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## EX CORDE ECCLESIAE AND THE IDEA OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

*Eduardo J. Echeverria*

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Science and scholarship are not neutral with respect to [the] struggle for our souls. It is not as if the main areas of scholarship are neutral with respect to this struggle, with religious or spiritual disagreement rearing its ugly head only when it comes, say, to religion itself. The facts are very different: the world of scholarship is intimately involved in the battle between opposing views; contemporary scholarship is rife with projects, doctrines and research programs that reflect one or another of these ways of thinking. At present, the sad fact is that very many of these projects reflect . . . fundamentally non-Christian ways of thinking.<sup>1</sup>

The Christian who is a scholar finds himself in two communities: the community of his fellow Christians and the community of his fellow scholars. Each has its own criteria for membership, its own characteristic practices, its own characteristic beliefs, its own characteristic training programs. Without a doubt a person can simply live in the two different communities, doing as the Athenians do when in Athens and as the Jerusalemites when in Jerusalem. But if one who is a scholar as well as a Christian wants coherence in life or even if he only wants self-understanding he cannot help asking, how does my membership in these two communities fit together?<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

JOHN PAUL II'S 1990 APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION ON CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES, *EX CORDE Ecclesiae* (*ECE*), concerns, in the document's own words, "all Catholic Institutions of higher education engaged in instilling the Gospel message of Christ in souls and cultures" (#10).<sup>3</sup> This document is relevant to at least three major areas of reflection on Catholic higher education: (i) a theology of cultural engagement, (ii) an educational philosophy, and (iii) the idea and practice of Christian scholarship. Though I will briefly address the first two points, it is primarily the third on which I wish to focus. My thesis is that the implementation of the vision of *ECE* in Catholic institutions of higher education requires the appropriation of the idea and practice of Christian scholarship. Although having an orthodox Catholic theology department at such institutions is necessary, it is not sufficient for developing and maintaining Catholic

institutions of higher learning. In order to achieve that goal, an institutional commitment to the idea and practice of Christian scholarship is required.

This article is organized as follows. Section I deals with cultural engagement and educational philosophy. This is followed in Section II by a presentation of the idea of Christian scholarship as it is found in *ECE*. Section III



deals with George Marsden's defense of the idea of Christian scholarship. In Section IV, we examine the thesis of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff that the contemporary rejection of the idea of Christian scholarship is rooted in the acceptance of classical foundationalism. I follow in Section V with Alfred J. Freddoso's own account of the idea of Christian scholarship. His account is not only informed by *ECE* but is also a much fuller development of the idea and practice of Christian scholarship than that of Marsden.<sup>4</sup> In Section VI, I conclude with some comments on the philosophy of the curriculum by considering briefly three Catholic institutions of higher education, Franciscan University of Steubenville, Thomas Aquinas College, and Christendom College. I argue that the philosophy of the curriculum that informs these institutions best expresses the vision of Christian scholarship in *ECE*.

## I. CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

How should Christian educators and intellectuals speak and act with Christian integrity when engaging the culture of our times? In the background of *ECE* is the deeply biblical Augustinian motif of a spiritual battle being waged in world history between the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas Mundi* (cf. Ephesians 6:1 Off.). In the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, "A monumental struggle [of the Kingdom of God] against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man."<sup>5</sup> This spiritual battle not only involves our very souls, but also involves our culture. As a sphere of human existence, the culture is fallen and infected by sin. "Cultures, like the people who give rise to them," says John Paul, "are marked by the 'mystery of evil' at work in human history."<sup>6</sup> In his 1995 Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the Pope challenges us to recognize that entire worldviews are in conflict in contemporary culture. He describes this conflict as an "enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the 'culture of death' and the 'culture of life'."<sup>7</sup>

Yet the Catholic tradition has repeatedly (and consistently) affirmed at one and the same time culture's inherent goodness (cf. Philippians 4:8) as well as the



calling of Christians to engage in the sanctification of culture by transforming it through God's grace in Christ. As Christians, in short, we are called to the work of drawing all parts of culture and all dimensions of human existence to Christ, of making them share in the redemption He

accomplished, and in this way to be His agents for exercising His Lordship in creation (see *Lumen Gentium*, #30-38, 57-59; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*). Basic to this evangelical Catholic and reforming view of culture is the truth that the whole creation is recapitulated in Christ. As the Pontifical Council for Culture states, "[a] Christian cultural project ... gives Christ, the Redeemer of man, center of the universe and of history (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, #1), the scope of completely renewing the lives of men 'by opening the vast fields of culture to His saving power'."<sup>8</sup> In sum, the Council explains,

the primary objective of [this] approach to culture is to inject the lifeblood of the Gospel into cultures to renew from within and transform in the light of Revelation the visions of men and society that shape cultures, the concepts of men and women, of the family and of education, of school and of university, of freedom and of truth, of labor and of leisure, of the economy and of society, of the sciences and of the arts.<sup>9</sup>

Key concepts like discernment stand out in *ECE*'s view of cultural engagement. Discernment is central to a vision of engaging culture for Catholic institutions of higher learning. As to engaging the culture, the Pontifical Council for Culture writes, "cultures share also in sin and, by this very fact, require the necessary discernment of Christians." This "implies," the Council adds, "rejecting everything that is a source of sin and fruit of sin in the heart of cultures."<sup>10</sup> The aim of discernment is neither exclusively opposition to, nor exclusively synthesis or harmonization with, the culture. Rather, the aim of discernment is truth: seek to hold and preserve true beliefs and avoid forming and preserving false ones (see 1 Thessalonians 5:21). Discernment requires communication and openness combined with critical judgment on behalf of truth, not simply for the sake of winning arguments, or promoting and vindicating oneself, but rather with the ultimate aim of evangelical transformation that,

at its core, is concerned to develop culture in such a way as to reveal Christ as its real fulfillment (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, #45, 58; cf. also, *Fides et Ratio*, #34, 71). Midway through, *ECE* refers to this specific priority in the mission of a Catholic institution of higher education:

[T]o examine and evaluate the predominant values and norms of modern society and culture in a Christian perspective, and the responsibility to try to communicate to society those ethical and religious principles which give full meaning to human life. In this way a [Catholic institution of higher education] can contribute further to the development of a true Christian anthropology, founded on the person [and work] of Christ, which will bring the dynamism of the creation and redemption to bear on reality and on the correct solution to the problems of life (#33).

Catholic institutions of higher education are communities of faith, learning and scholarship that should be committed to two goals: first, an intellectual fidelity to the Catholic faith and, second, intellectual excellence in accord with the autonomous ends of academic disciplines, their methods, and standards of excellence.<sup>11</sup> The common presupposition at Catholic colleges and universities should be that these two goals are fully consistent with each other. In other words, Catholic institutions of higher education should strive to embody institutionally, as centers of learning and research, both intellectual fidelity to the Catholic faith and excellence in intellectual inquiry. As such, then, the educational philosophy of such institutions should countenance no separation of the intellectual life from the life of faith, rigidly dividing faith from reason. Adopting such a segregated educational scheme would effectively produce two realms, one associated with academic life-learning and scholarship, and the other with faith religion and spirituality. The former would be neutral with respect to Christian faith, thought and practice, and the latter would be confined to extracurricular matters, prayer and liturgy, works of charity, and so forth. But a Catholic institution of higher education must reject a wall of separation between faith and learning, the life of faith and the life of the mind.

As leading Catholic scholar David Schindler has written,

Catholic universities may have theology departments that are faithful to the teachings of the Church, dormitory life that is a model of morality, campus chapels that are full of prayerful worshi-

pers and community organizations that energetically serve the most vulnerable and most afflicted in our society. But the point is that none of them yet informs us what specifies a Catholic institution as a university.<sup>12</sup>



Of course these things are necessary conditions for a college or university to be Catholic. But Schindler and others rightly insist that these conditions are not sufficient for their being Catholic. In order to be a Catholic institution of higher learning, Schindler adds, “it is necessary (also) to develop a Catholic mind.” In particular, this means working out the explicit implications of the Catholic faith in the classrooms and laboratories, studios and stages of these institutions. It stands to reason that since the formation of the life of the mind and imagination is their main concern, an institution where the Catholic faith has no internal influence on what goes on in these areas could not be authentically Catholic.<sup>13</sup> In short, Catholic institutions of higher education must develop a Catholic mind. Such institutions, says John Paul II, are called to explore courageously the riches of revelation and of nature so that the united endeavor of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, [and which has been] renewed even more marvelously, after sin, in Christ. (#5)

In this light, we can easily understand why *ECE* reaffirms the magnificent teaching of the Second Vatican Council (see *Gravissimum Educationis*, #10) that spoke of the great mission of Catholic higher education. It was to be the achievement of a Christian mind, which is a public, persistent, and universal presence in culture of the Gospel (#9). Catholic institutions of higher education, *ECE* adds, “are ... a lively and promising sign of the fecundity of the Christian mind in the heart of every culture. They give ... a well-founded hope for a new flowering of Christian culture in the rich and varied context of our challenging times” (#2). To achieve this end, Catholic students should not only be outstanding in learning, having developed new powers of seeing and understanding, but they should also be prepared “to undertake the more responsible duties of society, and to be witnesses in the world to the true faith” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, # 10).

[For] the good news of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man; it combats and removes the error and evil which flows from the ever-present attraction of sin ... it causes [man's life and culture] to blossom, as it were from within; it fortifies, completes and restores them in Christ. Thus by the very fulfillment of her own mission the Church stimulates and advances human and civic culture.<sup>14</sup>

## II. *EX CORDE ECCLESIAE* AND THE IDEA OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Science and scholarship are not neutral with respect to the struggle for men's souls and, with it, culture. As Notre Dame philosopher Alvin Plantinga rightly notes:

It isn't as if there is a large neutral area of scholarship where we all agree, with disagreement rearing its ugly head only when it comes to religion and politics, perhaps. The facts are very different: the world of scholarship is intimately involved in the battle between these opposing views; contemporary scholarship is rife with projects, doctrines, and research programs that reflect these non-Christian ways of thinking. (see Note 1)

*ECE* is in hearty agreement with this basic point. Because of this struggle, then, and also because a Catholic philosophy of higher learning rejects a wall of intellectual separation between faith and learning, the life of faith and the life of the mind, Christian scholars are called to engage in the ongoing project of bringing the resources of Christian truth to bear on philosophy, science, the humanistic disciplines, and not merely theology or religious studies. In other words, the Christian faith should be brought to bear internally on all academic disciplines. As *ECE* says, a Catholic institution of higher learning must engage in "a continuing reflection in the light of the Catholic faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which it seeks to contribute by its own research" (#12). This project of integration has four aspects.

(1) First, one must search for an integration of knowledge. At its core, integration is not just about accumulating truths, learning one fact after another, but rather should attempt to show that the truths of revelation and the deliverances of reason are mutually illuminating.

(2) Second, one must engage in an ongoing dialogue be-

tween faith and reason "so that it can be seen more profoundly how faith and reason bear harmonious witness to the unity of all truth" in the totality of all that is, with the purpose of contributing "to a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of human life and of the purpose of God's creation" (*ECE* #17).

(3) Third, one needs to examine the ethical implications of all scholarship, particularly in the areas of science and technology, as they bear upon the dignity of the human person and the development of a culture.

It is essential that we be convinced of the priority of the ethical over the technical, of the person over things, of the superiority of the spirit over matter. The cause of the human person will only be served if knowledge is joined to [a properly formed] conscience. Men and women of science will truly aid humanity only if they preserve "the sense of the transcendence of the human person over the world and of God over the human person" (*ECE*, #18).

(4) Finally, in a community of faith, learning and scholarship there must be an integrating worldview, a coherent and comprehensive vision of life that informs the search for an integration of knowledge and the dialogue between faith and reason. Christian theology and Christian philosophy play a central role in the formulation of this worldview because, in the words of Nicholas Wolterstorff, "it is in these two disciplines that the Christian scholar engages in systematic self-examination."<sup>15</sup>

An integrating worldview serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning by locating them within the context of a vision that is enlightened by, and rooted in, Gospel truths, and therefore by faith in Jesus Christ, the center of creation, human history, and all of reality, "in whom," St. Paul proclaims, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3). This point is well made with this magnificent sentence from *Fides et Ratio*: "What is revealed in Christ is the 'full truth' (cf. John 1:14-16) of everything which was created in Him and through Him and which therefore in Him finds its fulfillment (cf. Colossians 1:17)" (# 34). In sum, I understand *ECE* to be declaring that the idea and practice of Christian scholarship is complex. Of course, it involves receiving thankfully, as part of God's common grace to all humanity, what is true, good and beautiful in scholarship generally.

Chiefly, though, the Christian scholar seeks to engage the world of scholarship in a critical, creative and faithful manner.<sup>16</sup> Yes, he acknowledges the true insights of reputable scholarship, but he is also critical, meaning thereby that he should also reject what is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Being creative means that the Christian scholar does his best to go beyond merely rejecting whatever contradicts his beliefs—he engages in reconstructing, renewing, reforming, and rethinking in light of this Gospel. Finally, being faithful means seeking to illuminate the realms of all human knowledge with the light of faith.

Indeed, “Reflection and research on human knowledge in light of the Catholic faith” (*ECE*, #13) is one of the four distinctive characteristics that is essential for Catholic identity: The assumption behind this point is that rational inquiry itself can be enlightened by faith. This assumption raises the question as to why reason should be open to such enlightenment. Why should reason itself be evangelized?<sup>17</sup> It should be evangelized because of the noetic effects of sin. Reason itself is subject to the influences of sin; it is wounded by sin, by our fallen nature. The grace of redemption must heal this disorder. In short, cognitive renewal is needed.<sup>18</sup> In the words of Venerable John Henry Newman,

You must be born again, is the simple direct form of words which [the Church] uses after her Divine Master; your whole nature must be reborn, your passions, and your affections, and your aims, and your conscience, and your will, must all be bathed in a new element, and reconsecrated to your maker, and, the last not the least, your intellect.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, being faithful means that Christian scholars are committed to the vision that our intellectual endeavors are dynamically ordered to their end in Christ. They should be brought within the bounds of faith, because, as the Apostle Paul says in II Corinthians 10:5: “We bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

### III. THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Twice now I have spent my summers (1999,

2002) at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as a member of a faculty seminar in Christian scholarship. Four such seminars on a variety of subjects (philosophical, theological, historical, and cultural) are offered each summer. The specific aim of the seminar program is “to promote high quality scholarship that reflects a Christian perspective by encouraging Christian scholars to pursue current research topics in their disciplines.”<sup>20</sup> Chiefly, the general purpose of the program is the formation of a Christian mind. But what is that a Christian mind? Isn’t a developed mind all that one should seek, and mustn’t colleges and universities assist that intellectual formation by remaining *neutral* with respect to competing worldviews like the Christian faith? Being Christian makes no substantial difference to the formation of the mind isn’t that right? And of course, the project of reflecting on the intellectual implications of the belief-content of Christian faith for learning and scholarship is at best theological and at worst parochial, sectarian, and divisive. “Christian

scholarship” is actually an oxymoron because intellectual fidelity to the Christian faith and excellence in intellectual inquiry are two goals opposed to each—surely you agree?

It is precisely this putative contradiction between intellectual fidelity and intellectual excellence that is rejected as a fiction by confessional Protestantism in the Augustinian (and more recent Reformed) tradition as well as by confessional Catholicism with its own

roots in the Augustinian and Thomist traditions. Just a few illustrious scholars in this century from these distinguished traditions of Christian scholarship include Herman Dooyeweerd, Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, William Alston, and Ralph McInerny. Recently, it is largely the confessional Protestant representatives of this rich tradition of ecumenically diverse but authentically Christian scholars who have brought the very idea of Christian scholarship into mainstream intellectual life.

Notre Dame historian and Reformed Protestant Christian George Marsden has recently defended the intellectual legitimacy of the idea of Christian scholarship in the contemporary academic culture. This idea is the scholarly project of bringing the resources of Christian truth to bear on philosophy, science, and the humanistic disciplines, and not merely on theology or religious

  
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studies. As Marsden puts it, “Scholars who have religious faith should be reflecting on the intellectual implications of that faith and bringing those reflections into the mainstream of intellectual life.”<sup>21</sup> What exactly does it mean to reflect on the implications of faith for learning and scholarship? In addition, why does such reflection need defending in the dominant academic culture?

In answering the first question, Marsden singles out the epistemological role of those beliefs that he, following Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, calls “control beliefs” (*ICS*, 50).<sup>22</sup> Says Marsden,

Such beliefs, even if not directly expressed, act as significant controls on what other beliefs and theories we are willing to entertain ... What do we see as important to study? What is it about that subject which makes it interesting? What are the questions we ask that will organize our interpretations of this topic? What theories do we entertain as relevant to our interpretations? What theories do we rule out? (*ICS*, 50, 63)

In other words, Marsden suggests that the Christian scholar’s religious beliefs should function as control beliefs within his devising and weighing of theories. We may be led both to reject certain sorts of theories as well as to devise theories in light of our control beliefs.

In regard to the second question, such reflection needs defending because the dominant academic culture with its modernist account of intellectual inquiry has dismissed reflection on the intellectual implications of faith. But why such a dismissal? Marsden gives both historical and epistemological arguments as reasons for this dismissal. As to the former, he has a complex historical argument tracing the history of Church-related higher education in America, especially America’s most influential universities Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Michigan, Johns Hopkins, and Chicago.<sup>23</sup> Culturally established Protestant Christianity controlled higher education but eventually gave way to its disestablishment in order to avoid being parochial, sectarian, and divisive. Furthermore, disestablishment of any explicitly religious viewpoint was called for in order to deal more fairly with a pluralist religious environment.

Yet Marsden argues persuasively that in place of religious disestablishment has come the “virtual establishment of nonbelief” (*ICS*, 23), that is, the new orthodoxy of secularism with its underpinnings in philoso-

phical naturalism. In other words, Marsden disputes the assumption that intellectual inquiry, when it is not influenced by Christian beliefs, is influenced by nothing at all. That is, religious disestablishment did not simply leave an ideal inquirer *qua* inquirer who is an autonomous rational individual unencumbered by political, cultural, historical, or religious presuppositions, who is moved always and only by the evidence of reason available to all. On this view, intellectual inquiry must proceed from principles evident to pure reason alone.

Marsden wastes no time in showing that this view is not at all neutral this is scholarly inquiry based on naturalistic presuppositions. Naturalism, which is the view that there is no God, that nature is all there is, and that man should be understood as a part of nature, as a mere chance product of matter-in-motion, is one of the dominant worldviews of contemporary academic culture. In connection with naturalism is the related epistemic notion that science really tells us all that there is to know about all that there is. We can understand, given this view, why scholarly inquiry is thought to presuppose

that the norm for people to be fully accepted in academic culture is to act as though their religious beliefs had nothing to do with education. Scholars are expected to analyze subjects such as the nature of reality, beauty, truth, morality, the just society, the individual, and the community as though deeply held religious beliefs had no relevance to such topics. (*ICS*, 23-24)

Thus, the separation of faith and intellectual inquiry, indeed their opposition to one another, is almost always taken for granted in our contemporary academic culture.

But why isn’t the contemporary academy open to explicit discussion of the relation of religious faith to learning, of the efforts to unite knowledge and piety? It includes as legitimate points of view Marxist or feminist or African-American studies, so why not faith-informed scholarship? Shouldn’t faith-informed scholarship—Christian, Jewish, or Islamic-in principle have equal standing with other worldviews in the contemporary academy? And if not, why not? Contemporary academic culture asserts the values of inclusion, pluralism, and tolerance as primary. If so, then simple fairness undercuts the exclusion of Christian scholars from explicitly participating in this culture. Why, then, shouldn’t Christian academics reflect on the intellectual implications of the

Christian faith? Why should they “adopt a standardized stance of ‘neutrality’ with respect to the implications of beliefs such as that God exists, that God created the world, that God might reveal Himself to humans, or that God may have instituted a moral law” (*ICS*, 35)? Why indeed? This is pretended neutrality because the modernist account of intellectual inquiry conforms to the secularistic standards of a modern academic culture.

Marsden also offers an epistemological argument to show that the exclusively naturalistic assumption that regards “reality as the product of natural forces suitable to empirical investigation by common standards” is held to dogmatically by some scholars, “at least when the subject of religion is mentioned” (*ICS*, 28). Yet naturalism comes in two versions in contemporary academic culture: not only an objectivist naturalism that assumes the general empirical procedures used by science correspond to reason and truth, but also a relativistic or even nihilistic Creative anti-realism (to borrow a term from Alvin Plantinga) which denies the very existence of truth or objective reality. Truth and goodness, if not discarded, have been relativized to fit my viewpoint, your viewpoint, and so on. Neutral or value-free scholarship is rejected in this hard perspectivalism. Creative anti-realism, also described by Plantinga as Enlightenment Humanism or Enlightenment Subjectivism, “emphasize the creative activity of the human mind in imposing its categories, which are necessary to whatever we call ‘reality.’” This school of thought has its roots in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, but some contemporary expressions of Creative anti-realism “regard the human mind as essentially an adaptive mechanism which creates the ‘reality’ it finds useful for survival” (*ICS*, 30). Creative anti-realism is pervasive in various areas of the humanities, such as religious studies, literary studies, continental philosophy, and, in part, in history.



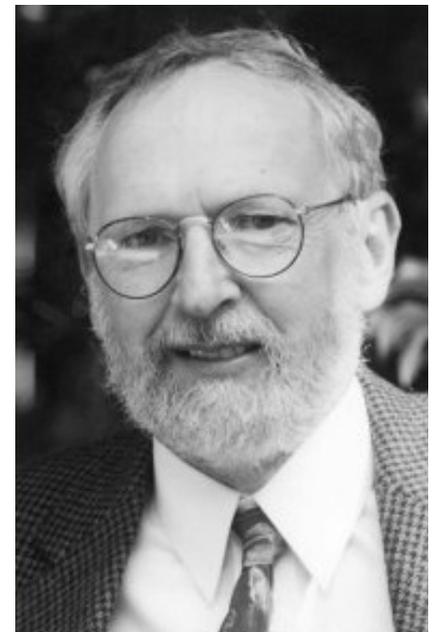
Marsden argues that the primary assumption of objectivist naturalism fails chiefly for four reasons. First, for all of the undeniable material advancement that science has brought, our contemporary scientific culture has failed “to unite people on the larger questions concerning society and human relationships.” Academic culture is as divided today, and perhaps even more divided, on

the larger questions of life as it was when culturally established Protestant Christianity controlled higher education.

Second, “the rule that academic beliefs must be empirically based is ... not applied consistently to other non-demonstrable beliefs that play prominent roles in the secular academy.” This is to commit the fallacy of the epistemic double standard.<sup>24</sup> Consider the generally accepted beliefs that all men have equal standing before the law regardless of race or gender, that it is wrong to kill infants, and that the poor and handicapped are especially deserving of our concern because of their inherent human dignity. These moral beliefs are rational, claims Marsden, but not the product of scientific argument and yet they are nonetheless not set aside because scholars do bring them to bear on their academic work. Says Marsden,

Scholars may indeed use empirical arguments to bolster their beliefs in these values, but ultimately these beliefs are held as inviolable, sacred truths and are not up for reconsideration. Such moral beliefs shape their scholarship in important ways, often determining what they choose to study and how they evaluate human relationships.

Marsden seems to be sketching a *parity argument*: if we dismiss the rationality of Christian beliefs on the basis of an empiricist model of scientific rationality, we would equally impugn the rationality of a large number of moral beliefs that are control beliefs for the contemporary academy. The upshot of Marsden’s critique of this epistemic double standard is that “there seems to be no consistent academic rule that all beliefs must be empirically grounded and hence that all religiously derived beliefs can be excluded on the grounds that they are ‘non-empirical...’” (*ICS*, 28).



*George M. Marsden*

Third, Marsden argues, the assumptions of

objective naturalism fail because religious beliefs cannot in fact be excluded from scholarly inquiry; they will inevitably shape some scholarship.

Finally, naturalism is not a scientific view; that is, it is not itself a conclusion of empirical investigation. Rather, it is a philosophical view about reality. Of course, given its dominance in contemporary university culture, says Marsden, “it is common for scholars to draw conclusions from their investigations that are actually based on the premise [of naturalism], rather than on the investigations themselves.” Many examples could be considered here to illustrate this point, but one will have to suffice. Psychologists like Freud provided us with plausible psychological accounts of the origins of religious belief. But it does not follow from this that religion is nothing but a psychological matter and hence can be fully explained by psychology. In Marsden’s own words,

A Christian or other religious scholar can concede, of course, that there are some observable psychological reasons why some people are more inclined to religious beliefs than others. Nevertheless, it does not follow that the naturalistic explanation is the whole explanation unless that is your premise. (*ICS*, 29)

Marsden does not reject objectivist naturalism in the name of relativism or hard perspectivalism, which is really a sort of “secular fideism;” neither does he argue for the legitimacy of Christian scholarship by invoking the philosophical defense known as the “tu quoque argument” (*ICS*, 45). That is, “(1) for certain logical reasons, rationality is so limited that everyone must make a dogmatic irrational commitment; (2) therefore, the Christian has the right to make whatever commitment he pleases; and (3) therefore, no one has a right to criticize him (or anyone else) for making such a commitment.”<sup>25</sup> This argument leads to a hard perspectivalism, which is the relativism of diverse starting points for intellectual inquiry, but also to the pointlessness of argument-mislogism as Catholic philosopher Alfred J. Freddoso has aptly named it—and to a skepticism or relativism about our cognitive powers as truth-oriented.

Marsden rightly observes that given this hard perspectivalism “the contemporary academy *on its own terms* has no consistent grounds for rejecting all religious perspectives” (*ICS*, 30). He explains: “If postmodernists who denounce scientific objectivism as an illusion are well accepted in the contemporary academy, there is

little justification for the same academy to continue to suppress religious perspectives because they are ‘unscientific’” (*ICS*, 30). Yet Christian scholars must reject both “relativistic postmodern anti-realist naturalism” as well as “objectivist naturalism” because they have confidence in the truth-attaining powers of reason, metaphysical truth included. Precisely this confidence is the backbone of Christian scholarship and the challenge to “contemporary university culture [that] is hollow at its core. Not only does it lack a spiritual center, but it is also without any real alternative” (*ICS*, 3). As Marsden writes:

Both these parties start with purely naturalistic assumptions and make these normative for good scholarship. Christians need to challenge these assumptions and to suggest that scholarship might just as responsibly take place within the framework of the assumptions that God has created an ordered reality. Far from being relativistic, this is a claim that our experience makes best sense if we realize that we are in a universe of truths sustained by God, even if humans can glimpse these truths only imperfectly, [albeit in a way that is true and certain]. (*ICS*, 30-31)

Marsden’s critique of contemporary academic culture is insightful. He successfully argues that the Christian is entitled to engage in scholarship as a Christian. Yet, it does not hit at the heart of the suppression of Christian scholarship in contemporary academic culture. Most to the point, Marsden never actually faces the question as to why the Christian scholar is epistemically justified in holding his convictions as the starting point for intellectual inquiry. Furthermore, except for a few sparse remarks about certain formal properties of intellectual excellence rules condoning intellectual detachment in order to weigh evidence fairly, clarity of thought and expression, constructing and presenting arguments for their own positions, representing the positions of others or their objections without tendentiousness, and intellectual honesty (*ICS*, 45-47)—Marsden does not raise the questions that a complete account of intellectual inquiry needs to address. Perhaps we could distinguish between *cautious* and *bold* accounts of Christian scholarship.<sup>26</sup> Marsden’s account is *cautious-faith-based* scholarship is fully compatible with a plausible account of intellectual excellence, fair discourse, and sound argument. Others like the philosopher-pope John Paul II in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* advance a bold account urging that Christian faith provides the *best* available general context for intellectual inquiry.<sup>27</sup>

I have three concerns in the remainder of this article: first, to consider the philosophical hypothesis advanced by Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga that the root cause of the suppression of Christian scholarship in general is the theory of theorizing known as *foundationalism*;<sup>28</sup> second, to consider briefly the bold account of intellectual inquiry advanced by Catholic scholar Alfred J. Freddoso, which is inspired by the philosopher-pope John Paul II, that “the Catholic intellectual tradition provides (a) the most adequate general account of the nature, ends, and methods of intellectual inquiry and (b) the best available solution to the serious conceptual problems that by general consensus afflict the contemporary university”<sup>29</sup> and third, I will argue that the philosophy of the curriculum developed at several Catholic institutions of higher education best expresses the vision of Christian scholarship found in *ECE*.

#### IV. FOUNDATIONALISM AND CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

In 1976, Wolterstorff wrote in his first edition of *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*,

the demise of foundationalism is important for the cause of Christian scholarship in general ...[and] its acceptance has repeatedly served to confuse and intimidate [Christians] in their theorizing. Only if the sting of foundationalism is plucked will the infection subside. (*RBR*, 34)

Before pursuing the main part of Wolterstorff’s claim that the cause of Christian scholarship is dependent on the demise of foundationalism, it would be useful to clarify his view of Christian scholarship and his understanding of foundationalism. As to the former, he writes:

The central thesis of [*RBR*]... is a normative one: The Christian scholar ought to allow the belief-content of his authentic commitment to function as control in his weighing of theories. By that I mean this: The Christian scholar ought to reject those theories which conflict or do not comport well with the belief-content of his authentic commitment; and he ought to search, in place of them, for theories which comport well with the belief-content of his authentic commitment. He ought to reject them *because* they are not compatible, or do not comport well with, the belief-content of his authentic commitment. (He may, of course, have other good reasons for rejecting some or

all of such theories.) I add that when a Christian scholar acts in accord with this obligation, it can appropriately be said that his faith is functioning *internally* to his theorizing. (*PR*, 179)

As to classic foundationalism, Wolterstorff says that it may be understood as a doctrine about justified belief, or knowledge, or both. The classic foundationalist holds that our beliefs are divided into those that need support from other beliefs and those that can support others and need no support themselves. Given this distinction, he further holds that self-supporting beliefs are *basic beliefs* (i.e., beliefs not inferred or reached as conclusions from other things believed), and such beliefs that are properly basic must be self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible reports of experience. Other beliefs are called *non-basic* beliefs and they are rational if and only if supported by properly basic beliefs. Against this background, we can consider Wolterstorff’s thesis on the connection between foundationalism and Christian scholarship. We have before us then his question, “Why would a person who holds to classic foundationalism protest my thesis concerning the proper relation of faith to learning?” (*PR*, 180)? Says Wolterstorff,

Well, he would say that it is right for a person to use the belief-content of his Christian faith as a control within his theorizing only if he is justified in believing that belief-content. And he would say that a person is justified only if that belief-content consists of indubitable propositions, or if it is inferred from indubitable propositions which supply adequate support for it. Now it is clear that the belief-content of the Christian faith is of neither of these sorts. It does not consist of incorrigible reports of states of consciousness, nor of self-evident necessary truths. But neither is it inferred from propositions of that sort which support it. That is, it is not held on the basis of good arguments all of whose premises are indubitable. In short, the belief-content of a person’s commitment ... does not fit the foundationalist’s criterion for justified beliefs. Accordingly the classic foundationalist would view me with my thesis as urging the incursion of unjustified beliefs into the sciences. And that he protests. It was because I felt this protest had to be answered that I launched my attack on classic foundationalism, arguing that the foundationalist’s criterion for justified belief is untenable. (*PR*, 180)

What, then, is Wolterstorff's attack against classic foundationalism?<sup>30</sup> Pared down for my purposes here, his critique, along with that of Alvin Plantinga, is that even if there are indubitable propositions (such as propositions that are self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses), these are quite insufficient as foundations for knowledge. For example, suppose we are warranted in believing propositions about physical objects. Yet it seems distinctly unlikely that the warrant for believing this derives from the basis of foundational propositions about incorrigible states of consciousness. As Wolterstorff says,

Certain propositions about our states of consciousness belong to the foundation. But science deals not just with states of consciousness but with all sorts of "objective" entities trees, minerals, motions of bodies, and the like. It seems unlikely that from our introspective knowledge of propositions about our own states of consciousness we could erect the whole structure of objective science (*RBR*, 54).

Plantinga's critique of foundationalism is even more widesweeping:

[I]f ... a proposition is rationally acceptable only if it follows from or is probable with respect to what is properly basic if [this claim] is true, then enormous quantities of what we all in fact believe are irrational. One crucial lesson to be learned from the development of modern philosophy—Descartes through Hume, roughly—is just this: relative to propositions that are self-evident and incorrigible, most of the beliefs that form the stock in trade of ordinary everyday life are not probable at any rate there is no reason to think they are probable (*RBG*, 136).

Plantinga has in mind propositions such as those expressing general beliefs in enduring physical objects, other persons, or the reality of the past. None of these appear to meet the foundationalist's criterion for rational belief. In other words, this criterion of rationality and proof is so stringent that most of the beliefs that apparently form the bedrock of our everyday lives cannot be judged as rational. Asks Plantinga rhetorically, "And does not this show that the [foundationalist] thesis is false" (*RBG*, 136)?

Plantinga has also attacked the foundationalist's criterion from another angle. He has pointed out that

classic foundationalism does not live up to its own requirements, in essence showing that it fails its own test for rationality. In other words, the very foundationalist thesis that "A is properly basic for me only if A is self-evident or incorrigible or evident to the senses for me" (*RBG*, 136) is selfreferentially inconsistent. This is because in order to be rational in accepting this thesis he must accept that it is itself self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses. Now, not only is it not, but if anyone accepts it despite this he is violating his epistemic duties (cf. *RBG*, 137). In short, Plantinga holds that the Christian scholar should feel no obligation to believe the foundationalist thesis. "It is no more than a bit of intellectual imperialism on the part of the foundationalist," says Plantinga.<sup>31</sup>

It remains to be asked how the rejection of foundationalism helps the Christian scholar in theory-formation and theory-appraisal. The brief answer to this question here has to be that if classical foundationalism is not true, it follows that Christians can and should move beyond seeing their theories devised on purely foundationalist assumptions. With regard to devising theories, the Christian scholar should take his religious beliefs as an autonomous source of intellectual positions capable of affecting theory formation and theory-appraisal. As Wolterstorff puts it,

The Christian scholar ought to allow the belief-content of his authentic Christian commitment to function as control within his devising and weighing of theories. For he like everyone else ought to seek consistency, wholeness, and integrity in the body of his beliefs and commitments. Since his fundamental commitment to following Christ ought to be decidedly ultimate in his life, his the rest of his life ought to be brought in harmony with it. As control, the belief-content of his authentic commitment ought to function both negatively and positively. Negatively, the Christian scholar ought to reject certain theories on the ground that they conflict or do not comport well with the belief content of his authentic commitment. And positively he ought to devise theories which comport as well as possible with, or are at least consistent with, the belief-content of his authentic commitment. (*RBR*, 76)

Needless to say, the Christian's evidential data, background theories, ideas, and other warrants, including logical and epistemic ones, used in the formation and

appraisal of theories are drawn from various valid and relevant sources of belief. In other words, Wolterstorff and Plantinga are saying that the Christian scholar should take “into account all that we know, including all that we know as Christians” (TP, 39). Says Plantinga,

Why should [Christians] be buffaloed (or cowed) into trying to understand ... things from a naturalistic perspective? So the central argument here is simplicity itself: as Christians we need and want answers to the sorts of questions that arise in the theoretical and interpretative disciplines; in an enormous number of such cases, what we know as Christian is crucially relevant to coming to a proper understanding; therefore we Christians should pursue these disciplines from a specifically Christian perspective. (TP, 40)

But, asks Plantinga, isn't this project of Christian scholarship as sketched above simply theology rather than philosophy or psychology or sociology or history, etc.? In this, he anticipates his critics, including some Thomists like Ralph McInerny. Let us be clear that both the Thomist and the Augustinian agree to think of the matter as follows:

There are the deliverances of faith: call them 'F'; there is also the result of thinking about the subject matter of science, appealing to the deliverances of faith as well as to the deliverances of reason: call that 'FS'. Thomist and Augustinian concur that we need FS. (TP, 60)

Aligning himself with the Augustinian strand of this project, Plantinga makes an irenic proposal to the Thomist that McInerny finds ingenious and welcomes.

But now consider the conditional or hypothetical proposition, *if F then FS*: the proposition that states what the implications of the faith are for the discipline in question. Perhaps this proposition *if F then FS* is best thought of as a large number of propositions, each explicating what the Christian faith brings to bear on some part of the discipline in question-or perhaps we should think of it as one enormously long proposition. Either

way, both parties to the discussion will agree that this proposition is not *itself* among the deliverances of faith; we learn it, or know it, by reason, not by faith. It is by reason rather than faith that we see the bearing of the faith on psychology; it is by reason rather than faith that we see how Scriptural teaching on love, or sin, or morality affects what we study in psychology or anthropology or sociology. So both sides (Augustinian and Thomist) agree-in fact, insist that we, the Christian community, need to know how the faith illuminates these areas (TP, 60-61).<sup>32</sup>

In sum, Christian scholars must spell out the implications of the faith for the discipline in question, but the assertion of the consequent, that is, drawing out these implications, is a rational move in the non-theological discipline itself psychology, history, biology, economics, literary criticism, philosophy, etc. In short, the formulation of the conditional or hypothetical proposition *if F then FS* is a work of reason. The non-believer may conclude from such hypotheticals that Christianity has been discredited by science. But as McInerny rightly notes,

  
*“It is by reason rather than faith  
that we see the bearing of the  
faith on psychology; it is by reason  
rather than faith that we see how  
Scriptural teaching on love, or sin,  
or morality affects what we study  
in psychology or anthropology or  
sociology”*  


Plantinga has another outcome in mind. I take him to be suggesting that the believing scientist will be guided by his faith to see that certain theories are false and this will suggest a research project that would minimally show that the theory in question is unproven. But to show this will require work that relies on the methods and criteria of that science.

In other words, faith illumines the path of philosophical or scientific inquiry generally by providing a fertile soil for the development of wisdom and insight, suggesting fruitful hypotheses, important questions, and paths of inquiry (*Fides et Ratio*, # 74, 76 and 79). Yet, “The faith does not provide one with [say] a biological theory,” adds McInerny,

but it suggests research projects which must be carried out within biology. I conclude that Plantinga has provided powerful support for the view that Christian philosophy or Christian science

draws attention to extra-philosophical or extra-scientific advantages that believers have over non-believers in pursuing philosophy and science.<sup>33</sup>

So the positive outcome of Wolterstorff's and Plantinga's critique of classical foundationalism is that revealed truths should themselves play a central role in the full development of any authentically Christian scholarship.



## V. ON INTELLECTUAL FIDELITY AND SECULAR INTELLECTUAL EXCELLENCE

Marsden's account of intellectual inquiry suggests certain formal criteria of excellence without considering those fundamental questions that a more substantive account of the intellectual life would examine. Alfred J. Freddoso's own Catholic account goes beyond formal criteria and raises these questions, suggesting the range of relevant issues that a complete account of intellectual inquiry must address. There are five such questions. (a) There are questions about truth—that is, what is the nature of truth? Freddoso asks, "Are the truths sought by intellectual inquiry true independently of whether they are thought to be true by human knowers, or is this sort of 'absolute' truth non-existent or at least unattainable?" In other words, should an adequate conception of intellectual inquiry presuppose a realist account of truth, or is truth a matter of the consensus of inquirers? (b) There are also questions about goals. Asks Freddoso, "Is truth itself the principal goal of intellectual inquiry?" Or is consensus that goal? If truth is the goal should we strive to attain a consistent, coherent and comprehensive synthesis of all the varied disciplines in the arts and sciences? (c) There are questions about method. "Which sources of cognition are permissible in establishing first principles of inquiry in particular domains?" asks Freddoso. Perception, Reason, Testimony, Intuition are these the only permissible sources? Or can faith be regarded as an additional source of basic beliefs as well? "If there are several sources of cognition how are they ordered with respect to one another?" asks Freddoso. (d) There are questions about affective context. Asks Freddoso, "What is the most fitting affective context for intellectual inquiry?" Should inquirers strive as inquirers to divest

themselves of all affective commitments or inclinations and to approach their domains of inquiry as neutral observers? Again, are there moral prerequisites for fruitful inquiry and, if so, what are they? Lastly, (e) there are questions about standards of excellence. Are there substantive criteria of excellence? If so, what are they? And how do they relate to the affective context of inquiry? (*WSE*, 5-6).

It is not possible in this article to examine all of these questions. Instead, I will only sketch Freddoso's answer to (d)—a vision of Catholic intellectual inquiry as it bears on the question of the most fitting affective context for intellectual inquiry. Properly grasping Freddoso's answer to this question requires understanding and accepting the classical Christian view that, first, the Christian faith, which is at once cognitive and affective in kind, rooted in mind and heart, is the best available general context for intellectual inquiry; second, that the noetic effects of sin have damaged our cognitive powers insofar as reason is disoriented and deprived of its direction toward truth; and third, that only the transforming effect of divine faith infused into our minds can rightly re-order the truth-attaining capacities of reason. Says Freddoso,

[I]t is a central Catholic doctrine that our natural cognitive powers, both theoretical and practical, are severely limited to begin with and, to make matters worse, have been gravely wounded by sin, with the result that they cannot lead us to genuine wisdom unless they are healed and elevated by the supernatural virtue of faith graciously bestowed upon us by God.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, Freddoso's answer to the question regarding the most fitting affective context for intellectual inquiry draws on the central Christian teaching that "as long as human reason is cut off from the illumination made available through the salvific action of Jesus Christ, it cannot perceive fully or definitively the metaphysical and moral truths that constitute the object of the classical search for philosophical wisdom."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, this is a bold account of the dynamics of Christian scholarly activity.

I will begin then with Freddoso's understanding of the creation, fall and redemption that forms the broadest context of Christian intellectual inquiry. If I understand him well, he affirms, along with Plantinga and others, that the intellectual life is not neutral with respect to the struggle for our souls, between (as St. Augustine

wrote) the *Civitas Dei* and the *Civitas Mundi*. In light of these dynamics, Catholic scholars should strive to attain two goals: first, an intellectual fidelity to the Catholic faith, or what Freddoso calls intellectual fidelity, and second, intellectual excellence in accord with secularity, which he calls secular intellectual excellence (*WSE*, 2). In this context, Freddoso distinguishes the orders of creation, fall, and redemption. He affirms the “inherent goodness of nature and its relative autonomy with respect to grace or, to put it differently, the inherent goodness of the secular and its relative autonomy with respect to the sacred.” Yet “the secular sphere is fallen and pervaded by sin” and thus the “Catholic tradition has repeatedly affirmed that Christians are called to participate in the sanctification of that sphere by healing and transforming it through grace” (*WSE*, 2). Applying this understanding to the realm of intellectual inquiry means that such inquiry is a “sanctifiable secular undertaking.” As Freddoso puts it,

Given that a secular undertaking is such that its own internal goals and methods, along with its internally define standards of excellence, are consonant with Catholic faith and morals, that undertaking can be elevated and sanctified if its conscientiously carried out for the glory of God by practitioners who are motivated by the supernatural virtue of charity. That is, any honorable secular undertaking complete with its own autonomous ends, methods, and standards of excellence can be ordered from without, as it were, to a supernatural end and thereby become part of Christ’s redemptive mission. And it is precisely by those dispositions which constitute secularity that we are led to recognize and appreciate the inherent goodness of such secular undertakings, the relative autonomy of their methods and standards of

excellence, and hence their sanctifiability. (*WSE*, 4)

Freddoso’s alternative to “relativistic postmodern anti-realist naturalism” and “objectivist naturalism” has two aspects. On the one hand, intellectual inquirers must be affectively, that is, morally and spiritually, well ordered within a community of trusting dialogue and sincere friendship and directed to the attainment of wisdom. On the other hand, Freddoso thinks of wisdom in the classic philosophical sense

as an integrated, comprehensive, and systematic elaboration of the first principles of being that provides definitive answers to fundamental questions about the origin, nature, and destiny of the universe and about the good for human beings and the ways to attain it. (*WSE*, 12)

This classic conception of intellectual inquiry presupposes a realist account of truth insists on the objectivity of truth-but it does not disregard or undermine the very moral and spiritual conditions, the dynamics as it were, of our advance toward truth. As Freddoso says,

... the pursuit of wisdom will prosper only insofar as rigorous intellectual training and practice are embedded within a well-ordered program of moral and spiritual development consonant with the attainment of complete wisdom. That is, successful intellectual inquiry presupposes a way of life that fosters rectitude of affection, where such rectitude is deemed essential for one’s having a clear cognitive grasp of all the relevant first principles. (*WSE*, 12-13)

Given this classic conception of intellectual inquiry, Freddoso affirms “no a priori restrictions on possible sources of cognition.” Like Plantinga, Freddoso holds that the Christian scholar should draw on all that he knows, including what he knows as a Christian. Inquirers should, he says, “draw upon all the cognitive resources available to [him] in constructing a complete and coherent set of answers to the deepest human questions” (*WSE*, 13).

Following *Fides et Ratio*, where John Paul I argues, in



Freddoso's own words, "that the Catholic faith provides the best context for intellectual inquiry in the contemporary world, and that the Church is the community within which such inquiry can best take place," Freddoso gives five reasons in defense of these claims. First, the Church provides the best affective context of inquiry by nurturing intellectual inquirers in a formation program involving moral, spiritual, and doctrinal dimensions. This context is crucial for two reasons: one, it thwarts the intellectual pride endemic to modernism's overvaluation of reason; and two, it thwarts the radical lack of confidence in the truth-attaining powers of reason underpinning postmodern relativism.<sup>36</sup> In short, such formation deals with the noetic effects of sin. Second, adds Freddoso, "the inherent hopefulness of the Catholic Faith ... serves as an effective deterrent to the pessimism that has historically resulted both from modernism's overvaluation of reason and postmodernism's undervaluation of reason." Third, man is by nature a truth-seeker and the sanctifiable secular undertaking of intellectual inquiry fulfills the ancient philosophical injunction "Know Thyself." Intellectual inquiry within this framework recovers the sapiential dimension of inquiry in its search for an "integrated vision of all the humanistic and scientific disciplines that contribute to human self-understanding." Fourth, this conception of intellectual inquiry fosters the common good of the Church and the wider culture. Against this background, it engages in a systematic self-examination about the inquirers own "[religious and] moral presuppositions, implications, and consequences and in this way self-consciously safeguards both its own integrity and human dignity of those whom it serves." And last but not least, intellectual inquiry in this affective context is aimed at the whole man, "conceived as one who is called to share in the beatitude of the Holy Trinity." The implication of this for intellectual inquiry is quite simply as follows: inquirers are

encouraged to think of themselves neither as modernist detached intellects nor as postmodernist victims of oppression, but rather as friends of God who should strive to deepen their understanding of the realms of nature and grace and to lead lives of service to God and neighbor. (*WSE*, 13-14)

We, therefore, have been called to this sanctifiable secular undertaking as Christian scholars. This, too, is the vision of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

## VI. PHILOSOPHY OF THE CURRICULUM

At the start of this article, I argued that Catholic institutions of higher education should be engaged in the formation of a Christian mind by integrating the life of faith and the intellectual life, and that this integration cannot be confined—as it often is nowadays—to extracurricular matters. Nor can carrying out the full task of integration be placed upon professors of theology alone. Rather, it must instead be fully integrated throughout the whole curriculum of the university. As Freddoso puts it, "students must come into contact with a large number of faculty members, across a wide range of academic disciplines, in whose own personal lives there is no bifurcation of the intellectual from the spiritual."<sup>37</sup>

Such a commitment to this sort of integration requires, then, a philosophy of the curriculum consistent with the goals of integration. In its 1969 Founding Document (FD), Thomas Aquinas College, for example, articulates such a philosophy. "All the parts of the curriculum ... should be conducted with a view to understanding the Catholic Faith, and that Faith itself should be the light under which the curriculum is conducted" (FD, 11). In 1998, the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, Christendom College produced a Vision Statement (VS) that outlined the contours of its philosophy of the curriculum. "If the curriculum of the College is aimed at knowledge of God, man and nature in and through a liberal education, and at serving God through the restoration of all things in Christ, the rest of the College must be compatible with this goal" (VS, 16). On Sept. 16, 1994, the full faculty of Franciscan University of Steubenville (Ohio, USA) adopted by vote a document stating its "Philosophy of the Curriculum" (PC). "Since we ... stand in the Catholic tradition as a university, we propose in this Philosophy of the Curriculum to ... declar[e] more fully our identity as a Catholic Franciscan *university*, especially as this identity is expressed in the curriculum" (PC, 1).

In sum, the aim of these three documents is to articulate more fully the identity of a genuinely Catholic institution which, as a university, belongs to the Catholic tradition and is committed to the faith of the Catholic Church. Each of these Catholic institutions of higher education agrees on the following basic points. First, they all agree that the light of faith illumines human understanding and hence that that the "essential purpose of a Catholic college is to educate under the light of the Faith" (FD, 1). Again, "Divine truth illumines all other truth and shows us the essential unity in every area of

thought and life. Only an education which integrates the truths of the Catholic Faith throughout the curriculum is a fully Catholic education” (*VS*, 1). Second, they all firmly reject the dogma of the self-sufficiency of reason which is the axiom of modern conceptions of liberal education. This dogma, which holds that the human mind is the measure of all truth, implies that Christian faith is incompatible with authentic intellectual inquiry because faith is said to inhibit, indeed undercut, the life of the mind (see *FD*, 17ff). By contrast, the documents of Christendom College and Thomas Aquinas College explicitly claim the very antithesis of this dogma. They express the viewpoint that the dogma of the self-sufficiency of reason has led to the denial of the existence of objective truth and first principles, moral and otherwise (*VS*, 2, 12, *FD*, 18-20). Third, they all agree that theology is the “principal part and crown” (*VS*, 10-11) in a Christian view of liberal education.

By its own essential character, theology completes and perfects the intellectual life of a free man, for it has in a preeminent way that which is desired in all of them. Liberal education undertaken by Christians and ordered to theology turns out to be liberal education in its fullness. (*FD*, 38-39)

This third tenet of a Christian liberal education is based on the classical Catholic principle that grace does not destroy but perfects—indeed, fulfills—nature.

Although I cannot do justice to the richness of all these documents, I will nevertheless briefly highlight three aspects expressed by each of them that best articulates the vision of *ECE*, namely, the goals of integration: first, the unity of all truth; second, the unity of faith and human knowledge; and third, the primacy of Christ, who is the Word of Wisdom, that is, “the criterion of both truth and salvation.”<sup>38</sup>

What does a Catholic worldview, an integrating vision, mean in an academic context where we are committed to searching for truth finding it, and communicating it? It means, firstly, that a “university must not limit itself to one region of truth to the exclusion of others; it should be open to all truth” (*PC*, 1). Although these documents do not say so explicitly, I venture to guess that this openness derives from the conviction that all truth is God’s truth. Secondly, it means that we should strive to understand the unity of all truth. We do not merely accumulate truths, learning one after another, but attempt to show how these truths are mutually illumin-

ating. “The curriculum undertakes to integrate harmoniously the knowledge acquired from these [read: the truths of Divine Revelation as taught by the Roman Catholic Church and the truths of natural reason as derived from natural law and human experience in fidelity to the Magisterium] sources” (*VS*, 1). Furthermore, *PC* proposes that students be given a sense of the unity of knowledge, of its integration, so that they never lose sight of the whole when they study the parts. Thirdly, because of its openness to all truth, these documents propose to introduce students to the main areas of knowledge. Philosophy and theology, central disciplines in the tradition of Catholic learning, are studied as foundational, because they deal with the interrelated meaning of God, man and the world. Great literature and poetry are read; historical consciousness is developed; the rigors of science and mathematics are encountered; and artistic sensibilities are awakened. A primary educational idea, as expressed by these documents, is that each discipline should be related to all the others, thus integrating and ordering the various areas of knowledge, rather than presented in isolation (see *FD*, 40-45, *VS*, 10-11, *PC*, 1-2).

Most importantly, an integrating vision, based on faith, aims to present not only human wisdom, but also Christian Wisdom. Integral to this presentation of the Christian faith is the first principle of the curriculum—the unity of faith and human knowledge. As one document states:

In presenting the Christian faith, we take care to present it, not in isolation from other truths, but in relation to them, so that faith interprets them and is at the same time interpreted by them. We want to enable our students to make Christian sense out of what they learn in their natural science courses, in their social science courses, in their study of art and literature. This does not mean that the Christian faith should interfere with or overrule the methods proper to the different disciplines, or that it should make us unwilling to accept the contributions made by unbelievers; it means that these disciplines, while being entirely respected according to their proper autonomy, should, as the nature of each allows, be brought into relat-



*“All truth is God’s  
truth...we should strive  
to understand the unity  
of all truth.”*



ion to Christian revelation. And in the encounter with human knowledge faith not only gives but also receives; our students find that their faith becomes “embodied” in such a way as to be deepened and enriched. (*PC*, 2-3)

It might be helpful to locate the strategy that *PC* describes here the interactionist model of faith and learning in the context of three strategies that, according to Wolterstorff, Christian scholars have typically used to relate faith and scholarly endeavors. First, they have at times revised their current understanding of Christian beliefs that are inconsistent with what are taken to be historical or scientific truths. This is the strategy of harmonizing faith and scholarship. Secondly, Christian scholars have at times accepted these truths and have tried to place them in a larger Christian context. Thirdly, they have at times proposed distinctively Christian applications of the results of scholarly endeavors. Common to these three strategies is the intellectual posture with respect to science that Wolterstorff calls conformist; a posture which as an overriding principle he rejects.

Says Wolterstorff, “they all take for granted that science is OK as it is.” He adds, “In none of them is there any internal relation between Christian commitment and what goes on within the sciences. In none of them does Christian commitment enter into the devising and weighing of theories within the sciences” (*RBR*, 81-82). Beyond this, confouliism is unacceptable for two main reasons:

The most obvious reason is that contemporary scientists as scientists disagree. One has to choose. But even if that were not the case within some branch of contemporary science, if all the “experts” in that field agree, why should the Christian ... surrender all his critical faculties in the face of it? The “experts,” after all, will have practiced their sciences with their control beliefs. (*RBR*, 82)

So another strategy is possible the belief-content of Christian commitment ought to function internally to scholarship, in the search for and the weighing of theories.

Now this last strategy, I judge, is the context in which Franciscan University’s *PC*, as well as the other documents of Christendom College and Thomas Aquinas College, can best be interpreted. We can now look

closely at the above passage from the document. Several things stand out. *PC* rejects the attempt to assign faith and academic disciplines—natural science, social science, art and literature, and so forth to separate areas. It proposes an interactionist model (to use Wolterstorff’s term) between the Christian faith and academic disciplines. While respecting the autonomous ends of academic disciplines, their methods, and standards of excellence, as well as accepting the contributions of non-Christian scholars in these areas, Christian scholars should bring their academic disciplines into relation with Christian revelation. “And in the encounter with human knowledge, faith not only gives but also receives; ... faith becomes ‘embodied’ in such a way as to be deepened and enriched” (*PC*, 3).

The point of the interactionist model is not simply to put these academic disciplines within a Christian context. For instance, to say that God has created the reality studied in the natural sciences is important, but insufficient for making Christian sense out of what is learned in the natural science courses. Merely setting them within a Christian context does not suggest anything at all by way of a research program *within* biology. One contemporary example of such a truly integrated research program, suggesting lines of inquiry within the field of the natural sciences, is the intelligent design theory developed by Phillip Johnson, William Dembski, Michael Behe, and others.<sup>39</sup>

On this view of the matter, then, I take these three documents to be proposing that Christian scholarship is a continuing reflection in the light of the Christian faith upon the growing treasury of human knowledge, to which Christian scholars seek to contribute by their own research. Those of us who are called to the task of implementing this vision must realize, however, that, in Wolterstorff’s own words, “Christian scholarship will be a poor and paltry thing, worth little attention, until the Christian scholar, under control of his ... commitment, devises theories, that lead to promising, interesting, fruitful, challenging lines of research” (*RBR*, 106).

Finally, the general goal of the Christian scholar in relating human knowledge to Christian revelation is to “relate all human learning to Christ.” As John Paul II says, Jesus Christ is “the criterion of both truth and salvation” (*FR*, #23). As Christians, our aim should be to encounter Christ through the creation over which He rules, and to understand His creation through Him, so that “in all things He may have the preeminence” (Col. I

18). Our integrating Catholic worldview is rooted in the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:11). This brief Christological confession is the most important thing a Christian can say about everything, including the life of the mind. Recall the important essay Catholic philosopher Etienne Gilson wrote more than 60 years ago: "The Intelligence in the Service of Christ the King."<sup>40</sup> In the New Testament, the Lordship of Christ in creation is revealed. St. John teaches that all things were made through Him, the Eternal Logos incarnate in Jesus Christ, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:3). St. Paul teaches that Jesus Christ is the "first-born of every creature," and that "all things have been created through and for Him, and He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. I 15-17). We acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, the center of creation "in whom," as St. Paul teaches, "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2-3).

## VII. CONCLUSION

The main thesis of this article is that developing and maintaining Catholic institutions of higher learning

require an institutional commitment to the idea and practice of Christian scholarship.

Unfortunately, for the most part, discussion of this commitment has been eclipsed by the necessary requirement of mandates for theologians. But the identity of a Catholic university qua university will not be maintained without an ongoing interaction between the Catholic intellectual tradition and scholarly disciplines and activities. Christian scholars in Catholic institutions should seek to implement the vision of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* throughout the curriculum by continuing to reflect, in the light of the control beliefs of the Catholic faith, upon the growing treasury of human knowledge. With the help of Marsden, Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and Freddoso, I have interpreted this vision to mean that the beliefcontent of Christian faith ought to function internally to scholarship, in searching for and weighing theories. Commitment to Christian scholarship is not meant to subvert, but to grow out of and deepen, our identity as Catholic institutions of higher education.



## NOTES

1Alvin Plantinga, "On Christian Scholarship," in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 267-295, at 280.

2Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976; 2nd edition 1984), 21.

3 On August 15, 1990, Pope John Paul II issued this Apostolic Constitution on Catholic higher education. The Apostolic Constitution describes the identity and mission of Catholic institutions of higher learning and provides General Norms to assist in realizing its vision. Further references to this document will be cited parenthetically in the text.

4Alfred J. Freddoso, "Whose Standards of Excellence? Secularity and the Mission of the University," which he posted on the Internet (<http://www.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/whosestandards.htm>), 1-21. I have profited much from this article.

5*Gaudium et Spes*, #37.

6 John Paul II, "Dialogue between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace," in *Origins*, January 4, 2001, Vol. 30: No. 29, #8.

7*Evangelium Vitae*, #21.

8 *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, Document of the Pontifical Council for Culture, May 23, 1999, #3, 6.

9 *Ibid.*, #25.

10 *Ibid.*, #2, 4.

11 On this, see Alfred J. Freddoso, “Whose Standards of Excellence? Secularity and the Mission of the University,” 2.

12 David L. Schindler, “Catholicism and the Liberal Model of the Academy in America: Theodore Hesburgh’s Idea of a Catholic University,” in his *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 143-176, at 147. This, too, is the judgment of the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Conference in “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*: An Application to the United States,” in *Origins*, June 15, 2000, Vol. 30: No. 5, 68-75, at 70: “Catholic universities, in addition to their academic commitments to secular goals and programs, should excel in theological education, prayer and liturgy, and works of charity. These religious activities, however, do not alone make a university ‘Catholic,... A recent observation by columnist Charlotte Allen in *Crisis* (September 2001) makes the same point: “For many Catholic conservatives, a university’s Catholic identity hinges on the orthodoxy of its theology department. The contents of a couple of required theology courses, however, aren’t going to make much difference in the worldview of most Catholic undergraduates these days. What will make a difference is the carrying on of a rich and vibrant Catholic intellectual and cultural tradition throughout the university. And that is where ... many ... Catholic institutions of higher learning miss an opportunity” (61). Similarly, philosopher Alfred Freddoso of Notre Dame argues that both the proponents and critics of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* have missed this crucial point: “[A]ccording to the Catholic vision, a life devoted to intellectual excellence and creativity is itself a great human good and at the same time a possible path to sanctity. All graduates of Catholic universities should come away appreciating this fact, even those who are not themselves called to the intellectual life. For this reason, the Catholic university’s spiritual mission cannot be confined as it often is nowadays to what goes on outside the classroom; it must instead be fully integrated with the university’s intellectual mission. Nor can the full burden of this integration be placed upon professors of theology. Rather, students must come into contact with a large number of faculty members, across a wide range of academic disciplines, in whose own personal lives there is no bifurcation of the intellectual from the spiritual” (“Missing the Message of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,” *National Catholic Register*, March 15-21, 1998). Most recently, Gerard V Bradley, Notre Dame Law professor and the former president of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, adds his voice to this chorus of voices in, “Looking Ahead at Catholic Higher Ed,” *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Spring 2002: 16-29.

13 On this, see Ralph McInerny, “The Advantages of a Catholic University,” in *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*, ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 175-186, at 182.

14 *Gaudium et Spes*, #58.

15 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 108. I return to an analysis of Wolterstorff’s views on Christian scholarship in Section IV of this article.

16 I owe this formulation of the Christian scholar’s task to Nicholas Wolterstorff. See his, *Keeping Faith: Talks for New Faculty at Calvin College*, Occasional Papers from Calvin College, Vol. 7, No. 1, February 1989, 42.

17 On this, see John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical Letter, September 14, 1998. This philosopher-Pope holds that original sin “so wounded reason that ... the human capacity to know the truth was impaired by an aversion to the One who is the source and origin of truth ... [H]uman thinking, because of sin, became ‘empty’, and human reasoning became distorted and inclined to falsehood (cf. Rom. 1:21-22). The eyes of the mind were no longer able to see clearly: reason became more and more a prisoner to itself. The coming of Christ was the saving event which redeemed reason from its weakness, setting it free from the shackles in which it had imprisoned itself” (#22). See also Francis Cardinal George, “The Catholic Mission Today in Higher Education,” *Origins*, Nov. 6, 1997, Vol. 27, No. 21: 352-358.

18 On the noetic effects of sin and cognitive renewal, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 213-216, 280-282. For an analysis of these crucial matters in *Fides et Ratio*, see my essay, “*Fides et Ratio*, The Catholic and the Calvinist: Prospects for Rapprochement,” *Philosophia Reformata* 65 (2000) 72-104, at 81-88.

19 John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1912; first pub-

lished 1864), 223.

20 This is how the purpose of the seminar program is stated in the brochure for Calvin College Seminars in *Christian Scholarship* 1999.

21 George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-4. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text as *ICS*.

22 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 6370. Subsequent references to this volume will be cited parenthetically in the text as *RBR*.

23 On this, see George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For a more varied and extensive account of the same history, dealing with both colleges and universities of more diverse ecclesial origins, see the study by Holy Cross priest and Catholic scholar James Tunstead Burtchaell, C.S.C., *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

24 On this, see Del Kiernan-Lewis, *Learning to Philosophize: A Primer* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2000), 112-13.

25 William Warren Bartley, *The Retreat to Commitment*, revised and enlarged second edition (LaSalle: Open Court, 1984), 72.

26 I am adapting to this discussion of Christian scholarship the categories Karl Barth used in his discussion of certain types of Christian apologetics. See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973), 439-440, "A bold apologetics proves to a particular generation the intellectual necessity of the theological principles taken from the Bible or from church dogma or from both; a more cautious apologetics proves at least their intellectual possibility."

27 *Fides et Ratio* #16-35, 64-108.

28 Alvin Plantinga, *The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship, The 1989-90 Henry Stob Lectures of Calvin College and Seminary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College and Seminary, 1990); subsequent references to this lecture will be cited parenthetically in the text as *TP*. See also, "Reason and Belief in God," in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 102-161; subsequent references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text as *RBG*. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, and "On Avoiding Historicism," in *Philosophia Reformata*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 1980: 178-185; subsequent references to this article will be cited parenthetically in the text as *PR*; see also, "On Christian Learning," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, eds. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, & Richard Mouw (New York: University Press of America, 1989), 56-80. See also, Ralph McInerny's reply to Plantinga's *TP*, "Reflections on Christian Philosophy," in *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, ed. Linda Zagzebski (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 256-279. See also, Catholic theologian David L. Schindler's general support for Plantinga's *TP*, "Catholicism and the Liberal Model of the Academy in America: Theodore Hesburgh's Idea of a Catholic University," in his *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* (see note 8).

29 Alfred J. Freddoso, "Whose Standards of Excellence? Secularity and the Mission of the University," 1. Hereafter references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text as *WSE*. See also Alfred Freddoso, "Fides et Ratio: A Radical Vision of Intellectual Inquiry," in Alice Ramos and Marie George, eds., *Faith, Scholarship and Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Washington, DC: American Maritain Association.)

30 Wolterstorff holds that "Christian belief, though it fails the test of the classic foundationalist, is nonetheless justified" (*PR*, 185). Both Wolterstorff and Plantinga have written prolifically on this question of epistemic justification and Christian beliefs. For Wolterstorff, see, for example, "Can Belief in God be Rational if it has no Foundations," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); and *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For Plantinga, see for example, "Reason and Belief in God" (see note 8 above); "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?," *Nous* 15 (1981): 41-51; "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," *Christian Scholar's Review* 11 (1981): 187-198; and "Justification and Theism," in *The Analytic Theist*, 162-186. See especially Plantinga's magisterial study, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University, 2000).

31 Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Rational?" in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, ed. C.F. Delaney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 7-27, at 23.

32David Schindler also affirms that the formulation of the conditional or hypothetical proposition if F then FS is a work of reason that clearly falls within the domain of the nontheological disciplines involved. On this, see “Catholicism and the Liberal Model of the Academy in America” where Schindler writes: “Other than in theology, the worldview given by faith cannot function as the premise for argument in any of the disciplines ... The Catholic inquirer or researcher will be guided by a Catholic worldview, which nonetheless will not be allowed to function (except in theology) as an explicit premise for his or her argument. The Catholic researcher will attempt to make his argument as far as possible in terms of the distinct evidence presented by the distinct kind of entity or subject matter under investigation. The crucial point, however, is that the Catholic researcher will remain cognizant of the fact that neither his nor his non-Catholic colleague’s gathering of evidence and constructing of arguments, at any given juncture, will be entirely without the implications of a worldview (however much this is for the time being left tacit). Therefore the question of worldview, in terms of what it implies for *both* researchers, must in the end be made explicit, as a condition for resolving differences that arise precisely within their respective procedures of evidence-collection and argument-contraction” (170-71).

33McInerny, “Reflections on Christian Philosophy,” 273.

34Alfred J. Freddoso, “Ockham on Faith and Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ockham*, ed. Paul V. Spade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 326-349, and for this quotation at 327.

35Ibid., 327.

36It is to restore our confidence in the truth-attaining powers of reason that John Paul II wrote *Fides et Ratio*.

37Alfred Freddoso, “Missing the Message of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,” *National Catholic Register*, March 15-21, 1998.

38*Fides et Ratio*, #23.

39Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway Publishing, 1991), and *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1997). Michael J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996). William Dembski, *The Design Inference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

40This is the title of an insightful essay in Etienne Gilson’s collection of essays, *Christianity and Philosophy*, trans. Ralph MacDonald, C.S.B. (New York & London: Sheed & Ward, 1939), 103-126.

