

Dynamic Diversity in a Catholic Augustinian College¹

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Abstract

This article shows how Merrimack College's Catholic heritage and Augustinian tradition provide intellectual and spiritual resources for the college to fulfill its educational responsibility to prepare students for virtuous citizenship in a religiously and culturally pluralistic society. It uses four major Vatican documents and several foundational Augustinian ideas to elaborate principles useful for the guidance of Merrimack's academic community and the direction of its campus culture. The article concludes with Merrimack's "Statement of Augustinian Values for Higher Education" as an expression of its distinctive mission in American higher education.

The Religion Question in American Higher Education

When a Catholic or other religiously affiliated college highlights its distinctive educational mission and heritage, an elephant enters the room. That elephant provokes anxiety. Faculty and other members of the academic community—even those who may be faithful members of the institution's founding religious tradition—grow anxious about academic freedom and freedom of religion. Given the significant number of religiously affiliated institutions of higher education in the United States, it is important to name the elephant and address people's anxieties and questions about the role of religion and religious faith in higher education.²

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² There are about 1,000 religiously-affiliated colleges and universities in the United States. There are more than 200 Catholic colleges and universities, which make them the largest represented group. In the remainder of this article "college" will be used to refer to both colleges and universities.

The following discussion names that elephant and sets it in the context of the Augustinian Catholic tradition at Merrimack College.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion as well as the freedoms of speech, of the press, of assembly, and of redress of grievances.³ In any discussion of their mission, religiously-affiliated institutions must address questions generated by the “no establishment” clause in the Constitution. This prompts the question: How does a religiously-affiliated school, with its particular mission and purpose, prepare students for citizenship in a society that cherishes the five freedoms of the First Amendment? More explicitly, how can a college or university founded on the precepts and principles of one specific religion educate young people for citizenship in a diverse society that recognizes the primacy of no one religion?

Another important consideration for religiously-affiliated schools is that contemporary world events seem driven as much by religious fervor as by economic and social factors. The so-called clash of cultures is defined, for better or for worse, along religious lines. Right now, for instance, a billion Muslims and a billion Christians are struggling—or not—to understand, to forgive, and to tolerate each other. How do colleges which stand in a particular religious tradition address inter-religious understanding and appreciation? As communities of learning and teaching, how do they address the delicate relationships among different faiths and cultures in a society that is growing ever more pluralistic?

Within this mix, the legal reality of academic freedom is also a concern. How do colleges and universities balance religious doctrines and ethics with the freedom of thought that is essential to the intellectual life of learning and of teaching?

These large questions, the elephant’s significant proportions, cause concern for those who enter the room to engage in these complicated conversations—conversations essential to the future of Catholic higher education.

Ironically, each of the 1,000 religiously-affiliated schools in the United States is itself an institutional expression of the free exercise of religion.

³ “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” *First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*, <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/>.

Americans have wedded the second phrase in the First Amendment—the free exercise of religion—to their creative penchant to form private associations, a tendency noted by Alexis de Tocqueville in the early 1800s.⁴ The constitutional prohibition against a state-sponsored religion, the protected free exercise of religion, and American social initiative and ingenuity have all helped to produce this impressive collection of religiously-affiliated colleges and universities. Yet, this success leads to pressing questions about the role of religiously-affiliated colleges in the secular democracy that has permitted and encouraged their distinctive educational missions.

Merrimack College

Merrimack College, located in North Andover, MA, is one of these religiously-affiliated institutions. At the request of Archbishop Cushing of Boston, the Order of St. Augustine founded the Catholic college in 1947.⁵ During the past twenty years, since the publication of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, Merrimack has been engaged in an extended conversation about the meaning of its distinctive Catholic and Augustinian educational mission. Through annual seminars and symposia, faculty, students, alumni, and staff at Merrimack have explored ways in which the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the particular educational and spiritual heritage of the Augustinian Friars have enriched and continue to enrich the academic community as well as the wider project of American higher education. During this long multiyear project, Merrimack staff, faculty, and administrators have read many articles, documents, and books together. Faculty wrote and presented papers. Visiting professors and lecturers engaged the college with their own research and perspectives.

As at other colleges, this conversation has been welcomed and, at the same time, anxiety-provoking. Though our Catholic and Augustinian heritage distinguishes us among the twenty-one other Catholic

⁴ “Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They . . . make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they found hospitals, prisons, and schools. If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society.” Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume II, Section II, Chapter V, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/toc_indx.html.

⁵ Villanova University, founded in 1842, is the other major Augustinian institution of higher education in the United States. There are also Augustinian universities and colleges in the Philippines, across Latin America, and in Australia.

colleges and universities in New England, issues of academic freedom, religious diversity, and Church involvement have emerged as concerns in our conversations just as they have at other Catholic institutions.

The following review of three documents of the Second Vatican Council, of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, and of distinctive themes in Augustinian theology and pedagogy reflects our many conversations and forums at Merrimack College. To address faculty and staff concerns about academic freedom, about the sanctity of conscience, and about religious and philosophical pluralism, we found that these texts from Church teaching and the theology of St. Augustine have enriched our conversations and educated all of us about the richness of the Catholic university tradition. While the elephant may not yet be eating out of our hands, it is less of a threat and more of a force whose strength and nobility we have begun to harness. We have started to work together to raise a large tent that is intellectually hospitable, and we are building a diverse community that is authentically welcoming while remaining distinctively Catholic and Augustinian. We also believe that our reflections on these texts are universal enough to enrich the wider national and international dialogue about the significant contributions that Catholic colleges can make to our country and to the world.

Gaudium et spes: The Church in the Modern World

Aside from the Augustinian Friars and members of the faculty of religious and theological studies, most of our faculty, students, and staff had never read any document from Vatican II (1962-1965). Yet, three of those documents held many welcome surprises for those who were willing to engage the texts as “required reading” for an enlightened conversation about Catholic higher education. The longest and foundational text for our exploration has been *Gaudium et spes*⁶—Joy and Hope, two sentiments helpful to get such a conversation off to a good start.

Gaudium et spes was promulgated on December 7, 1965. It emerged as the last and, in many ways, culminating work of Vatican II. While earlier documents of The Council focus on the inner life of the Church and doctrine, *Gaudium et spes* expresses the Church’s reflection on its

⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Vatican City, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1965).

relationship with the contemporary world.⁷ The document proclaims that the proper role of the Church is one of engagement with the world in its diversity of cultures, of peoples, and of political systems. The Church should “focus its attention . . . on the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; that world which is the theater of human history and the heir of human energies, human tragedies and human triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker’s love. . . .”⁸

In contrast to the somewhat defensive tone and isolationist stance of much of Vatican rhetoric and writing throughout the previous century, *Gaudium et spes* is remarkable because of its call for open engagement with the world. It calls Catholics and all Christians to an optimistic and realistic dialogue with all peoples, its goal the transformation of societies and cultures in light of Gospel values.⁹ The document speaks eloquently of the Church’s “solidarity with, as well as its respect and love for the entire human family with which it is bound up,” and of the need to work with all persons for the renewal of human society and for new solutions to common problems.¹⁰

Gaudium et spes calls Catholic colleges in particular to a new kind of engagement and dialogue with the world. It challenges the Church’s educational institutions to plunge into the critical questions and controversies of the contemporary world as full partners in on-going dialogue about civilization and its problems.¹¹ The document discusses the importance of “the various disciplines of philosophy, history and of mathematical and natural science, and. . . the arts”¹² as ways of elevating “the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and

⁷ Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 1. The opening words are: “The joys (*gaudium*) and hopes (*spes*), the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” See also Walter M. Abbot, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966).

⁸ Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 2.

⁹ This document is in many ways the Catholic Church’s official reflection on what Richard Niebuhr described as “the many sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization” in Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1951), 1. *Gaudium et spes* would generally fit into Niebuhr’s theological category of “Christ the Transformer of Culture” (*Christ and Culture*, 190-229), while many earlier Vatican documents of the nineteenth and twentieth century would fit into his category of “Christ Above Culture” (*Christ and Culture*, 116-148).

¹⁰ Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, sec. 57.

beauty, and to the formation of considered opinions which have universal value.”¹³ The entire text stresses the importance of the academic disciplines as ways of enriching and advancing human dialogue and of solving human problems. The liberal arts, physical sciences, and social sciences in general, as well as economics and political science in particular, are advanced as ways of bringing people together in the search for truth and for solutions to persistent and troubling human problems.¹⁴ Of particular interest to the academy is the document’s call “to harmonize the proliferation of particular branches of study with the necessity of forming a synthesis of them and of preserving among men the faculties of contemplation and observations which lead to wisdom.”¹⁵

The common ground for this continuous dialogue is the dignity of the human person. This is the foundational theme of the entire document and the specific topic of chapter one. The Christian affirmation of the dignity of each person is based on the scriptural belief that humans are created in God’s image.¹⁶ Contemporary Catholic colleges receive this cornerstone of their educational mission from *Gaudium et spes*. The human dignity of each and every person in the academic community is the *sine qua non* of Catholic higher education. All other dimensions of the person: the intellect, the conscience, the freedom, and the goal of human life—all derive from this basic understanding of and commitment to human dignity.¹⁷ While members of other religions or persons of no particular religious belief may affirm human dignity for different philosophical reasons, respect for every person can serve as the shared starting point for ecumenical, interfaith, and cross-cultural discourse on a Catholic campus.

The document calls for serious dialogue with those whose life experience and philosophical convictions leave them doubting God’s existence.¹⁸ Christians are beckoned to sincere and prudent dialogue with all persons, even with those whose beliefs may be profoundly different; the touchstone is whether the dignity of the person, the integrity of the intellect, and the freedom of conscience are respected for and by all. Such dialogue is essential for the betterment of the world that we all

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., sec. 5, 59, 62-64, 73-76.

¹⁵ Ibid., sec. 56.

¹⁶ Ibid., sec. 12. See also Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1990), sec. 15, 16; and Genesis 1: 26-27.

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 15-17, 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., sec. 19-21.

share.¹⁹ Christians should not presume that they have a monopoly on God's Spirit, but instead know that "the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every person the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery" of Christ.²⁰

Such theological understanding sets the direction for how a Catholic college can infuse its educational mission and purpose with an ethos of intellectual hospitality and an attitude of welcome for all of the diverse members of its academic community. *Gaudium et spes* offers a theological model for how a college can be specific about its Catholic nature and yet at the same time embrace faculty, students, and administrators who are not Catholic or who may be disaffected Catholics. The key is a profound respect for human dignity based on the biblical belief that we are all created in God's image.

In chapter two, the document turns to the theme of the "Community of Humankind."²¹ The foundational idea in this chapter is the importance of mutual respect for all persons in light of the Christian commandment of love.²² This commandment applies even and especially to our relationships with those who are different from ourselves.²³ Human equality is an imperative derived from the deeply held assumption of basic human dignity.²⁴

In their mission statements, many Catholic colleges mention the centrality of the common good as a core value. *Gaudium et spes* describes the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment. . . ."²⁵ In today's complex world, the common good involves the rights and duties not only of the local community, but indeed of the whole human race, and extends to the care of the planet itself: "Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family."²⁶

The document mentions certain general principles involving how the Church should address specific problems in the world, keeping the

¹⁹ Ibid., sec. 21.

²⁰ Ibid., sec. 22.

²¹ Ibid., sec. 23-32.

²² Ibid., sec. 24; see also Rom 13:9-10; 1 Jn 4:20.

²³ Ibid., sec. 27-28.

²⁴ Ibid., sec. 29.

²⁵ Ibid., sec. 26.

²⁶ Ibid.

common good in the forefront. Among the most important of these principles are human rights, the unity of the human family, the responsibilities of citizenship, and peace among the community of nations.²⁷

Contemporary Catholic colleges can understand and define their unique and distinctive place in American higher education through the rich and important theological themes and practical suggestions in *Gaudium et spes*. The document challenges Catholic colleges to open engagement with the world in a continuous dialogue for the transformation of societies and cultures. It stresses the importance of academic disciplines as ways of enriching and advancing that dialogue for the critical evaluation of human problems and the development of solutions. It establishes basic human dignity, equality of all persons, and the common good of the entire human family as foundational principles for Catholic higher education.

Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

For more than twenty years, Merrimack College has been home to The Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations. On the Feast of St. Francis, October 4th, 2008, this center expanded its mission to include Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations. Because of the work of the center, our academic community has been acutely aware of the importance and complexities of interreligious dialogue. So, *Nostra aetate*²⁸—In Our Time—has been a critical part of our conversations on Catholic and Augustinian mission.

This document was also promulgated during the last session of Vatican II, appearing two months before *Gaudium et spes* in October 1965. A brief statement of only a few pages, *Nostra aetate* contrasts significantly with the sixty plus pages of *Gaudium et spes*. However, the two documents promote the same openness to the world and both call for dialogue and mutual respect. *Nostra aetate* focuses specifically on the Church's relationship with other religions, in particular with Hinduism, with Buddhism and, in a special way, with the other two Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Islam. At most contemporary American Catholic

²⁷ Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 41, 42, 75-93.

²⁸ Pope Paul VI, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

colleges, one finds representatives of other religions among faculty, students, and staff. This document provides a theological guide for how the Catholic and Christian members of the academic community should relate with their colleagues of different faiths.²⁹

Part of the mission of the Catholic college is to promote “unity and love among men, indeed among nations,”³⁰ emphasizing “what men and women have in common and what draws them to fellowship.”³¹ A Catholic institution of higher education is the ideal venue for realizing the document’s exhortation “that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, [Christians] recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these peoples.”³²

A special, heartfelt exhortation—noteworthy in that it was written more than forty years ago—is made to Christians and Muslims to move beyond the quarrels and hostilities that mark their shared histories, to work for mutual understanding, and to cooperate together for social justice and human welfare in the world, as well as for peace and freedom.³³

The longest section of *Nostra aetate* is devoted to the Church’s relationship with members of the Jewish faith. Christians are reminded that their faith is inherited from the children of the patriarchs and Moses, and that the two religions share a “common patrimony.”³⁴ The Council “wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.”³⁵

The theological foundation of interreligious dialogue promoted in *Nostra aetate* rests on the same major theme found in *Gaudium et spes*: the dignity of the human person. No matter what religion we profess, we are all created in God’s image.³⁶ “No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between person and

²⁹ Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, sec. 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, sec. 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, sec. 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, sec. 5.

person or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.”³⁷

Dignitatis humanae: Declaration on Human Freedom

The third document that significantly shapes the self-understanding of American Catholic higher education was promulgated on the same day as *Gaudium et spes*, December 7, 1965, as the Second Vatican Council drew to a close.

*Dignitatis humanae*³⁸ took shape and form at the Council largely through the efforts of an American Jesuit, Fr. John Courtney Murray. It is remarkable that such a document could emerge from a Church long suspicious of liberal democracies and of other political and seemingly antireligious consequences of the Enlightenment. “Americanism” had once been branded as a heresy, and American theologians who spoke for religious liberty were castigated by their peers or silenced by the Vatican.³⁹

There are three main ideas in *Dignitatis humanae* that enrich the distinctive educational vision and mission of American Catholic colleges. They are themes featured prominently in *Gaudium et spes*: profound respect for the dignity of each person, respect for individual conscience, and attention to the common good.

Murray’s theology of religious liberty rests on freedom of conscience, a theme present in *Dignitatis humanae*. Every person is “bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God;”⁴⁰ no one should “ever be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience;”⁴¹ the “exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts whereby a person sets his or her life course directly toward God.”⁴² In its treatment of religious freedom, *Dignitatis humanae* reads in many places like a theological corollary to the First Amendment, proclaiming that both individuals and communities

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Pope Paul VI, “Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Human Freedom,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

³⁹ Robert W. McElroy, *The Search for an American Public Theology: The Contribution of John Courtney Murray* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

⁴⁰ Paul VI, “Dignitatis Humanae,” sec. 3.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

have the right to exercise religious choice, and that this right should never be hindered “either by legal measure or by administrative action on the part of government. . . .”⁴³ “Government is therefore to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws, and by other appropriate means.”⁴⁴

The title of the document, however, reveals that the theological foundation upon which the Council builds its argument for religious liberty is not primarily Murray’s quintessentially American theme of freedom of conscience. As in *Gaudium et spes* and *Nostra aetate*, the dignity of the human person (*Dignitatis humanae*), derived from the biblical anthropology of “in the image of God,” grounds religious liberty.⁴⁵

Following the spirit of *Dignitatis humanae*, one can easily argue that the American Catholic college has an institutional responsibility to protect and defend by all reasonable measures the dignity of all its members since, no matter which religion or conviction they embrace, they are seen to be made in God’s image. This includes honoring the sanctity of individual conscience and respecting the religious liberty of all members of the academic community.

The themes of freedom of conscience, of inviolable human rights, and of religious liberty are balanced by another theme as prominent in *Dignitatis humanae* as it is in *Gaudium et spes*: the common good.⁴⁶ In a typically Catholic theological fashion, the document situates the rights and freedom of the individual in the wider context of community and society. “In the exercise of their rights, individual people and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all. All people are to deal with their fellows in justice and civility.”⁴⁷ Here again, there is a direct application to the educational mission of the Catholic college, which should promote the notion of the common good.

This value of the common good translates directly into responsibility for one’s local community, for one’s country, and for the world. A student’s education at a Catholic college should include learning and

⁴³ Paul VI, “*Dignitatis Humanae*,” sec. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. 6. In these and similar statements, the Church also references theocracies around the world where Catholics and other Christians are minorities.

⁴⁵ Paul VI, “*Dignitatis Humanae*,” sec. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, sec. 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

mentoring that advance a young person's experience of basic human dignity, of respect for the sanctity of conscience, and of responsibility for all levels of the common good.

Ex corde Ecclesiae: From the Heart of the Church on Catholic Universities

Our dialogue about Merrimack College's Catholic and Augustinian mission began in earnest with the publication of *Ex corde Ecclesiae*⁴⁸ on August 15, 1990. This Apostolic Constitution has been made widely available to our academic community and has sustained and furthered our conversations in significant ways.⁴⁹

All the major themes highlighted from the three documents previously cited in this paper are found in *Ex corde Ecclesiae* and are specifically applied there by Pope John Paul II to Catholic higher education. For example, one finds in *Ex corde Ecclesiae* an affirmation that Catholic colleges "immersed in human society, as any university"⁵⁰ are to be instruments of "cultural progress for individuals as well as for society."⁵¹ By teaching and by research, they should promote the dignity of human life and justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing of the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level.⁵²

Members of the academic community are to enjoy academic freedom "so long as the rights of the individual person and of the community are preserved within the confines of the truth and the common good."⁵³ While Catholic teaching and discipline are to influence the nature of the academic community, each person's freedom of conscience

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.

⁴⁹ See John P. Langan, S.J., ed., *Catholic Universities in Church and Society: A Dialogue on Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 1993). See also Alice Gallen, O.S.U., ed., *American Catholic Higher Education: Essential Documents 1967-1990* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 189-237.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 32.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 12. Note here how, as in *Dignitatis humanae*, the rights of individual conscience are to be held in creative tension with the common good and the dignity of every person. This approach is somewhat counter-cultural amidst the individualism of contemporary America but is characteristic of the best traditions in Catholic theology.

is to be fully respected.⁵⁴ The religious liberty of non-Catholic members of the academic community is to be respected; in turn, they are asked to respect the Catholic nature of the college or university.⁵⁵ Catholic colleges, like other private and public institutions of learning, should serve the public interest through teaching and research, being committed to the promotion of human solidarity and its meaning in society and in the world.⁵⁶

However, there is also a topic of special emphasis in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, as it was of particular interest to John Paul II himself as a philosopher. In the first paragraph, he states that a Catholic college's privileged task is "to unite existentially by intellectual effort two orders of reality that too frequently tend to be placed in opposition as though they were antithetical: the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth."⁵⁷ The two orders to which he refers are the order of faith ("the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth") and the order of reason ("the search for truth").⁵⁸ The whole introduction to *Ex corde Ecclesiae* is dedicated to this relationship between faith and reason as elaborated by John Paul II, and to the central role of this relationship in the intellectual life and academic culture of a Catholic college or university.⁵⁹

The creative tension between faith conviction and the continued search for truth is a complex dynamic. When a person becomes convinced of the true value of a particular faith, or—to put it philosophically—when a person is clear about his or her basic assumptions or philosophical starting point, then what is the relationship between that faith or that set of presuppositions and the believer's continued use of reason and intellect to explore both the implications as well as the contradictions of faith? Once converted, once convinced of the truth claims of Christianity, what becomes of unfettered intellectual inquiry? Can the true believer put aside dearly held assumptions or profound convictions and engage with nonbelievers or believers from other faiths in a truly free and open dialogue? By virtue of their faith, are students and faculty who believe in Christ less engaged in a true, open, and continuing quest for truth? Are scholars and teachers who do not believe in Christ or in God, by virtue of their positions or opinions, on an endless and fruitless search

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, General Norms, Article 2, 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, sec. 27.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, sec. 37.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, sec. 1.

⁵⁸ This is the theme of John Paul's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, "Faith and Reason", promulgated on September 15, 1998, http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0216/_INDEX.HTM.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 1-11.

until and unless they eventually discover God in Christ? How can colleagues in a Catholic college or university continue together on the search for truth within an academic community that includes everything from conviction to agnosticism to atheism? These have been continuing questions in our conversation on mission.

John Paul II quotes Saint Augustine on this point. “*Intellege ut credas; crede ut intellegas.*”⁶⁰ That is, seek to understand in order that you may believe; believe in order that you may seek to understand. Augustine and John Paul II posit that it is only “the united endeavor of intelligence and faith that enables people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God. . . .”⁶¹ Both also claim that it is only this “united endeavor of intelligence and faith” that equip us to move forward in an impartial search for truth.⁶²

Catholic colleges contribute to the academic universe and the scholarly life by institutionalizing this teaching that human intellectual endeavor is more complete and fulfilling when both our capacity for conviction and our capacity for questioning are held in a continuous, creative, and heuristic tension, supported by a profound respect for colleagues engaged in the same arduous endeavor. The intellectual ethos of a Catholic college should honor both faith and reason by challenging members of the academic community to be forthcoming about their most basic religious and philosophical assumptions and also by encouraging open, respectful, and continuing dialogue on important religious, ethical, and political concerns and questions.

St. Augustine’s own conversion to Christianity can serve as a model for this seeming contradiction between believing one has found the font of truth even while continuing to search for truth. Augustine’s early life had been an intellectual odyssey and existential journey not unlike that of many of today’s college students and professors. He examined and explored various schools of thought such as Manichaeism, Aristotle’s categories, academic skepticism, astrology, and neo-Platonism.⁶³ At the

⁶⁰ Saint Augustine, Sermon 43, paragraph 9. See Edmund Hill, O.P., trans., *Sermons II (20-50)* (New York: New City Press, 1990), 241. Pope John Paul II includes this quotation from Augustine in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 5.

⁶¹ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Augustine’s *Confessions* chronicle his restless search. For a superb contemporary translation, see Saint Augustine, Maria Boulding, O.S.B., trans., *The Confessions* (New York: New City Press, 1997).

same time, he longed for a teacher or mentor who might show him the way.

Augustine's conversion at age thirty-two consisted of the discovery of Christianity as a convincing system of belief, thought, and ethic. After his baptism, Augustine, ever the restless searcher for truth, found within himself a new source of confidence and curiosity, a new font of love and learning that intensified his intellectual journey and deepened his spiritual search. He explored the soul; studied the Scriptures; and critiqued religion, philosophy and society with this new inner confidence, a confidence built upon Christ his "Inner Teacher."⁶⁴ Christ became for Augustine that teacher and mentor, an inner compass, a Virgilian companion who guided him as he ventured forth into new territories of the soul and new vistas of Christian faith and philosophy.

It is clear that conversion to Christ did not mean the end of intellectual activity for Augustine. Rather, for him, Christian faith inspired an intensification of his journey. Faith and reason were not only compatible; they were both necessary and reliable guides in Augustine's continuing intellectual pilgrimage. It is this converted, Christian Augustine, firm in faith but persistent in questioning, that John Paul II holds up as the model for a Catholic college and that applies in a special way to those institutions in the Augustinian tradition.

The contemporary Catholic college should be a place where Christians can freely explore faith and philosophy, theology and science in the context of a community of faith. Such a college, however, should also be a place where persons of other philosophical persuasions or religious commitments can, as full members of the academic community, follow their search for truth in ways that remain faithful to their best selves. In a Catholic college, this free and open dialogue, which is at the heart of the intellectual life, requires both the risk of mutual honesty about diverse convictions of faith and philosophy as well as the exercise of respectful reason as the vernacular of debate. The Catholic intellectual life should never foreclose any avenue of truth. The Catholic college must cherish and nurture freedom and openness in intellectual, scientific, or professional research, writing, or teaching. This continuing search for truth involves a creative tension for the Christian intellectual, a continuing, dynamic interplay between faith and reason. The question of how a believer continues the search for truth after conversion

⁶⁴ Saint Augustine, Robert P. Russell, O.S.A., trans., *The Teacher (De Magistro)* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 51, 54, 59.

to Christ—whom believers hold to be the Truth—is a crucial, open-ended, and existentially fruitful one in the contemporary Catholic college, incorporating a great diversity of opinions, religious traditions, and philosophical schools.

The Augustinian Primacy of *Caritas* and *Affectio*

In addition to the three documents of the Second Vatican Council and *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, discussions of Merrimack College's Catholic and Augustinian mission have also included consideration of unique aspects of the Augustinian educational tradition. Given the vast influence of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) on Christian theology, there are many theological themes an Augustinian college might select for an exploration of its distinctiveness. One theme, however, emerges as pre-eminent and sets the context for others: the theme of love.

It may be counter-cultural in contemporary American academic circles to suggest, as the University of Paris Augustinian scholar Saint Giles of Rome did 700 years ago, that learning should be ordered to love;⁶⁵ yet an Augustinian vision of the academy is founded on the primacy of love and understands the academic community to be, above all else, a scholarly fellowship of friends.⁶⁶ Those friends, who come from very different backgrounds, disciplines, persuasions, and beliefs, can nonetheless be united by *caritas*. As Augustine understood it, *caritas*, or love, involves a profound respect for and acceptance of one's fellow truth-seekers. This virtue, at once theological and practical, incarnates the theological principle of the dignity of every person.

Caritas exercises the important and sometimes difficult self-discipline that is necessary if we are to engage each other with respect and intellectual openness. *Caritas* is willing to practice humility, that is, a realistic assessment of one's own intellectual and personal strengths and limitations in light of the common search for truth. All members of the academic community should be afforded this respect and acceptance as they engage one another in the important and sometimes arduous search for truth. Catholic colleges can themselves demonstrate their

⁶⁵ Adolar Zumkeller, O.S.A., John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., trans. and ed., *Theology and History of the Augustinian School in the Middle Ages* (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1996), 17-23.

⁶⁶ Donald Burt, O.S.A., *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 55-76.

mission through a specific practice and charitable exercise of respect for every person's human dignity.

From an Augustinian perspective, the academic community is called to grow together through knowledge to wisdom.⁶⁷ Learning is valued because it opens opportunities for personal and societal transformation. Passionate learning, supported by a compassionate community of students and scholars, can be the beginning of lifelong transformation of self and, through one's service to others, of society. This is wisdom in the Augustinian tradition within Catholicism: knowledge put to work in the building of a new society, a "City of God" whose outlines and blueprints can already be found in the respect and acceptance—the *caritas*—of the collegiate community itself.

This Augustinian theology of love can also influence the curriculum in higher education. In an age of specialization, of isolated and esoteric academic disciplines, students need help to make connections and to integrate knowledge they gain from different fields of study.⁶⁸ Augustine's emphasis on the primacy of love provides a principle of integration and connection across the curriculum. In an Augustinian approach, respect for and acceptance of one's academic colleagues includes respect for and interest in their various disciplines and particular methodologies. Augustinian education calls for the exploration of ways to invite and engage students and faculty from different disciplines and majors into sustained and meaningful conversations on civilization and its many and diverse aspects.⁶⁹

The medieval Augustinian School of philosophers and theologians asserted that theology has as its final purpose not only love of neighbor or *caritas*, but also love of God or *affectio*.⁷⁰ All members of the Catholic college community may not believe in God or in the reality of a transcendent being. An Augustinian approach to Catholic education, however, considers the possibility that human learning, in its many and diverse particulars, is ultimately a participation in the divine. Teaching,

⁶⁷ Saint Augustine, Edmund Hill, O.P., trans., *On the Trinity* (New York: New City Press, 1991), 334-337.

⁶⁸ Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes*, 56.

⁶⁹ This emphasis on the integration of academic disciplines as a special distinction of Catholic colleges and universities is stressed in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, 15-16. See also Gary N. McCloskey, O.S.A., "Threads to be Woven: Characteristics of Augustinian Pedagogy." (Paper presented at The Augustinian Educators International Conference in Rome, Italy, July 2005).

⁷⁰ Zumkeller and Rotelle, *Augustinian School*, 23.

research, writing, and study are sacred activities, containing within themselves the seeds of transcendence. The life of the student and the scholar are filled with a thirst for knowledge, which knowledge alone cannot quench. As theology is ultimately directed to the experience of God's love, all learning in its proper way is directed to awakening within the student and the teacher an experience of self-transcendence that leaves one open to the possibility of the eternal. Indeed, for St. Augustine, those who search for the true and the good are on the way to a discovery of God.⁷¹ One can at least raise this possibility in conversations about mission.

A Magna Carta of Catholic, Augustinian Education

To conclude, a document unique to Merrimack College's context is offered. In our years of thinking together about the distinctiveness of Merrimack's Catholic and Augustinian educational mission, we developed a "Statement of Augustinian Values for Higher Education."^{71a} This statement (located in Appendix A) draws on all the texts and ideas presented in this article. Written during a period of two years by a representative task force of Merrimack's academic community and approved by governance bodies, the statement functions as a kind of *Magna Carta* on Catholic and Augustinian higher education at Merrimack. It presents the fundamental principles that underlie and support our own twenty-first century expression of the 800 year old heritage of Catholic and Augustinian education.⁷² We hope it will inspire similar statements of Catholic mission at Catholic colleges and universities in the United States and internationally.

⁷¹ This is perhaps the major theme of Augustine's *Confessions*. Results of the 2005-2006 survey "Spirituality and the Professoriate: A National Study of Faculty Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors" by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, point to a surprisingly strong interest in spirituality among the professoriate. See www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

^{71a} Merrimack College Catalog 2010-2011, 9, <http://warrior.merrimack.edu/academics/Pages/CourseCatalog.aspx>.

⁷² Pope John Paul II uses this same analogy of *Magna Carta* to describe his hopes for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 8.

Appendix A

Augustinian Values for Merrimack College

The life and thought of Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) serve as a foundation for the Catholic intellectual humanism of Merrimack College. The educational and spiritual traditions of the Order of Saint Augustine (1244 CE) also enrich our academic community. Merrimack College celebrates its Augustinian mission and affirms the following values that are ours by heritage and grace.

Before all else our college is a community of scholarship and service whose members support and challenge each other in a wholehearted pursuit of knowledge, holding one another to the highest intellectual and ethical standards.

Knowledge grows into wisdom when we recognize the limits of reason and of our individual perspectives, attend to the common good, and fashion the changes inspired by learning.

The pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning requires diligent study, freedom of thought, dedication to dialogue, and collegial respect for each person's experience.

The contemplation and reflection encouraged by the intellectual life inspire an ethical sensibility as well as a prophetic critique of social structures in light of justice and peace.

The great texts of human history, including sacred scriptures, call us to continuing dialogue as our varied religious and philosophical convictions enrich our Catholic mission.

Our lifelong pursuit of truth and understanding can be for Christians an expression of the inner pilgrimage with Christ the Teacher, for adherents of all faiths part of the search for God, and for everyone a journey of hope amidst the ever-expanding horizons of human experience.

These values invite all members of our community to learn, teach, work and study in ways appropriate to their discipline and their service, and in a manner that makes Merrimack College a vibrant Augustinian academic community.

