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# What Made Catholic Identity A Problem?

Philip Gleason

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PHILIP GLEASON

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*Marianist Award Lecture/1994*

What Made Catholic Identity  
A Problem?



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*The University of Dayton*

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WHAT MADE CATHOLIC IDENTITY  
A PROBLEM?

by PHILIP GLEASON

Marianist Award Lecture  
1994

THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

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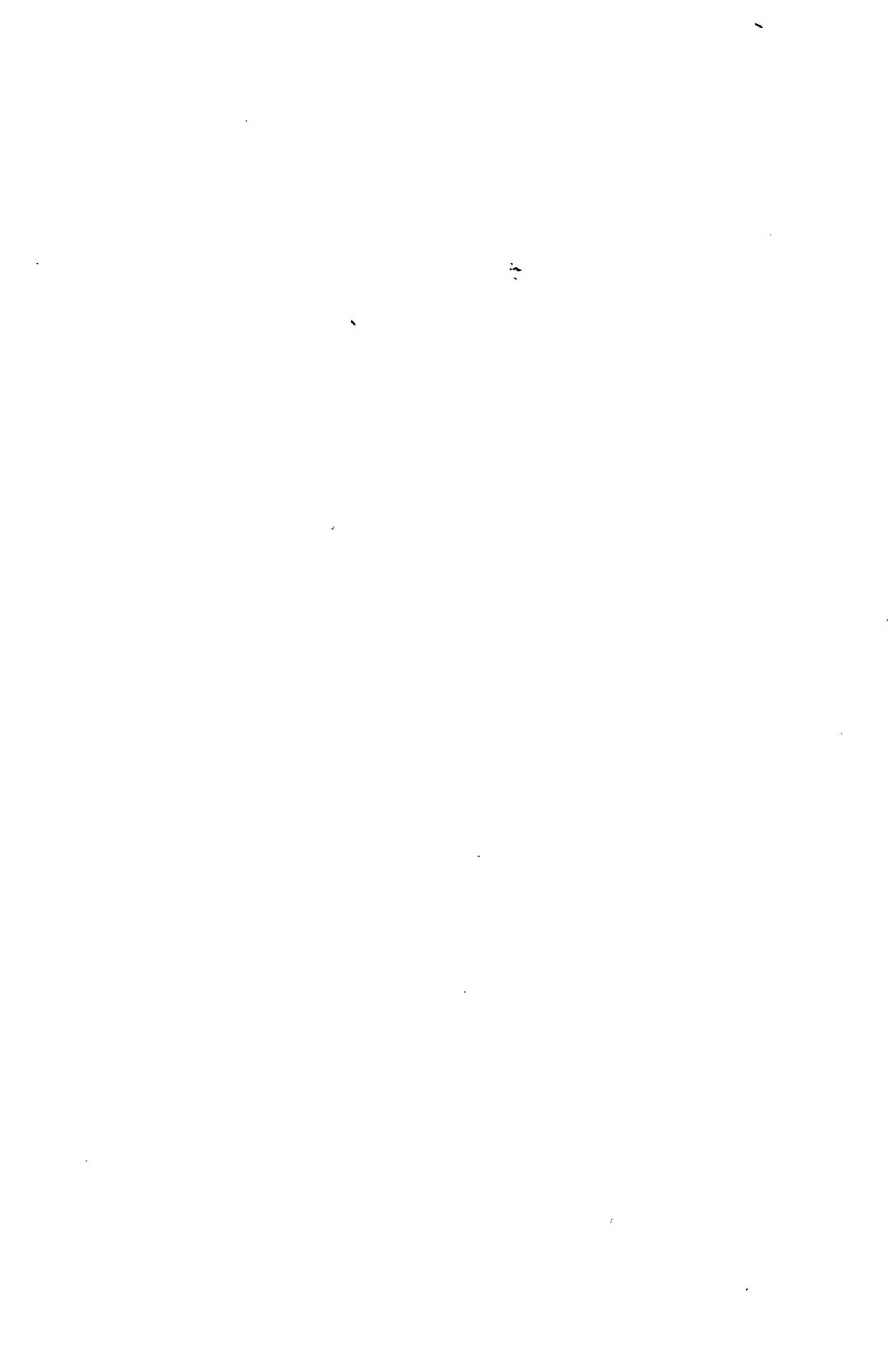
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PHILIP GLEASON is professor of history at the University of Notre Dame. He was born in Wilmington, Ohio in 1927 and graduated from the University of Dayton in 1951. After a year as a management intern in Baltimore, and another as an eighth grade teacher in Xenia, he embarked upon graduate work in history at Notre Dame, receiving his doctorate in 1960. Except for a term as visiting chaired professor at the Catholic University of America, he has taught at Notre Dame ever since. Professor Gleason also served as chairman of Notre Dame's Department of History from 1971 to 1974, and in 1978 he received the university's annual faculty award.

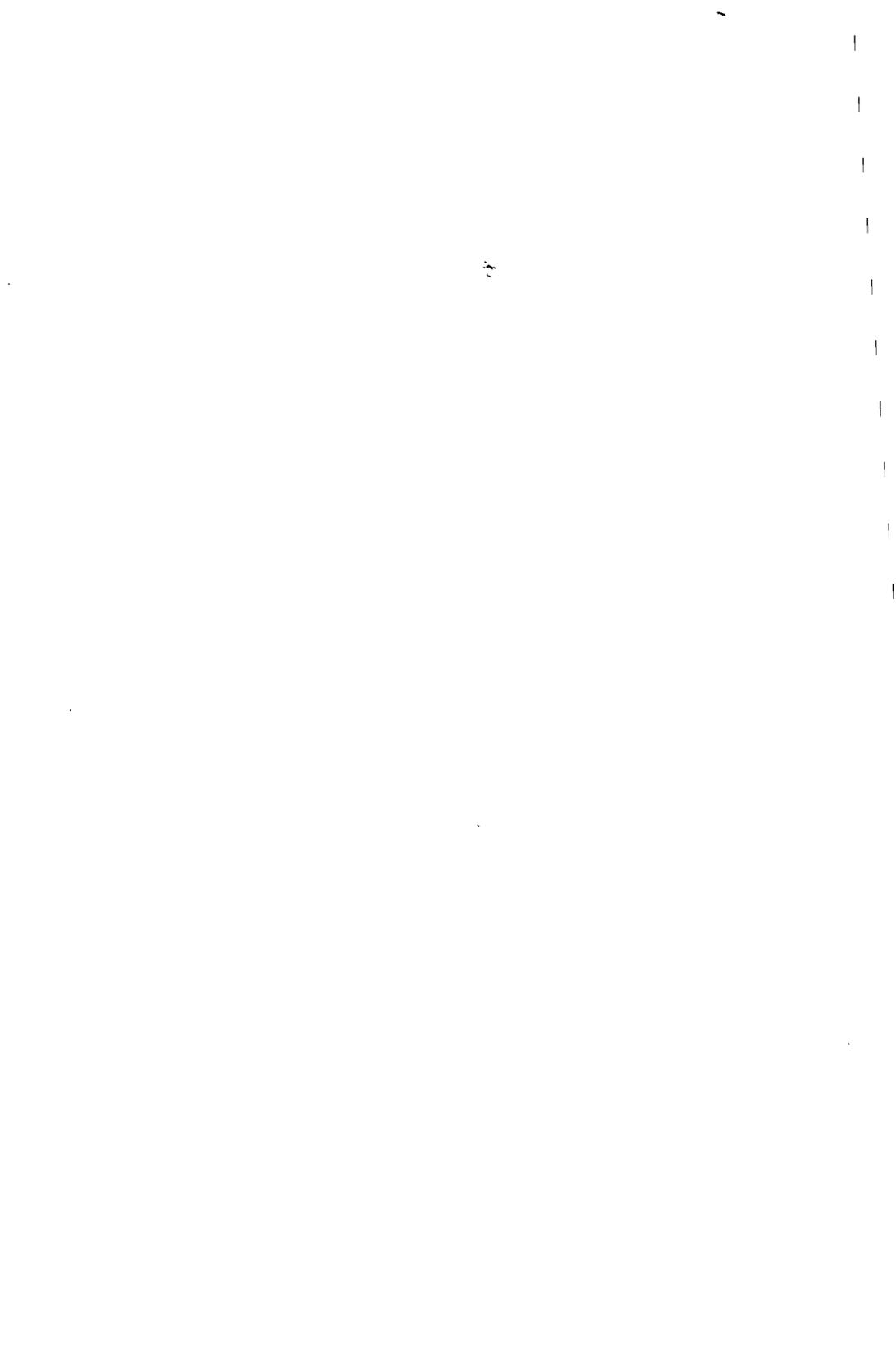
From 1986 to 1988 Professor Gleason was national chairman of the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs. A past president of the American Catholic Historical Association, he has also served as consultant to the Johns Hopkins Program in American Religious History and on the editorial boards of the *Journal of American History* and the *Review of Politics*. He has published many scholarly articles and written or edited six books, the most recent being *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism Past and Present* (1987), and *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (1992). He is presently completing a history of American Catholic higher education in the twentieth century.

Professor Gleason is married to Maureen Lacey Gleason who is Deputy Director of the University of Notre Dame Libraries; they are the parents of four adult children.



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*The following lecture was given at the University of Dayton on the occasion of the presentation of the Marianist Award to Philip Gleason, January 27, 1994.*



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## WHAT MADE CATHOLIC IDENTITY A PROBLEM?

Receiving the Marianist Award for 1994 is a very great honor and a mark of recognition for which I am deeply grateful.

It is an honor not merely in itself but also because it allows me to claim fellowship with the distinguished group of Catholic scholars whom you have chosen for the award in past years.

In that group, I am especially gratified to find myself associated with two other historians — the late Monsignor John Tracy Ellis (1986) and the Honorable John T. Noonan (1991) — whose work I admire enormously and both of whom I am proud to call friends (although in the case of Monsignor Ellis that friendship is now but a cherished memory).

I might add that being placed on a plane of equality with the provost of my own university — Timothy O'Meara, who won the award in 1988 — can hardly prove disadvantageous to me back in South Bend.

I feel especially honored also in being the first alumnus of UD to receive the award since it was reactivated in the mid-80s. It is, I have to admit, a long time since I graduated in 1951, but I have the fondest recollections of my undergraduate years.

I like to think that Brother Louis Faerber, who encouraged my interest in teaching in those distant days, would take some

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satisfaction in this award. And I don't doubt that Brother William O. Wehrle, who exercised a benign despotism over the third floor of Alumni Hall dormitory, would feel considerable surprise at what is going on here.

Not that I ever caused the good brother any trouble you understand. And in fact I remember him, not just as a disciplinarian, but as the teacher of a course on the history of the English language that was one of the most interesting of my prolonged career as a student.

There were many other memorable courses — Richard Baker's history of philosophy, William Canning's US history survey, Erving Beauregard's Expansion of Europe (where I learned that Norway has a longer coastline than the continent of Africa), Kathleen Whetro's American literature course (where I learned what "venery" means), and Wilfred Steiner's medieval history course for which I read a book that contained an unforgettable line — one that is applicable in many situations of life and learning. It comes from the prologue to Robert the Monk's history of the First Crusade and runs as follows: "The more studiously anyone directs his attention to this subject, the more fully will the convolutions of his brain expand and the greater will be his stupefaction."<sup>1</sup>

That isn't the text for my talk this afternoon because I don't really want to stupefy you. I do, however, hope to expand the convolutions of your brains just a bit in connection with the question that does furnish my text: "What made Catholic identity a problem?"

The question, of course, refers to the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities. That is a hot question now — at least at Notre Dame — and has been for quite a while. I want to talk about it from two angles: from the perspective of one whose memories (as you just learned) go back to the late 1940s; and also from the perspective of one who has studied the history of Catholic higher education in the 20th century. These two dimensions have become so intermingled that I honestly couldn't say which has

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been most important in shaping my present understanding of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

## **Catholic Identity at Mid-Century**

Considered from the vantage point of the present, the most striking thing about the Catholic identity issue in the 1940s and 1950s is that it didn't exist. The reality, of course, existed - existed in the sense that Catholic colleges and universities definitely *had* that identity, *were* Catholic, and made no bones about *professing* their Catholicity. What didn't exist was the "problem" of Catholic identity. That didn't exist because the Catholicity of the institution was so much of a given — seemed so obviously a fact of nature — that no one regarded it as a problem any more than they regarded it as a problem that a college was a college and not a filling station or a furniture factory.

In other words, the Catholic identity of places like the University of Dayton was a reality that could be taken for granted — and was, indeed, taken for granted. But there was a kind of paradox here, for the main reason Catholic colleges of that era could be unself-consciously Catholic was that Catholics were still self-consciously "different." That is, American Catholics were so conscious of holding distinctive *religious beliefs* that it seemed perfectly obvious that they needed their own schools to perpetuate the outlook on life that flowed from those beliefs.

So long as Catholics continued to constitute that kind of distinctive religious subculture, the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges would not emerge as a problem. For as the historian of religious change at Amherst College wrote, "The very acceptance of an idea operates to make exegesis needless and apology supererogatory. Only when its validity is challenged will there appear a body of definition and discussion."<sup>3</sup> The challenges that eventually started people talking about the "problem" of Catholic identity were only beginning to take shape at midcentury. They were still much weaker than the internal and external factors

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reinforcing that identity as a given quality whose existence could be taken for granted.

The chief internal factor reinforcing it was the continuing momentum of self-confidence produced by several decades of fabulous growth in numbers of faithful, in organizational energy, and in spiritual vitality. The Catholic intellectual revival of the interwar period — called by some the Catholic Renaissance — carried over strongly into the post-World War II era. So did the various apostolic movements inspired by what was known at the time as “Catholic Action” (of which Dayton’s Father Ferree was a major theorist). The closely related battle against “secularism,” which had gotten under way in the thirties, reached its climax in the late forties. Thinkers like Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray, S.J., gained a respectful hearing for the Catholic tradition in philosophy and theology; on a less rarefied level, journalists like John Cogley applied natural-law reasoning to the problems of the day. Catholicism attracted intellectual converts, and Thomas Merton’s *Seven Storey Mountain* (1948) — the story of his conversion and vocation to the priesthood as a Trappist monk — became a minor publishing sensation. Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen, who was a famous convert maker, reached a wider audience as a lecturer, spiritual writer, and media personality.

In a word, the American Catholic subculture seemed to be in good shape intellectually speaking. It was plagued by no doubts about having a distinctive religio-intellectual tradition, about the contents of the tradition, or about the responsibility that fell on Catholic colleges and universities to articulate the tradition, present it to young people, and represent it in the larger world of learning.

Externally, the religious identity of the Catholic college was reinforced by certain features of the national cultural scene. The war had sparked a revival of religion, for there were, as the saying had it, “no atheists in foxholes.” On a deeper level, totalitarianism and war discredited secular liberal ideas of human perfectibility

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and rehabilitated “Christian realism.” That expression was particularly identified with Reinhold Niebuhr, who infused his influential social and political commentary with the spirit of Protestant Neo-Orthodoxy. By the late 1940s, observers were calling attention to evidence of a major “revival of religion.” That, along with the country’s Cold War repudiation of Communism, was well calculated to bolster the morale of Catholic educators and reinforce their commitment to integrating faith and learning in their colleges and universities.

### **Counter-Currents**

At the same time, however, counter-currents were beginning to build up that would at length render problematic the hitherto taken-for-granted quality of these institutions’ Catholic identity. The subtlest was the continuing social assimilation of the Catholic population, and the concomitant acceleration of the process by which Catholic colleges and universities adjusted themselves to prevailing standards in the larger world of American higher education (especially after they took up graduate work in earnest). This twofold process of social and academic acculturation took place gradually and — especially in respect to social assimilation — more or less beneath the surface. For that reason it went unnoticed for quite some time. Indeed, it was not until the 1960s that social scientists began to publicize the finding that Catholics had experienced dramatic upward mobility and by then surpassed their Protestant fellow citizens “in most aspects of status.”<sup>4</sup>

As they became less distinguishable from other Americans in terms of income, occupation, residential location (for they, too, moved to the suburbs), and educational aspiration — and as the sense of ethnic distinctiveness faded for the grandchildren of immigrants — Catholics, especially the young people who came of age after World War II, began to wonder whether they were so different from everyone else that they had to have their own separate institutions, and why they were expected to hold different views from other people on matters such as divorce and birth control.

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The earliest indication of this tendency was the intra-Catholic criticism of “Catholic separatism,” “ghettoism,” and the “siege mentality” that erupted around 1950 and continued strongly for several years. No doubt it was in part a response to hostile external criticism. For while the Catholic critics defended the Church from foes like Paul Blanshard, who portrayed Catholicism as intrinsically unAmerican, they also wanted to eliminate whatever features of Catholic life gave needless offense to others. This made good sense in the highly charged atmosphere of inter-religious conflict over issues like aid to parochial schools, which Protestants and secular liberals regarded as examples of arrogant “aggressiveness” on the part of Catholics. To defuse this kind of hostility, Catholic liberals urged their coreligionists to participate more actively in “the mainstream of American life” by joining “pluralistic” movements for social betterment along with Protestants, Jews, and non-believers.

The advice was perfectly justifiable in the circumstances, but it was also inevitably assimilationist in tendency. Insofar as it was assimilationist, criticism of “ghettoism” implicitly endorsed the underlying social processes that were making Catholics more like other Americans and simultaneously weakening their distinctive identity. But even if this had been pointed out at the time, the critics would probably have dismissed it as unimportant. For they were objecting to what they considered unduly exaggerated forms of Catholic distinctiveness. Catholicity as such, they would have said, was far too deeply rooted to be at all threatened by eliminating these extremes.

## **Self-Criticism**

This view of the situation was implicit in the most famous critique of American Catholic academic performance ever published — Monsignor Ellis’ “American Catholics and the Intellectual Life,” which was published in 1955 and set off a chain reaction of “self-criticism” that continued into the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> Ellis’ target was not ghettoism as such, but the lamentably weak showing

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made by American Catholics in scientific research, scholarly publication, and intellectual leadership generally — all of which of course reflected very unfavorably on Catholic institutions of higher education. Ellis did, however, hit hard at ghettoism in his conclusion, which was that Catholic scholars' indolence and their "frequently self-imposed ghetto mentality" were primarily responsible for this dismal record.

But despite his unsparing criticism, despite his coming down hard on ghettoism, and despite his urging Catholics to "mingle" more freely with "their non-Catholic colleagues," it was quite evident that Ellis regarded the Catholicity of Catholic scholarship as being too deeply rooted to be in any way threatened by a public airing of its deficiencies or by closer association with outsiders. On the contrary, it was only by following his counsel that Catholic scholars could "measure up" to their responsibilities as bearers of "the oldest, wisest and most sublime tradition of learning that the world has ever known."<sup>6</sup>

But as the chorus of self-criticism mounted in the late fifties, much else besides laziness and ghettoism was causally linked to "Catholic anti-intellectualism." Thomas F. O'Dea, for example, identified formalism, authoritarianism, clericalism, moralism, and defensiveness, as the five "basic characteristics of the American Catholic milieu which inhibit the development of mature intellectual activity." And Daniel Callahan carried the logic of criticism to its seemingly inevitable conclusion by announcing that "the real culprit" was "the American Catholic mentality" itself.<sup>7</sup> At this point, one might reasonably have asked whether Catholics had any solid basis for thinking they had an intellectual tradition that was even respectable, much less one that was "the oldest, wisest, and most sublime" in the history of the world.

## **A Challenge to Identity**

Though self-criticism was thus intended as an assault on Catholic smugness — which did, indeed, furnish a very large target

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— it could not help but raise deeper questions about the content of the Catholic intellectual tradition. That in turn posed an implicit challenge to the identity of Catholic institutions of higher education, for it was their ostensible dedication to that tradition that gave them their distinctive character.

Increasingly sharp criticism of Neoscholastic philosophy had the same effect, since it had previously been considered the intellectual centerpiece of the Catholic Renaissance and the most essential element in the undergraduate curriculum. By the late fifties, however, Catholic educators had largely abandoned their earlier preoccupation with “integrating the curriculum” around a core of Neoscholastic philosophy and theology. Instead, they devoted themselves to the “pursuit of excellence” — with excellence being understood as the way things were done at places like Harvard and Berkeley.

Of course, most professors in Catholic colleges were too much absorbed in “their own work” to keep abreast of the Catholic intellectualism discussion, or to pay much attention to curricular developments that did not impinge directly on the self-interest of their departments. But they were being affected by more subtle changes. One such change was heralded by growing opposition among Catholic sociologists to the older view that there was such a thing as “Catholic sociology.”

This was significant because sociology was different from mathematics or chemistry. No one had ever prescribed “Catholic” approaches to those subjects; but the founders of the American Catholic Sociological Society insisted that their discipline was different because the teacher/researcher’s personal worldview and value commitments entered directly into the way sociology was studied and taught. The fact that a new generation of Catholic practitioners regarded the “Catholic sociology” approach as outmoded and embarrassingly parochial reflected a degree of academic acculturation that foreshadowed more pervasive identity problems to come.<sup>8</sup>

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Those problems were to burst forth in the 1960s, but they did not do so right away. Pope John XXIII, who issued his call for *aggiornamento* in 1959, and John F. Kennedy, who was elected president the following year, seemed the bellwethers of a new and better day for an American Catholicism that had “come of age” (to use a phrase popular at the time). Indeed, the last of the strictly Ellis-inspired “self-critics” veered dangerously close to a new kind of smugness by asserting that, thanks largely to the younger lay professors who had absorbed “professional standards” in graduate school, Catholic colleges were in “transition from a prolonged intellectual adolescence to a point where they can face the challenges of maturity.”<sup>9</sup>

By that time (1964), the pace of *aggiornamento* had picked up so markedly that the same author, John D. Donovan, could refer to “fundamental challenges to the validity and viability of the theological, structural, and historic warrants of the pre-1950 system” of Catholic higher education.<sup>10</sup> But this abstract and stuffily academic way of putting the point corresponded to the muffled and obscure state of the question at that time. The “fundamental challenges” were still latent. No one — or at least no Catholic — had come right out and said in plain language that just as there could be no such thing as “Catholic sociology” neither could there be such a thing as a “Catholic university.”

What precipitated that crucial next step, raising the issue in the starkest terms and causing it to be stated with brutal directness, was the explosion over academic freedom set off in December 1965, when St. John’s University in New York summarily dismissed thirty-one professors. In the aftermath of that gross violation of academic due process, and as other academic freedom cases erupted (including a much-publicized case here at UD), George Bernard Shaw’s dictum that a Catholic university is a contradiction in terms was quoted repeatedly, and John Cogley, the erstwhile promoter of natural law, said a Catholic university was as outmoded as the papal states. But the unkindest cut, which was also the most revealing of changing attitudes, came from two

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Catholic professors at Fordham (one a layman, the other a priest) who said that urging people to take up an “intellectual apostolate” — a staple of earlier “self-criticism” — was tantamount to recruiting “holy panderer(s) for the Catholic Church.”<sup>11</sup>

## **A Crisis of Confidence**

Catholic intellectuals — and therefore Catholic institutions of higher education as well — were obviously undergoing a severe crisis of confidence. A generation earlier, this would have been called a “failure of nerve”; by the mid-sixties, people spoke instead of “identity crises.” At Notre Dame (to which I went as a graduate student in 1953, joining the faculty six years later) the identity problem did not emerge directly from the uproar over academic freedom, although we did stage the first scholarly symposium on the subject ever held at a Catholic institution.<sup>12</sup> Notre Dame’s awakening to the academic identity problem as such was a by-product of the more general identity problem that overtook American Catholicism after Vatican II. And that, in turn, took place against the background of the national crisis of confidence caused by racial violence, antiwar protests, and campus disturbances. Adding to the social and political turmoil were unsettling shifts on the cultural front, most notably the drug-saturated “counter-culture” and the women’s liberation movement.

The religious identity of Catholic colleges and universities thus emerged as an explicitly recognized *problem* when three powerful forces came together in the mid-1960s. The first of these was the social and educational assimilation of American Catholics that had been building up since World War II. Besides making them think and feel more like their non-Catholic neighbors, this progressive acculturation had been accompanied by self-criticism that made Catholic academics positively ashamed of the past and determined to break out of its mold.

How long it would have taken for these internal pressures to bring the Catholic identity issue to explicit formulation is a moot question, for the other two forces — Vatican II and the national cultural crisis of the sixties — intervened. In combination they

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popped the cork on the pent-up internal forces and multiplied the shattering effect of the resulting explosion. Their influence was especially marked in reinforcing and generalizing the tendency to *reject the past* that was already present as an element of the situation created by the internal pressures. *Change* was the talismanic word in those days. The past, as I heard the president of a Catholic women's college say, was irrelevant because the future would be entirely different!

Obviously this was not the only reaction to the Council and the domestic upheaval, but it was of crucial importance for our topic. Why? Because the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges and universities was an inheritance of the past, and in the postconciliar climate that made it an *ipso facto* candidate for change. How could it remain a taken-for-granted assumption — an unself-consciously held and therefore unexamined given — when everything else in Catholic belief and practice was being scrutinized, challenged to justify itself, reinterpreted, modified, or even rejected? That their religious identity would now become an explicit problem was made even more inevitable by the fact that the colleges had been subjected to so much preconconciliar criticism for weaknesses said to flow from clericalism, authoritarianism, and other characteristics associated with their being Catholic.

The emergence of the problem did not, of course, mean that those who discussed it — even those highly critical of the past — wanted Catholic colleges and universities to reject or abandon their religious identity. Outright secularization was an extreme option recommended by very few and followed by even fewer. The great majority of Catholic educators wanted their schools to remain Catholic. At the same time, however, they realized that “being Catholic” in the future could not be exactly what it had been in the past. For two reasons: because the self-understanding of the Church as a whole had been transformed by the Council, and because on-going changes in Catholic higher education itself had reached a tipping point that required some fundamental readjustments.

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## The Catholic Identity Problem

Thus the Catholic identity problem was (and is) precisely that — a problem. It is a problem because, though Catholic identity is prized as something to be cherished, nurtured, and preserved, neither its substantive content nor the means to be employed in maintaining it are anything like as clear as they were in the preconciliar era. For we must remember that it was the clarity of Catholic religious beliefs in the 1940s — and the conviction that the Church would “never change her teaching” — that made the Catholic identity of Catholic colleges a taken-for-granted given. After Vatican II, when the Church’s teaching had undeniably been changed, Catholic belief was not nearly so clear as it had been. How then could Catholic educators continue to take for granted what was no longer there as a given?

If the problem “surfaced” (as people used to say in the sixties) roughly three decades ago, how has it developed since then? That is too obvious a question to ignore, but too big a one to try to answer. Let me conclude with a few informal comments based mainly on what has happened at Notre Dame.

First, it is striking how much attention the subject has received. Thus when the new lay board of trustees took over its duties in 1967, the revised by-laws of the university included an explicit commitment to maintain Notre Dame’s Catholic character and that commitment has remained an active concern of the board ever since. Each of the three major university self-studies since the early 1970s has also placed preserving Notre Dame’s religious identity first among institutional priorities. And the issue has been discussed in many other campus forums over the years.

The prominence of the issue flows naturally from the shift from its being something that could be taken for granted to something that needs to be self-consciously articulated. Hence the discussion seems to me not only appropriate, but vitally necessary. Even the disagreement that the discussion causes, potentially

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damaging to the internal harmony of the university community though it be, at least shows that the matter is being taken seriously.

The disagreement itself flows from the two sources mentioned above: the transformation of the Church's self-understanding wrought by Vatican II and subsequent developments; and on-going changes internal to Catholic colleges and universities. Illustrative of the first are differences between conservative and liberal Catholics over issues like academic freedom, theological dissent, the role of the magisterium, the relation of colleges and universities (especially the latter) to ecclesiastical authority, and the degree to which "education for justice" can serve as the core element in an institution's Catholic identity.

### **Faculty Changes**

Among on-going internal developments bearing on the Catholic identity issue the most important, in my opinion, are changes in the composition of the faculties of Catholic colleges and universities. Thirty years ago, Donovan drew attention to changes in outlook and orientation accompanying the growth of the lay faculties whose younger members were mainly recruited from leading "secular" graduate schools. The shifts he sketched have become more noticeable in recent years. Priests and religious have virtually disappeared as a numerically significant factor on many faculties, and no longer dominate the ranks of academic administrators as they used to.

Even more significant, however, is the operation of a generational transition that has all but completely displaced faculty members (lay and religious) whose outlook was formed when the earlier mentality held sway. Not all of the older generation were equally articulate about or committed to maintaining the religious character of their institutions, but it is a fair generalization that a good many more of them were so disposed than is the case with the generation that has replaced them. In addition, many of these younger faculty members consider it unprofessional — indeed,

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highly improper — to take a candidate's religion into account as a consideration in hiring. As a Jesuit writer has observed, by 1970 it had become "declassé" to show any interest in that dimension of a candidate's background.<sup>13</sup>

The growth of this kind of feeling among faculty members, along with the disagreements already mentioned about what "Catholic identity" entails in substantive terms, adds up to a serious problem indeed. And its seriousness is heightened by the fact that over-reaction to it; especially on the part of ecclesiastical authorities who feel an understandable concern for the future of Catholic colleges and universities, could easily make matters worse instead of better. Continued discussion is of course necessary for, as I have already said, what can no longer be taken for granted has to be raised to a new level of self-consciousness and articulated in more explicit terms.

It will not be easy for all parties to that discussion to combine the requisite degree of clarity and frankness with the equally essential qualities of moderation and — perhaps most important of all — respect for the good will of the opposition. For despite the depth of feeling involved, the suspicions aroused, and the polemics that too often accompany exchanges on the subject, there is, I believe, a great reservoir of good will still shared by all the parties to the discussion. Being a historian, I would like to think that the reservoir of good will is fed, at least in part, by the realization that what is at stake is the continuity of a tradition venerable in age, rich in humane associations, and honorable in its achievements, which it is our obligation to hand on in the form best suited to future needs.

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## NOTES

1. Dana C. Munro, *The Kingdom of the Crusaders* (New York, 1936), 174.
2. For more detail on what follows, see my chapter, "American Catholic Higher Education, 1940-1990: The Ideological Dimension," in George M. Marsden and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York, 1992), 234-58.
3. Thomas LeDuc, *Piety and Intellect at Amherst College, 1865-1912* (New York, 1946), vii.
4. Norval D. Glenn and Ruth Hyland, "Religious Preference and Worldly Success: Some Evidence from National Surveys," *American Sociological Review* 32 (February 1967), 73-85.
5. John Tracy Ellis, "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life," *Thought* 30 (Autumn 1955), 351-88.
6. Ellis, "American Catholics and Intellectual Life," 386-88.
7. Thomas F. O'Dea, *American Catholic Dilemma* (New York, 1958), chap. 7; Daniel Callahan, *The Mind of the Catholic Layman* (New York, 1963), 98.
8. For more on this shift see Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith* (Notre Dame IN, 1987), 67-70; and the articles in the Fiftieth Anniversary issue of *Sociological Analysis* (vol. 50, no. 4, 1989).
9. John D. Donovan, *The Academic Man in the Catholic College* (New York, 1964), 193. The study on which this book was based was the last one commissioned by the Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs as a follow-up to Ellis' critique.

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10. Donovan, *Academic Man*, 195.
  11. John Cogley, "The Future of an Illusion," *Commonweal* 86 (June 2, 1967), 310-16; Edward Wakin and Joseph F. Scheuer, *The De-Romanization of the American Catholic Church* (New York, 1966), 261.
  12. See Edward Manier and John W. Houck, eds., *Academic Freedom in the Catholic University* (Notre Dame IN, 1967).
  13. Joseph A. Tetlow, S.J., "The Jesuits' Mission in Higher Education: Perspectives and Contexts," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 15-16 (November 1983-January 1984), 33.

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Each year the University of Dayton presents the Marianist Award to a Roman Catholic distinguished for achievement in scholarship and the intellectual life.

Established in 1950, the award was originally presented to individuals who made outstanding contributions to Mariology. In 1967, the concept for the award was broadened to honor those people who had made outstanding contributions to humanity. The award, as currently given, was reactivated in 1986.

The Marianist Award is named for the founding religious order of the University of Dayton, the Society of Mary (Marianists). The award carries with it a stipend of \$5,000.

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