

**2010 PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL DINNER
THE THOMAS MORE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
MERRIMACK, NEW HAMPSHIRE
DECEMBER 4, 2010**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

President William Edmund Fahey, Members of the Faculty and Student Body, Members of the President's Council, and benefactors and friends of Thomas More College of Liberal Arts:

Introduction

It is a distinct pleasure for me to address you as you gather to support the work of Catholic higher education as it is being carried out so faithfully and well at The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts. I am happy to make some small contribution to your noble and critical efforts to promote authentic Catholic higher education in our nation.

In addressing you on what is surely a joyous occasion for The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts, even as it is also an occasion of strong commitment and sacrifice for the sake of the future of the College, I offer you some reflections on the nature and ends of Catholic higher education from the Magisterium of the Venerable Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, which, I trust, will both be a confirmation of the steadfast work of the administration, faculty, staff, and student body of the College, in order that she be true to her Catholic identity, and an inspiration to continue to put your hand to plow, not looking backward but going forward in your mission for the sake of the Church and society, in general.¹

The Importance of the Catholic University to Society and the Church

My first reflection concerns the importance of the Catholic university to society and the Church. The Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council underlines the importance which the Church has consistently assigned to Catholic higher education, in order that “the convergence of faith and reason in the

¹ Cf. *Lk* 9:62.

one truth may be seen more clearly.”² It is sufficient to consider the challenges of a lifetime as a member of the Church and a citizen of the nation, and the many and significant fields of human endeavor for which the university student prepares himself to know the importance of his receiving a complete education, that is, an education in which the convergence of faith and reason in the pursuit of the one truth is consistently taught and exemplified. Pope Benedict XVI gives clear expression to the irreplaceable service of Catholic higher education for the attainment of the necessary unity of faith and reason. In his meeting with Catholic Educators at The Catholic University of America, on April 17, 2008, addressing the fundamental Catholic identity of the Catholic university, he reminded the educators:

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).³

In a particular way, the Catholic university which is true to her identity will help students to be strong in giving an account of their faith in their vocation in life, whether it be the married life, the dedicated single life, the consecrated life or the ordained priesthood, and in whatever field of human endeavor they engage, resisting the secularist dictatorship which would exclude all religious discourse from the professions and from public life in general.

Quoting the Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman, the Venerable Pope John Paul II underlined the importance of the service of the Catholic university to the Church and society, in general, in his Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* with these words:

It is the honour and responsibility of a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve to *the cause of truth*. This is its way of serving at one and the

² Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Declaration on Catholic Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October 1965, no. 10.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Pope Benedict in America*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008, p. 74.

same time both the dignity of man and the good of the Church, which has “an intimate conviction that the truth is (its) real ally ... and that knowledge and reason are sure ministers to faith”. Without in any way neglecting the acquisition of useful knowledge, a Catholic University is distinguished by its free search for the whole truth about nature, man and God. The present age is in urgent need of this kind of disinterested service, namely of *proclaiming the meaning of truth*, that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished.⁴

The fact that the Catholic university had its birth from “the heart of the Church,” to quote the beginning of the same Apostolic Constitution, demonstrates the importance in which the Church has always held higher education.⁵ During various periods of the Church’s history, the service of the Catholic university has been critical to meeting the challenges of the time. In a society which is marked by a virulent secularism which threatens the integrity of every aspect of human endeavor and service, for example, medicine, law, government and higher education itself, the service of the Catholic university is more needed than ever. How tragic that the very secularism which the Catholic university should be helping its students to battle and overcome has entered into several Catholic universities, leading to the grievous compromise of their high mission.

The Harmony of Faith and Reason at the Catholic University

At the Catholic university, the student will be led to overcome the prevalent and utterly destructive error of our time that somehow faith is contradicted by reason. This error has hindered and even prevented the essential and irreplaceable contribution of the Church to the life of society, in general, that is, to the pursuit of the common good. It is only through the meeting of faith and reason that the deepest truth of the various areas of study can be uncovered. In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Venerable Pope John Paul II declared:

It is in the context of the impartial search for truth that the relationship between faith and reason is brought to light and meaning. The invitation of Saint Augustine, “*Intellege ut credas; crede ut intellegas*”, is relevant to Catholic Universities that are called to explore courageously the riches of Revelation and

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, “On Catholic Universities,” 15 August 1990, no. 4.

⁵ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 1.

of nature so that the united endeavour of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, renewed even more marvelously, after sin, in Christ, and called to shine forth in the light of the Spirit.⁶

At the Catholic university, students should be equipped, through their study and research, to address the truth of the Decalogue and of the Golden Rule to their own personal lives and to the life of the society in which they live. At the Catholic university, the very manner of study and research should manifest the bankruptcy of the abuse of human life and human sexuality, which has come to be standard on many university campuses, and the bankruptcy of the violation of the inviolable dignity of human life, of the integrity of marriage, and of the right order of our relationship to one another and to the world, in general, which is the trademark of our culture, a culture of violence and death.

Pope Benedict XVI provided a somewhat lengthy reflection on the communication of faith with reason at the Catholic university in his meeting with Catholic educators during his pastoral visit to our nation in April of 2008. In particular, he commented on how the mission of the Catholic university responds to the highest aspiration of a nation, namely, “to develop a society truly worthy of the human person’s dignity.”⁷ Noting the division which secular society creates between truth and faith, he underlined the importance of the study of metaphysics which uncovers the nature of truth which, in turn, necessarily forms us in the pursuit of the moral good.⁸

The Holy Father points out that “the truths of faith and reason never contradict one another.”⁹ He illustrates the irreplaceable service of the Church, of the Catholic faith, in man’s pursuit of truth, with these words:

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

⁶ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 5.

⁷ *Pope Benedict in America*, p. 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

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.¹⁰

One thinks, for example, of the cold and calculated advance of the experimentation on human embryos for the sake of supposed cures in our nation to see the critical need of the education in metaphysics and the doctrines of the faith at the Catholic university.

A Place To Encounter Jesus Christ

The first and chief teacher at every institution of Catholic higher education is Our Lord Jesus Christ Who is the fullness of the revelation of God to us. A Catholic college or university, at which Jesus Christ alive in His Church is not taught, encountered in the Sacred Liturgy and its extension through prayer and devotion, and followed in a life of virtue is not worthy of the name. Pope Benedict XVI, in his meeting with Catholic educators, on April 17, 2008 declared:

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.¹¹

The presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ on the campus of the Catholic college and university is not something additional to or even extraneous to the pursuit of truth. It is, rather, He alone, Who inspires, guides and disciplines professors and students, so that they remain faithful in the pursuit

¹⁰ *Pope Benedict in America*, p. 75.

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Pope Benedict in America*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008, pp. 70-71.

and do not fall prey to the temptations which Satan cleverly offers to corrupt us whenever we set out to attain a great good.

According to the ancient canonical wisdom, *corruptio optimi pessima est*, “the corruption of the best is the worst.” Sadly, we have witnessed the truth of the axiom in so many Catholic colleges and universities in our nation, which once gave pride of place to their Catholic identity and the Catholic life of the campus but now are Catholic in name only, usually qualifying their Catholic identity by another name, for example, calling themselves a Catholic university in the Franciscan or Jesuit tradition. What the tradition, with a small “t”, means, in practice can have little, if anything, to do with Tradition, with a capital “T”. The word, “Catholic,” in the name of a university has its full qualification, that is, it accepts no modifiers.

In his Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Venerable Pope John Paul II describes the Catholic identity of the Catholic university, using the words of the Final Document of the 1972 Congress of Delegates of Catholic Universities. Having noted the four characteristics of the Catholic university, he concludes:

In the light of these four characteristics, it is evident that besides the teaching, research and services common to all Universities, a Catholic University, *by institutional commitment*, brings to its task the inspiration and light of the *Christian message*. In a Catholic University, therefore, Catholic ideals, attitudes and principles penetrate and inform university activities in accordance with the proper nature and autonomy of these activities. In a word, being both a University and Catholic, it must be both a community of scholars representing various branches of human knowledge, and an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and operative.¹²

In his ad limina address to the United States Bishops of New York State on October 15, 1988, the Venerable Pope John Paul II made it clear that the critical service of the many Catholic universities in our nation depends upon the strength of their Catholic identity. He told the Bishops:

Catholic institutions of higher learning, which educate a large number of young people in the United States of America, have a great importance for the future of

¹² Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, “On Catholic Universities,” 15 August 1990, n. 14.

society and of the Church in your country. But the degree of their influence depends entirely on preserving *their Catholic identity*. This Catholic identity has to be present in the fundamental direction given to both teaching and studies. And it must be present in the life of these institutions which are characterized by a special bond with the Church – a bond that springs from their institutional connection with the Catholic message. The adjective “Catholic” must always be the real expression of a profound reality.¹³

Identifying a university as Catholic means identifying every aspect of the university's life as Catholic.

Earlier, during his visit to our nation in September of 1987, the Venerable Pope John Paul II reminded leaders of institutions of Catholic higher education of their greatest challenge. He observed:

The challenges that confront you are just as testing as those your forefathers faced in establishing the network of institutions over which you now preside. Undoubtedly, the greatest challenge is, and will remain, that of *preserving and strengthening the Catholic character of your colleges and universities* – that institutional commitment to the word of God as proclaimed by the Catholic Church. This commitment is both an expression of spiritual consistency and a specific contribution to the cultural dialogue proper to American life. As you strive to make the presence of the Church in the world of modern culture more luminous, may you listen once again to Christ's prayer to his Father for his disciples: “*Consecrate them by means of truth – ‘Your word is truth’*”(Jn 17:17).¹⁴

Those who have struggled and continue to struggle to maintain and develop the Catholic identity of Thomas More College know the truth of Pope John Paul II's words. At the same time, they know the deep joy of imparting a truly Catholic higher education, through which students and professors grow in their love of Christ, and, thereby, of providing to society a service which only a truly Catholic institution of higher education can provide.

¹³ Pope John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks to the American Church: John Paul II's Homilies, Speeches, and Letters in the United States*, ed. The Cambridge Center for the Study of Faith and Culture, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992, p. 468.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

The Catholic university makes a lifelong contribution to the formation of the conscience of her students. Through authentically Catholic studies, the student grows ever more sensitive and attentive to the voice of God, which we call the conscience, by which he knows right from wrong, truth from falsehood, and beauty from ugliness.

It is the conscience, the voice of God, speaking to our souls, which is, in the words of the Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, “the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.”¹⁵ As such, the conscience is ever attuned to Christ Himself Who instructs and forms it through His Vicar, the Roman Pontiff, and the Bishops in communion with him. The Blessed Cardinal Newman observed that conscience “is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives.”¹⁶ In accord with the wisdom of Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas, our thoughts and actions should not be conformed to the voices of men who speak about human and passing things, no matter how persuasive or powerful they may be, but to the voice of God speaking to us, through our conscience, about the realities which pertain to our relationship with Him and are enduring.

The encounter with Jesus Christ, which takes a privileged form at the Catholic university, naturally requires the active engagement of the Bishop, the successor of the Apostles, in any Catholic university within his jurisdiction. The Catholic university, for its part, will seek the fullest possible communication with the Bishop. Regarding the relationship of the Bishop with the Catholic university, the Venerable Pope John Paul II, in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, observed:

Bishops have a particular responsibility to promote Catholic Universities, and especially to promote and assist in the preservation and strengthening of their Catholic identity, including the protection of their Catholic identity in relation to civil authorities. This will be achieved more effectively if close personal and pastoral relationships exist between University and Church authorities, characterized by mutual trust, close and consistent cooperation and continuing dialogue. Even when they do not enter directly into the internal governance of the

¹⁵ John Henry Cardinal Newman, “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk,” V, in *Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching II*, London: Longmans Green, 1885, p. 248. Quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1778.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

University, Bishops “should be seen not as external agents but as participants in the life of the Catholic University”.¹⁷

When one considers the noble mission of the Catholic university, it becomes clear that it can only be accomplished within the Church, within the living Body of Christ, in which the Bishop acts in the person of Christ, Head and Shepherd of the flock in every time and place.

How much the Bishop should be able to depend upon the Catholic university to be a partner with him in meeting the many challenges of the new evangelization, the teaching of the faith in its integrity, the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy as the action of Christ, uniting heaven to earth; and the giving of the sound discipline by which the order inherent in the life of the Church is safeguarded and promoted. The situation in which the Catholic university views the Bishop as a suspect or outright unwelcome partner in the mission of Catholic higher education, unless the Bishop is willing to betray the duties of his office as the chief teacher of the faith in the territory in which the Catholic university has its seat by endorsing the Catholic identity of the university without regard for the high demands of such an identity, is totally anomalous.

The Importance of Theology to the Catholic Identity of the Catholic University

The Catholic identity of the Catholic university is defined by the fullness of the revelation of God's love in His only-begotten Son Who became man in order that we might know and live the truth of that love. The study and research which takes place at the Catholic university finds its ultimate meaning in that revelation which is the source of all being. The conduct of study and research in the context of an ever deepening knowledge of Divine Revelation helps the teacher and the learner to grow in wonder before the mystery of God's immeasurable and unceasing love of man and to return love for love. In the earlier-referenced ad limina address to the U.S. Bishops of New York State, the Venerable Pope John Paul II reminded the Bishops of the stable and irreplaceable contribution which the study of theology makes to the safeguarding and promotion of the Catholic identity of the Catholic university. He observed:

What faith teaches is not the result of human investigation but comes from *divine revelation*. Faith has not been transmitted to the human mind as a philosophical invention to be perfected; rather, it has been entrusted to the Spouse of Christ as a divine deposit to be faithfully guarded and infallibly interpreted (see First Vatican

¹⁷ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 28.

Council: *Dei Filius*, ch. IV: DS 3020). In the area of strictly human knowledge, there is room not only for progress toward the truth but also, and not infrequently, for the rectification of substantial error. Revealed truth, however, has been entrusted to the Church once and for all. It has reached its completion in Christ. Hence the profound significance of the Pauline expression “*deposit*” of faith (see 1 Tm. 6:20). At the same time, this deposit allows for a further explanation and for a growing understanding as long as the Church is on earth.¹⁸

In this light, one understands the insistence on the importance of, at least, a chair, if not a faculty, of Catholic theology at every Catholic university.¹⁹

In *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Venerable Pope John Paul II set forth the importance of the teaching of Sacred Theology in the Catholic university. He wrote:

Theology plays a particularly important role in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogue between faith and reason. It serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning, not only by helping them to investigate how their discoveries will affect individuals and society but also by bringing a perspective and an orientation not contained within their own methodologies. In turn, interaction with these other disciplines enriches theology, offering it a better understanding of the world today, and making theological research more relevant to current needs. Because of its specific importance among the academic disciplines, every Catholic University should have a faculty, or at least a chair, of theology.²⁰

His insistence on the importance of a solid and profound teaching of Catholic theology at the Catholic university echoes the directive of the Fathers at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: “In Catholic universities in which there is no faculty of Sacred Theology there should be an institute or course of theology in which lectures may be given suited also to the needs of lay students.”²¹

Given the importance of the teaching of Sacred Theology at the Catholic university, whether it be through a faculty or chair or designated course of studies, special care should be

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

¹⁹ Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 28 October 1965, no. 10.

²⁰ *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 19.

²¹ *Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 10.

given to the curriculum and the hiring of professors prepared to lead students in the study of the Scriptures and the Tradition, especially the study of the Fathers of the Church and the approved theologians, above all, Saint Thomas Aquinas.

It should be kept in mind that many young Catholics are poorly catechized. It may, therefore, be advantageous to connect the study of the classic texts of Sacred Theology with the relevant parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Given the religious illiteracy which marks our time and in fidelity to the seriousness with which university studies should be undertaken, there is really no place for engaging in speculative theology and certainly no time to waste on superficial and tendentious theological writings of the time.

What sense does it make, for instance, to engage students in a discussion of the possibility of the admission of women to Holy Orders, when the students have little or no knowledge of the consistent teaching of the Holy Scriptures and Tradition on the Sacred Priesthood and on the reservation of priestly ordination to men. Special care must be exercised in the teaching of moral theology to correct the numerous and readily available articles and books which follow a proportionalist or consequentialist approach to moral questions, and to ground students in the Aristotelian-Thomistic ethics which, in turn, is grounded in a sound metaphysics.

Conclusion

There are many more aspects of the Catholic university, compellingly illustrated in the magisterium of both the Venerable Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, which time does not permit me to address. It is my hope that my little reflection on the fundamental aspects which I have been able to address will help us all to see more clearly the critical importance of the Catholic university and specifically of The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts to the Church and the world in our time. It is also my hope that it will inspire us all to a stronger engagement in the apostolate of Catholic higher education. Pope Benedict XVI, in addressing Catholic educators during his pastoral visit to our nation in April of 2008, emphasized the importance of the engagement of the entire community in the critical apostolate of Catholic education. Speaking of the heroic sacrifices made in the past to provide Catholic schools and universities in our nation, he observed:

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.²²

What Pope Benedict urges pertains not only to the support of Catholic elementary and secondary schools, but also to the support of truly Catholic colleges and universities. They are critical to the nurture of the soul of our nation.

Saint Thomas More, the patron saint of our college, steadfastly, in the face of imprisonment and execution, listened to the voice of God, rather than the voices of men who would have had him act according to a human way of thinking, alienated from the wisdom of God. At his trial on July 1, 1535, Saint Thomas More held firmly to the living Tradition of the Church, which forbade him, in conscience, to acknowledge King Henry VIII with the title of Supreme Head of the Church. When, during his trial, the Chancellor rebuked him, citing the acceptance of the title by so many bishops and nobles of the land, Thomas More replied: "My lord, for one bishop of your opinion I have a hundred saints of mine; and for one parliament of yours, and God knows of what kind, I have all the General Councils for 1,000 years,"²³ When the Duke of Norfolk accused him of malice in his response, Thomas More responded: "What I say is necessary for discharge of my conscience and satisfaction of my soul, and to this I call God to witness, the sole Searcher of human hearts."²⁴ Rightly, Thomas More declared on the scaffold before his execution: "I die the king's good servant, and God's first."²⁵ The Saint served his king well by obeying God Who revealed His truth to him through Thomas More's conscience, instructed and formed by the example of the saints of the Church and by her Magisterium.

Let us continue to pray and work so that our college under the patronage of Saint Thomas More will form its graduates to cultivate, throughout their lifetime, the divine wisdom and truth

²² *Pope Benedict in America*, p. 72.

²³ Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith, eds., *A Thomas More Source Book*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004, p. 354.

²⁴ *A Thomas More Source Book*, p. 354.

²⁵ *A Thomas More Source Book*, p. 357.

which they pursue through their studies, so that they place always first in their lives the truth and love, into which God leads them through their conscience, formed by the Magisterium of the Church, our Mother and Teacher. My reflection is offered to assist us all in seeking always the truth and love by which we serve others and our world well by serving God first.

Thank you. God bless you.

Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke
Archbishop Emeritus of Saint Louis
Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura