approach to coursework. Nonetheless, in my opinion and in that of many in our Church today, this experiment has been tried and found very much wanting.

Present in the audience, I listened carefully to Pope Benedict XVI’s address to Catholic educators. His message, couched in his customarily polished and peaceful language, conveyed a crystal-clear message: Catholic institutions, wake up and rediscover your deepest identity! “Catholic identity,” he declared, “demands and inspires much more [than mere orthodoxy of course content]: namely, that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith.” (An aside: “orthodoxy of course content” would already be a huge step forward for most Catholic schools in this country, but we see that the Pope has even loftier aspirations.)

The Pope’s very first words, drawn from the Letter to the Romans, set the tone for his entire address: “How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news.” The good news is not academic freedom, it is not earthly credentials and it is not worldly success. The good news is Jesus Christ, His message, His wisdom, His salvation. *That* is what the Catholic university exists to promote, to proclaim, to study, to ponder, to write and sing about, to pass on from generation to generation, enriched with new insight, thereby enriching the entire world.

Hence, the Pope went on to say: “First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth.” First and foremost, then, we are to be a place of meeting God and experiencing the power of His love and His truth—the only love that never disappoints, the only truth that can ground and guarantee every other truth we know. Take away this love and the world is a bleak waste, a meaningless labyrinth; take away this truth and the world is a tale signifying nothing. Young people instinctively know this, which is why they must either find some absolute cause worth living and dying for, or surrender themselves to amnesic indulgence.

Pope Benedict did not mince words. “Each generation of Christian

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educators,” he reminded us, has a duty “to ensure that the power of God’s truth permeates every dimension of the institutions they serve.” And why? So that young people may lead a life “characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true.” This venerable triad, which is actually the motto emblazoned on the crest of Wyoming Catholic College, expresses why we were founded: to nourish our students with the perennial and the profound, the substantial and the sacred, the things that truly satisfy the infinite hunger of the human heart.

For this reason, academic freedom is not and could never be our guiding principle; truth is. Academic freedom is an idol that misleads its worshipers to imagine a vain thing: that reason alone can get us safely home. As a matter of fact, reason is not only *not* capable of realizing our high destiny as children of God, it even collapses in upon itself in mute nihilism when no longer supported by the divine strength of faith. “Only in faith can truth become incarnate and reason truly human,” said the Holy Father.

Academic freedom, in its usual acceptance, also completely misunderstands the very nature of freedom, as indicated by the question, Freedom *for what?* To be free is only as good as what you are freed to do and to be. As the Pope put it in his speech, “Freedom is not an opting out, it is an opting in—a participation in being itself.” Jesus Christ affirmed to His disciples: “You will know the truth, and the *truth* will set you free.” Nothing else can liberate us, nothing else can satisfy us and nothing else can save us from despair—or from the evasion of despair that accounts for much of the industry of modern life.

As a new school, in the face of the tyranny of relativism as well as a pervasive lack of understanding that *no* part of life is untouched by the mysteries of our faith, we have wanted to chart a course that makes optimal use of our freedom as a new school, unencumbered by the fruitless battles of recent generations.

It is perhaps ultimately quite ironic that the founders of this college, in a world drunk with ideas of innovation and progress, turned with one accord to the traditional practices and studies that make for true intellectual freedom—the “liberal arts” and the liberal (that is, free man’s) education they sustain. Our students learn by a guided tour of the Great Books, supplemented by remaining in touch with God’s first book, creation. Students who receive this kind of education, seemingly remote from the “practical,” are capacitated for a whole host of life skills and vocations that they can pursue with unique versatility and vitality.

It is an embarrassing exercise to go back and compare the rigorous classical education this country’s Founding Fathers received with the simulacrum of education their descendents are getting today. What did those men of action study? They studied logic, rhetoric, Latin, mathematics, physical sciences, literature, philosophy and very often theology. Their studies were a sort of last echo of the Catholic Church’s educational heritage, which is the sole root and finest flower of all university life in the Western world. Our college has the wonderful opportunity to grow up from this root, without compromise, and to harvest its fruits for the good of the Church and of the country.

Pope Benedict XVI concluded his address by quoting his favorite theologian, St. Augustine: “We who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher.” Christ, the Light of the World, is truly the Master at our college, the One to whom we look, the One whose wisdom we strive to embrace, both in and out of the classroom. In this way we strive to create a culture of true freedom, born of “intellectual charity”—the freedom, that is, to know, to pursue, to discover and to cling to all that is really good, beautiful and true.

ADDRESS TO CATHOLIC EDUCATORS

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

April 17, 2008, The Catholic University of America

Your Eminences,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Distinguished Professors, Teachers and Educators,

How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news” (Rom 10:15-17). With these words of Isaiah quoted by Saint Paul, I warmly greet each of you—bearers of wisdom—and through you the staff, students and families of the many and varied institutions of learning that you represent. It is my great pleasure to meet you and to share with you some thoughts regarding the nature and identity of Catholic education today. I especially wish to thank Father David O’Connell, President and Rector of the Catholic University of America. Your kind words of welcome are much appreciated. Please extend my heartfelt gratitude to the entire community—faculty, staff and students—of this University.

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord’s disciples, the Church.

The dynamic between personal encounter, knowledge and Christian witness is integral to the *diakonia* of truth which the Church exercises in the midst of humanity. God’s revelation offers every generation the opportunity to discover the ultimate truth about its own life and the goal of history. This task is never easy; it involves the entire Christian community and motivates each generation of Christian educators to ensure that the power of God’s truth permeates every dimension of the institutions they serve. In this way, Christ’s Good News is set to work, guiding both teacher and student towards the objective truth which, in transcending the particular and the subjective, points to the universal and absolute that enables us to proclaim with confidence the hope which does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5). Set against personal struggles, moral confusion and fragmentation of knowledge, the noble goals of scholarship and education, founded on the unity of truth and in service of the person and the community, become an especially powerful instrument of hope.

Dear friends, the history of this nation includes many examples of the Church’s commitment in this regard. The Catholic community here has in fact made education one of its highest priorities. This undertaking has not come without great sacrifice. Towering figures, like Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and other founders and foundresses, with great tenacity and foresight, laid the foundations of what is today a remarkable network of parochial schools contributing to the spiritual well-being of the Church and the nation. Some, like Saint Katharine Drexel, devoted their lives to educating those whom others had neglected—in her case, African Americans and Native Americans. Countless dedicated Religious Sisters, Brothers, and Priests together with selfless parents have, through Catholic schools, helped generations of immigrants to rise from poverty and take their place in mainstream society.

This sacrifice continues today. It is an outstanding apostolate of hope, seeking to address the material, intellectual and spiritual needs of over three million children and students. It also provides a highly commendable

opportunity for the entire Catholic community to contribute generously to the financial needs of our institutions. Their long-term sustainability must be assured. Indeed, everything possible must be done, in cooperation with the wider community, to ensure that they are accessible to people of all social and economic strata. No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.

Some today question the Church's involvement in education, wondering whether her resources might be better placed elsewhere. Certainly in a nation such as this, the State provides ample opportunities for education and attracts committed and generous men and women to this honorable profession. It is timely, then, to reflect on what is particular to our Catholic institutions. How do they contribute to the good of society through the Church's primary mission of evangelization?

All the Church's activities stem from her awareness that she is the bearer of a message which has its origin in God himself: in his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1:9; *Dei Verbum*, 2). God's desire to make himself known, and the innate desire of all human beings to know the truth, provide the context for human inquiry into the meaning of life. This unique encounter is sustained within our Christian community: the one who seeks the truth becomes the one who lives by faith (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 31). It can be described as a move from "I" to "we", leading the individual to be numbered among God's people.

This same dynamic of communal identity—to whom do I belong?—vivifies the ethos of our Catholic institutions. A university or school's Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction—do we really believe that only in the mystery of the Word made flesh does the mystery of man truly become clear (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22)? Are we ready to commit our entire self—intellect and will, mind and heart—to God? Do we accept the truth Christ reveals? Is the faith tangible in our universities and schools? Is it given fervent expression liturgically, sacramentally, through prayer, acts of charity, a concern for justice, and respect for God's creation? Only in this way do we really bear witness to the meaning of who we are and what we uphold.

From this perspective one can recognize that the contemporary "crisis of truth" is rooted in a "crisis of faith". Only through faith can we freely give our assent to God's testimony and acknowledge him as the transcendent guarantor of the truth he reveals. Again, we see why fostering personal intimacy with Jesus Christ and communal witness to his loving truth is indispensable in Catholic institutions of learning. Yet we all know, and observe with concern, the difficulty or reluctance many people have today in entrusting themselves to God. It is a complex phenomenon and one which I ponder continually. While we have sought diligently to engage the intellect of our young, perhaps we have neglected the will. Subsequently we observe, with distress, the notion of freedom being distorted. Freedom is not an opting out. It is an opting in—a participation in Being itself. Hence authentic freedom can never be attained by turning away from God. Such a choice would ultimately disregard the very truth we need in order to understand ourselves. A particular responsibility therefore for each of you, and your colleagues, is to evoke among the young the desire for the act of faith, encouraging them to commit themselves to the ecclesial life that follows from this belief. It is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth. In choosing to live by that truth, we embrace the fullness of the life of faith which is given to us in the Church.

Clearly, then, Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with orthodoxy of course content. It demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith. Only in faith can truth become incarnate and reason truly human, capable of directing the will along the path of freedom (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 23). In this way our institutions make a vital contribution to the mission of the Church and truly serve society. They become places in which God's active presence in human affairs is recognized and in which every young person discovers the joy of entering into Christ's "being for others" (cf. *ibid.*, 28).

The Church's primary mission of evangelization, in which educational institutions play a crucial role, is consonant with a nation's fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person's dignity. At times, however, the value of the Church's contribution to the public forum is questioned. It is important therefore to recall that the truths of faith and of reason never contradict one another (cf. First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, IV: DS 3017; St. Augustine, *Contra Academicos*, III, 20, 43). The Church's mission, in fact, involves her in humanity's struggle to arrive at truth. In articulating revealed truth she serves all members of society by purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths. Drawing upon divine wisdom, she sheds light on the foundation of human morality and ethics, and reminds all groups in society that it is not praxis that creates truth but truth that should serve as the basis of praxis. Far from undermining the tolerance of legitimate diversity, such a contribution illuminates the very truth which makes consensus attainable, and helps to keep public debate rational, honest and accountable. Similarly the Church never tires of upholding the essential moral categories of right and wrong, without which hope could only wither, giving way to cold pragmatic calculations of utility which render the person little more than a pawn on some ideological chess-board.

With regard to the educational forum, the *diakonia* of truth takes on a heightened significance in societies where secularist ideology drives a wedge between truth and faith. This division has led to a tendency to equate truth with knowledge and to adopt a positivistic mentality which, in rejecting metaphysics, denies the foundations of faith and rejects the need for a moral vision. Truth means more than knowledge: knowing the truth leads us to discover the good. Truth speaks to the individual in his or her entirety, inviting us to respond with our whole being. This optimistic vision is found in our Christian faith because such faith has been granted the vision of the Logos, God's creative Reason, which in the Incarnation, is revealed as Goodness itself. Far from being just a communication of factual data—"informative"—the loving truth of the Gospel is creative and life-changing—"performative" (cf. *Spe Sahi*, 2). With confidence, Christian educators can liberate the young from the limits of positivism and awaken receptivity to the truth, to God and his goodness. In this way you will also help to form their conscience which, enriched by faith, opens a sure path to inner peace and to respect for others.

It comes as no surprise, then, that not just our own ecclesial communities but society in general has high expectations of Catholic educators. This places upon you a responsibility and offers an opportunity. More and more people—parents in particular—recognize the need for excellence in the human formation of their children. As *Mater et Magistra*, the Church shares their concern. When nothing beyond the individual is recognized as definitive, the ultimate criterion of judgment becomes the self and the satisfaction of the individual's immediate wishes. The objectivity and perspective, which can only come through a recognition of the essential transcendent dimension of the human person, can be lost. Within such a relativistic horizon the goals of education are inevitably curtailed. Slowly, a lowering of standards occurs. We observe today a timidity in the face of the category of the good and an aimless pursuit of novelty parading as the realization of freedom. We witness an assumption that every experience is of equal worth and a reluctance to admit imperfection and mistakes. And particularly disturbing, is the reduction of the precious and delicate area of education in sexuality to management of "risk", bereft of any reference to the beauty of conjugal love.

How might Christian educators respond? These harmful developments point to the particular urgency of what we might call "intellectual charity". This aspect of charity calls the educator to recognize that the profound responsibility to lead the young to truth is nothing less than an act of love. Indeed, the dignity of education lies in fostering the true perfection and happiness of those to be educated. In practice "intellectual charity" upholds the essential unity of knowledge against the fragmentation which ensues when reason is detached from the pursuit of truth. It guides the young towards the deep satisfaction of exercising freedom in relation to truth, and it strives to articulate the relationship between faith and all aspects of family and civic life. Once their passion for

the fullness and unity of truth has been awakened, young people will surely relish the discovery that the question of what they can know opens up the vast adventure of what they ought to do. Here they will experience “in what” and “in whom” it is possible to hope, and be inspired to contribute to society in a way that engenders hope in others.

Dear friends, I wish to conclude by focusing our attention specifically on the paramount importance of your own professionalism and witness within our Catholic universities and schools. First, let me thank you for your dedication and generosity. I know from my own days as a professor, and I have heard from your Bishops and officials of the Congregation for Catholic Education, that the reputation of Catholic institutes of learning in this country is largely due to yourselves and your predecessors. Your selfless contributions—from outstanding research to the dedication of those working in inner-city schools—serve both your country and the Church. For this I express my profound gratitude.

In regard to faculty members at Catholic colleges universities, I wish to reaffirm the great value of academic freedom. In virtue of this freedom you are called to search for the truth wherever careful analysis of evidence leads you. Yet it is also the case that any appeal to the principle of academic freedom in order to justify positions that contradict the faith and the teaching of the Church would obstruct or even betray the university’s identity and mission; a mission at the heart of the Church’s *munus docendi* and not somehow autonomous or independent of it.

Teachers and administrators, whether in universities or schools, have the duty and privilege to ensure that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. This requires that public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church’s *Magisterium*, shapes all aspects of an institution’s life, both inside and outside the classroom. Divergence from this vision weakens Catholic identity and, far from advancing freedom, inevitably leads to confusion, whether moral, intellectual or spiritual.

I wish also to express a particular word of encouragement to both lay and Religious teachers of catechesis who strive to ensure that young people become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith. Religious education is a challenging apostolate, yet there are many signs of a desire among young people to learn about the faith and practice it with vigor. If this awakening is to grow, teachers require a clear and precise understanding of the specific nature and role of Catholic education. They must also be ready to lead the commitment made by the entire school community to assist our young people, and their families, to experience the harmony between faith, life and culture.

Here I wish to make a special appeal to Religious Brothers, Sisters and Priests: do not abandon the school apostolate; indeed, renew your commitment to schools especially those in poorer areas. In places where there are many hollow promises which lure young people away from the path of truth and genuine freedom, the consecrated person’s witness to the evangelical counsels is an irreplaceable gift. I encourage the Religious present to bring renewed enthusiasm to the promotion of vocations. Know that your witness to the ideal of consecration and mission among the young is a source of great inspiration in faith for them and their families.

To all of you I say: bear witness to hope. Nourish your witness with prayer. Account for the hope that characterizes your lives (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) by living the truth which you propose to your students. Help them to know and love the One you have encountered, whose truth and goodness you have experienced with joy. With Saint Augustine, let us say: “we who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher” (*Sermons*, 23:2). With these sentiments of communion, I gladly impart to you, your colleagues and students, and to your families, my Apostolic Blessing.

Research Priorities

The Center for the Study of Catholic Higher Education

The Center—in addition to publishing two issues of the quarterly *Bulletin of Catholic Higher Education*, continuing research on the 2009 *Newman Guide* and publishing a series in anticipation of the beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman—has three priority research areas: Academics, Student Life (Love & Responsibility) and Governance.

Academics

Academics are, of course, the reason that colleges and universities exist. Among the most important issues that The Center will delve into are the core curriculum and a proper understanding of academic freedom. For decades core curricula at Catholic colleges, once their hallmark, have been weakened to the point that they are practically non-existent on many campuses. The Center will trace the history of the core, examine its importance to educating students and propose models of core programs that are able to meet the needs of modern students without sacrificing academic quality. In terms of academic freedom, there is perhaps no single greater threat to the Catholic identity of a college than the absolutist view of academic freedom that is in operation at the vast majority of colleges today. In addition to engaging leading experts to conduct research on and provide analysis of these issues, the Center will co-host a series of panel discussions with other organizations including The Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Student Life / Love & Responsibility Program

While academics are what colleges “do,” most students spend far more time in the dorm room than in the classroom. As a major component of its research on this topic, The Center will build on The Cardinal Newman Society’s Love & Responsibility program—which in part was launched in response to the crisis on campuses of what is popularly known as the “hook-up” culture. CNS staff and advisors have spent countless hours meeting with social scientists and theologians to determine the most effective approach to combat this problem, and it has become clear that the first step is to educate administrators, parents and students about how casual attitudes toward love, life and marriage are detrimental to a student’s physical, psychological and spiritual well being. To that end, The Center has commissioned a research project to examine student attitudes and experiences on Catholic campuses. In addition, renowned experts in their fields will examine *Humanae Vitae* at 40 years in the context of campus life and the pastoral care of students with same sex attractions. Future areas of study will include spiritual life and social justice issues.

Governance

Establishing a quality academic program and providing students with a campus culture that promotes a Catholic environment requires leadership from academic departments, administrators and boards of trustees. The Center will produce a series of papers in 2008 on the importance of these issues from the points of view of a college administrator and of a trustee, and in addition will examine the importance of hiring for mission.

All Center papers, lecture transcripts and other publications are available on its website:

www.CatholicHigherEd.org



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