

Engagement with Pluralism: A New Way of Understanding and Fostering a Catholic Culture within Catholic Universities

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Abstract

This article engages in a critical dialogue with Melanie N. Morey and John J. Piderit, S.J.'s *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis*. It proposes a fifth model, the *Catholic Engagement model*. It elaborates that model by examining a working paper, "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience," that has been used in workshops at DePaul University which explore seven "deep structures" in the Catholic tradition that can form bridges linking people in a pluralistic campus culture.

Introduction

With few exceptions, Catholic colleges and universities in the United States are stronger than ever in terms of enrollments, academic excellence, and financial stability. However, they have been the subject of a series of jeremiads that decry the impending loss of their Catholic identity. The latest entry to the genre is *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* by Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, S.J. In the opening lines of this work, Morey and Piderit proclaim an ominous warning:

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A crisis is looming within American Catholic higher education. As Catholic colleges and universities analyze their position and set a course for the future, they are faced with a structural reality that threatens their ability to continue as institutions with vibrant religious cultures.¹

For Morey and Piderit, the crux of the crisis for Catholic higher education is the diminishing presence of men and women of the founding religious communities and their replacement with lay faculty and staff who may lack the spiritual and theological formation of their predecessors. By these criteria, virtually all Catholic colleges and universities find themselves in a “perilous state” regarding the vibrancy of their Catholic culture.²

To their credit, Morey and Piderit do not force all Catholic universities into a common mold, nor do they offer a single prescription for overcoming the crisis. Rather, they cluster Catholic colleges and universities into the following four types or models using identity and mission as differentials.

1. *Catholic Immersion*. These institutions have a majority of Catholic students; emphasis is placed on hiring faculty and staff who are practicing Catholics; courses in Catholic theology form a substantial part of the required coursework; and compliance with Catholic moral teachings structures residence life.
2. *Catholic Persuasion*. These institutions provide a grounding in Catholic teaching to all students, Catholic or not; there is an identifiable group of faculty and staff who are theologically grounded and practice their Catholic faith; and compliance with Catholic moral teachings structures residence life.
3. *Catholic Diaspora*. Only a minority of students, faculty, and staff at these institutions are Catholic; students are encouraged to take courses on Catholic teachings; and the institution aims to create “religiously sensitive” graduates who have been encouraged to live according to Catholic moral principles.
4. *Catholic Cohort*. The Catholic character of these institutions is carried, as the title indicates, by a group of committed faculty and staff who seek to train a cohort of students who will know and practice their Catholic faith; these cohorts function as leavens within the institution.³

¹ Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit, S.J., *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

² Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 5, 351.

³ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 62-66.

For each of these institutional models, Morey and Piderit present a distinctive set of prescriptions designed to restore and enhance the health of the Catholic culture within Catholic universities.⁴ While conceding that Catholic universities must make some adaptations to the larger culture in order to survive, the authors argue that the crux of the matter is the restoration, renewal, and transmission of an institutional culture that is *distinguishable* as Catholic.⁵

Setting Cultural Boundaries

A theory of culture, which attempts to account for both continuity and change in institutional identity by focusing on content, symbols, and actions, underlies these four models. Within these models, however, Morey and Piderit emphasize content as establishing coherence and distinguishability.

*Content is the bedrock of culture. It defines and differentiates cultural boundaries and establishes organizational constraints. It comprises the body of what new members of the organization are taught “as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel.”*⁶ (Emphasis added)

Symbols and actions must fall within distinguishable boundaries if a particular culture is to be transmitted. Morey and Piderit insist:

To secure distinguishability at a Catholic university, proposed activities have to be significant in two senses. The activity must play a central role in the life of the university as university, and the activity must be related to a central activity of Catholics.⁷

So, setting aside space for religious services and meditation is not distinguishably Catholic, and merely praying the Stations of the Cross does not in and of itself connect with a core activity of the university. Distinguishability, in other words, requires clearly established “boundary points” for activities that meet these dual criteria.⁸

⁴ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 313-39.

⁵ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 31, 56-60.

⁶ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 23-24.

⁷ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 34.

⁸ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 34-35.

We suggest that this understanding of culture as something to be restored or renewed through careful tending of boundaries is untenable on the following three levels: (1) in its understanding of culture as such; (2) in its image of Catholicism as a culture; and (3) in its understanding of universities as creating their own cultures. First, cultural coherence and distinguishability as driving concepts for the entire project contradict contemporary understandings of culture which emphasize *internal* differentiation and nonhomogeneity, the blurring of boundaries between cultures, and the participation of individuals and groups in multiple cultures simultaneously. Focusing solely on distinguishable Catholic content, symbols, and actions unduly limits the ways in which Catholicism itself can be a transformative presence across boundaries and a contributor to the formation of multiple identities in our students.⁹

Second, the vitality of Catholicism, we suggest, resides within its own internal pluralism. Catholicism, as lived, is polymorphous. Moreover, it is this internal diversity that contributes to Catholicism's spiritual richness. Holding together diverse strains while minimizing conflict is the genius of a full-blown religious tradition. In this understanding, the Bible stories of Moses on Sinai, the Matthean Jesus, the first half of the Acts of the Apostles, the fourth article of the Nicene Creed, the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, and the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter might be celebrated by those Catholics who, and Catholic institutions that emphasize religious authority and authoritative offices. Yet an equally proper way of being Catholic might extol Creation stories, nature miracles, St. Francis of Assisi, eco-spirituality, and ecological ethics with little mention of Roman authority. A third way of being Catholic—one not popular in a country devoted to consumerism—might promote asceticism as a way to celebrate Jesus' forty-day fast, his celibacy, his suffering, and the suffering of the martyrs and virgins. The Desert Fathers and Mothers would be read, and Fridays, Lent, and the traditional penitential days as well as the Sacrament of Penance would be highlighted in this incarnation of Catholicism.

DePaul University offers an example of this type of pluralism. Due to DePaul's diversity, Catholic students bring many different

⁹ Our understanding of how this transformative presence may operate at a deep structural level will become clearer as the article progresses. Here, we point simply to the role a religious tradition with a strongly positive, albeit qualified, endorsement of reason had in constituting the medieval university itself. A social institution, the medieval university eventually came to embody multiple models of reason while retaining, epistemological critiques notwithstanding, a similarly positive, albeit qualified, commitment to rational discourse.

manifestations of Catholicism to campus. Latino, Polish, and Irish Catholics sit together in an “Introduction to Catholicism” course in which various embodiments of the “official” tradition are juxtaposed with the students’ own experiences of a Catholicism permeated with culturally-distinctive spiritual practices. The Catholicism of DePaul’s Latino students, while doctrinally indistinguishable from that of other students, is certainly distinguishable at the level of “lived religion.” Our Lady of Guadalupe cannot be confused with Our Lady of Czestochowa, Our Lady of Fatima, or Our Lady of Lourdes in her history, her cultural, or her religious significance. Push this reflection a step further: What would happen if those same students were assigned a text such as Joseph Murphy’s *Santeria* in which Catholic saints and African *orishas* form a Janus-faced extrapolation and synthesis of Spanish Catholicism and diasporic African religious traditions? The question of where boundary lines should be drawn could well become vexing. Could one say that allegiance to recognized religious authorities is what makes a person not only specifically, but vitally, religious?¹⁰

This understanding of Catholicism as a pluralistic tradition should be seen as a strength, not a weakness. Wade Clark Roof has argued that modernity renders religious boundaries increasingly porous.¹¹ Even mainstream believers with close ties to religious institutions lead spiritual lives that are fluid and eclectic.¹² Only small minorities find homes for themselves within tightly structured boundaries.¹³ Therefore, a tradition that is itself richly diverse is more likely to meet the needs of today’s spiritual seekers.

Third, universities themselves are the confluence of many different cultural streams that are not easily or preferably segregated. Universities contain multiple subcultures that flourish in tension with one another. In some sectors of the university, scientific rationalism reigns as the predominant theory framing experimental methods. The products of that method are what get certified as true knowledge. In other sectors, such as service-learning classes and advocacy groups with chapters on

¹⁰ Joseph M. Murphy, *Santeria* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). For an intriguing analysis of how the image of Jesus has been interpreted within the diversity of American religious communities and for a discussion that dramatizes just how fluid boundaries can be and how polymorphously vital religious symbols can be, see Stephen Prothero, *The American Jesus* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

¹¹ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 35.

¹² Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 44.

¹³ Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 73-75.

campus (e.g., Amnesty International), service which fosters a commitment to social justice transforms students' lives. Here, truth emerges in engagement with the larger, social world. In other areas, such as the recreation center, the cult of bodily health is pursued. In short, a university as a culture is polycentric. Not one of the examples just mentioned is distinguishably Catholic, and it would be naïve to assume that one can simply displace these alternative, transformative centers. The question, rather, is whether multiple centers of Catholic content, symbols, and actions attain a transformative power within the polycentric culture.

If Catholicism and Catholic universities are not monolithic, neither are Catholics; many cultural streams commingle in each of our lives. Emphasizing an understanding of culture as, in Georgetown theologian Peter Phan's words, "the ordering principle and control mechanism of social behaviors without which human beings would be formless,"¹⁴ Morey and Piderit minimize precisely what keeps genuine cultures vibrant. Historical process with all of its ambiguities and contradictions—in the case of Catholic universities, characterized best by an artful fusion of pragmatism and idealism in connection with a polymorphous tradition—is what keeps a culture alive, not content.¹⁵ Culture is a dialogue between the past and the present in which we seek what is going forward.

DePaul University, in affirming its Catholic identity, has chosen to remain true to this more complex understanding of culture. A document entitled *Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience*,¹⁶ formulated out of ongoing conversations among upper level administrators, faculty, staff, and students puts it this way:

Institutions are more than the sum of their parts. Institutional identity is complex. The identity of a Catholic institution is very complex. An institutional identity that strives to be at one time Catholic, Vincentian, urban, and university is most complex. Moreover, to relate one's personal and professional identity to a community of religious faith and practical activity that is 2000 years old is a formidable task. For an institution, the task is even more daunting. An institution which claims to be Catholic will incarnate only a portion of the complex richness that is Catholicism.¹⁷

¹⁴ Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 219.

¹⁵ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 218-20.

¹⁶ "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience," (paper developed summer 2003, DePaul University, Chicago), 1. Available on request.

¹⁷ Ibid.

A Fifth Type of Catholic University: The Catholic Engagement Model

Given our disagreement with Morey and Piderit over the formative concept of culture, we wish to propose a fifth model, the *Catholic Engagement* model. This model affirms the *de facto* internal pluralism of most Catholic universities as a positive condition for truly transformative learning. This is especially the case when it comes to engagement with religious diversity. Morey and Piderit present this possible way of being a Catholic university without truly grasping its distinctiveness when they quote one unnamed university president as saying:

[Our] Catholic identity is intermixed with our identity to have a campus that really starts to have a dialogue among other faiths . . . we have kids from so many religions that one of the best things we need to do is fortify how the Catholic religion can lead in embracing other religions, creating interfaith dialogue and making sure our kids are appreciative, aware and articulate of their own values and ethics coupled with the ability to see the vision and the beauty and merit and worth of other peoples' faiths.¹⁸

The *Catholic Engagement* model does not present pluralism, which includes the strong presence of what Morey and Piderit call, the “non sectarian academic model,” as a threat to Catholic identity.¹⁹ The *Catholic Engagement* model recognizes the pluralism of its three publics—the Catholic community in its widest sense, the academy, and the larger society—as intrinsically positive and enters into dialogue with these diverse publics. In contrast to all but Morey and Piderit’s *Catholic Diaspora* model, this fifth model does not see Catholic identity as maintained by creating what Mary Douglas calls a “high grid/high group” culture, i.e., a culture constituted by firmly fixed rather than fluid boundaries both in terms of ideology (grid) and behavioral conformity (group).²⁰ Engagement implies lowering drawbridges, opening gates, and being willing to be transformed in unpredictable ways.

Genuine Catholic identity, Peter Phan argues, is not to be gained by setting one culture over or against all others.

¹⁸ As quoted in Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 159.

¹⁹ Morey and Piderit, *Catholic Higher Education*, 80-83.

²⁰ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 77-92.

Rather than *differentiation* and *exclusiveness*, I conceive Catholic identity as *intensification* and *deepening* of those deep structures that are pervasive in the Catholic church's faith and practice and that are possessed in common with other Churches and even with non-Christian believers. In this way ecumenical and interreligious dialogues do not constitute a threat to the preservation of the Catholic identity; rather they provide necessary means and opportunities for deepening and intensifying the Catholic identity, not over [or] against the others but with them.²¹

Phan's point is made in "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience" in the following way:

Living as we do in a diverse and pluralistic society, city, and university, we know and embrace the fact that some members of our university community will not affirm DePaul's institutional beliefs and values and that even those of us who do agree with them will interpret them in different ways. Because DePaul aspires to be fully pluralistic as well as fully Catholic, we engage in joyful conversation with those in our midst who espouse alternative viewpoints. We seek a mutual enrichment. DePaul's understanding of its Catholic tradition, in fact, commits it to affirm this dialogical pluralism. The diversity of faculty, staff, and students is the condition for the kind of education that DePaul affirms.²²

Three key contrasts with Morey and Piderit rise to the surface in the quotations from Phan and from "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience." First, both quotations place a priority on *bridging versus bonding*. In a university context which is highly diverse and in which a pluralism of religious beliefs and affiliations flourishes, the elements of Catholicism that take precedence are those that many members of the university community can affirm from their own standpoint. Bridge concepts encourage the "dialogical pluralism" that we seek.²³ Second, there is the leap of faith that Catholicism, as a culture-transforming religion, is carried forward more by its deep structures, which may be shared, than by those elements of doctrines and of practices that set it apart. Third, none of the four models that Morey and Piderit offer presents a full-fledged commitment to dialogical pluralism. The *Catholic Persuasion* model, which comes closest, indicates by its title a limit to dialogue. From the standpoint of the *Catholic*

²¹ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 59.

²² "Catholic Identity," 1.

²³ Martha Nussbaum credits Jacques Maritain as an early proponent of this view, specifically with regards to human rights in his *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943). See Martha Nussbaum, "Aristotle, Politics and Human Capabilities," *Ethics* 111 (October, 2000): 105.

Engagement model, such foreclosing damages the Catholic culture of the university itself. We know the many things that Catholic universities have been; we do not yet know what kind of Catholic culture these universities may yet create.

In explaining his understanding of Catholic identity, Phan takes aim at direct methods that seek to spread knowledge of doctrines and practices that distinguish Catholics from others. It is not that young Catholics have never learned these teachings, he argues, but they fail to be persuaded by the reasons offered in their support. They lack an understanding of the “deep structures” alluded to in the statement we have quoted. In the case of Catholicism, Phan points to “sacramentality, mediation, communion and the ‘analogical imagination’” as examples of deep structures.²⁴ We may conclude that such structures create an ethos, habits of both heart and mind, and modalities for processing experience. Operating on both conscious and unconscious levels, these structures constitute a form of life. Phan sees Catholic identity established *indirectly* through reflection on these deep structures, which are frequently shared with other traditions. This is the case with a sacramental structure, shared with Anglicans and Orthodox Christians, which promotes “a positive appreciation of created realities as mediation and sacrament of their divine Creator.”²⁵ Such reflection forms intellectual and moral virtues, ways of perceiving the world and acting within it that resonate with the chords of a Catholic spirituality. In our judgment, engagement with such structures has the potential to create bridges linking the alternative worldviews that *de facto* inform the pluralistic culture of all but the most conservative Catholic college or university.

We see evidence of the transformative power of the indirect approach of the *Catholic Engagement* model in an analogous case. Multiple surveys of DePaul University’s faculty and staff, as well as the reports of outside evaluators, indicate a remarkably strong and pervasive commitment to DePaul’s Vincentian mission. This commitment extends to specific hallmarks of that mission: a commitment to first generation students, to diversity, to engagement with the urban context as an extended classroom, and to community service.

The results of these surveys indicate that DePaul’s faculty, staff, and students have appropriated the Vincentian tradition. However, the

²⁴ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 53-55.

²⁵ Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 55-58.

surveys do not reveal how faculty, staff, and students over time have reshaped the Vincentian tradition. One clear example of this reshaping is the gradual inclusion of a commitment to diversity as part and parcel of DePaul's Vincentian mission. While DePaul's Vincentian commitment to the poor originally meant a commitment to the children of European Catholic immigrants, that commitment now extends to a much broader racially, ethnically, and *religiously* diverse population of first generation college students.²⁶ To the chagrin of many Catholics in the DePaul community, Vincent's own embodiment of a reformed Catholicism is, in practical terms, eclipsed in this appropriation. Neither is it acknowledged that the value of diversity is explicitly honored by a church with a universal mission.

While, as in any culture, not all salient traits are affirmed to the same degree by all participants, there is, in Wittgenstein's phrase, a "family resemblance" among the various embodiments even though the members of the DePaul community approach and affirm its Vincentian mission from multiple religious and nonreligious standpoints. In light of this analysis, the obvious question arises: Why could we not achieve the same ends with the university's Catholic mission and identity?

²⁶ DePaul's Office of Institutional Planning and Research conducted faculty and staff surveys in 2005 (faculty n=483; staff n=674), 2007 (faculty n=528; staff n=662) and 2009 (faculty n=511; staff n=816). One section of the surveys was devoted to topics regarding mission and another to issues of diversity. In each of the years surveyed, topics explicitly relevant to DePaul's Vincentian mission were addressed, and in 2007 and 2009, a topic related to Catholic identity was added. In 2005, 89.2% of faculty and 89.3% of staff; in 2007, 91.7% of faculty and 90.2% of staff; and in 2009, 91.5% of faculty and 95.3% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I have a good understanding of DePaul's mission." In 2005, 81.0% of faculty and 75.4% of staff; in 2007, 82.7% of faculty and 76.8% of staff; and in 2009, 84.0% of faculty and 84.2% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I can see the relationship of my work and DePaul's mission." In 2005, 75.9% of faculty and 74.1% of staff; in 2007, 76.0% of faculty and 77.4% of staff; and in 2009, 78.1% of faculty and 87.5% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "The heritage of Vincent de Paul remains relevant to the university today." In 2005, 76.2% of faculty and 74.0% of staff; in 2007, 74.8% of faculty and 73.2% of staff; and in 2009, 77.9% of faculty and 84.7% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "DePaul values the diversity of its employees." In 2007, 70.1% of faculty and 69.4% of staff and in 2009, 73.8% of faculty and 82.2% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "DePaul demonstrates a commitment to its Catholic identity." Remarkably, in every case, the most recent data show a deeper understanding and commitment to DePaul's mission among both faculty and staff than the earlier data; this contrasts with the claims of those who see a secular ethos increasingly dominating Catholic universities. "Faculty and Staff Surveys," Office of Institutional Planning and Research, DePaul University, 2005, 1007.

Catholic Identity at the Level of Deep Structures

As indicated above, a group of administrators, faculty, staff, and students gathered throughout 2003 to explore those aspects of the Catholic mission of the university that could, in theory, create bridges among the very diverse worldviews that flourish within this university's pluralistic culture. "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience," now used as a resource to stimulate dialogue, resulted from these initial conversations. The group identified seven principles that, together, constitute DePaul's way of affirming a Catholic identity and are, in addition, shared by many within our institution, Catholic and non-Catholic alike:

- The Dignity of the Human Person
- The Goodness of Community
- A Gracious, Sacramental Universe
- The Wisdom of the Past and the Creation of New Knowledge
- The Complementarity of Authentic Religious Faith and Carefully Exercised Human Reason
- The Promotion of Social Justice
- A Compassionate Commitment to the Poor and Marginalized.²⁷

While principles technically operate at a conscious level, explicitly shaping practice, the principles, as described in "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience," are most often effective at the level of Phan's deep structures.

The first two of these principles are, clearly, the dual foci around which the magnetic field of Catholic Social Teachings has been created. But "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience" consistently pushes to a deeper level: The dignity of the human person leads to the creation of a community in which all listen "carefully to the wisdom that each shares." For its part, the affirmation that an educational community is more than a set of instrumental relationships distributing private benefits (our salaries, their degrees) commits the university to "sharing the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of people of this

²⁷ Initial stimulus toward the development of these seven principles came from an article by Monika Hellwig, "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University," in *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, ed. Anthony J. Cernera and Oliver J. Morgan (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2000), 1-18.

age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted”²⁸ In the current context of disputative discourse, an ethos of listening deeply is in itself a tall order. The University in recent years has paid more careful attention to the ways in which it celebrates the successes of students and faculty. It has also institutionalized service days in which large numbers of students work alongside and share experiences with those who are disadvantaged. Sharing the joys and the sorrow of others, we undergo what Gustavo Gutierrez calls a “conversion to our neighbor.”²⁹

The description of the third principle (A Gracious, Sacramental Universe) reveals a deep structure most transparently.

There is no necessary reason for the universe to exist at all. In fact, it does. All of reality is wonderfully created. Beyond the fact of gracious existence, a fundamental insight that Catholicism shares with others is that things are often different than what they seem to be at first glance. The poem, sculpture or musical piece hides and reveals deeper truths about the human subject, Ultimate Reality, and the relationship between the two The founders of DePaul University, as well as many of its Catholic and Christian members, experience in Jesus the Christ the first and ultimate sacrament/symbol of the human encounter with the Divine, the final source and summit of all that is true, good/just and beautiful. Others in the University express their awe and affirmation of a gracious universe in a myriad of ways (sic).³⁰

There are, as well, myriad ways in which the university builds upon the foundation of this deep structure: through its nationally-recognized conservatory programs in music and theatre, through its studio art and digital media programs, through a campus that is graced with contemporary works of sacred art, through service learning courses that bring art education into Catholic and public elementary schools and a community music program that trains young musicians, especially those disadvantaged students who otherwise would never learn the wonders of playing a musical instrument. An understanding of Catholicism that focuses solely on truth and goodness and neglects beauty is extremely narrow. Writers from Gerard Manley Hopkins to Walt Whitman

²⁸ Pope Paul VI, “Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” sec. 1 as cited in “Catholic Identity,” 2. For “Gaudium et Spes” in its entirety, see http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

²⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Revised Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 118.

³⁰ “Catholic Identity,” 2.

to Annie Dillard offer a broader, shared message: beauty, too, is a modality of the sacred.

The fourth and fifth principles (The Wisdom of the Past and the Creation of New Knowledge; The Complementarity of Authentic Religious Faith and Carefully Exercised Human Reason) focus on the life of the mind. In an age when popular media and a spate of polemical tracts masquerading as scholarship posit a sharply polarized understanding of faith and reason, a Catholic university that “stands in the long tradition of Christian Humanism”³¹ will foster a countercultural vision: “Either/or” we are told; “both/and” the Catholic university replies.

“Do not cling to any ideology—even Buddhist ones,” argues the Vietnamese monk and international peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh.³² Catholic universities could well adopt and adapt such a motto in formulating their Catholic identity. The “Catholic Identity” paper cites John Paul II to the same effect when he states that revelation “can never debase the discoveries and legitimate autonomy of reason.” While, for its part, reason “must never lose its capacity to question and be questioned,” the affirmation that faith and reason are reconcilable does not mean that they can, in fact, be reconciled in this particular moment.³³ Catholic universities that affirm this vision of the ultimate unity of faith and reason must also live with the day-to-day conflicting views, including views that *seem* to conflict with the Magisterium. We say “seem to conflict” because deep listening and thoughtful conversation may reveal a shared orientation and ethos at a deep structural level.

Perhaps the best way to make this point is through a story from DePaul’s past. In the 1960s, DePaul University became one of the first Catholic universities to depart from an exclusive reliance on required courses in scholastic philosophy as the key curricular component of its Catholic identity. In an interview for DePaul’s centennial history with John T. Richardson, C.M., who throughout the 1960s presided as DePaul’s executive vice president and later became its ninth president, Charles Strain suggested that responding to the winds of change blowing through the 1960s might be expressed in an analogy:

³¹ “Catholic Identity,” 1.

³² Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2005), 90.

³³ Pope John Paul II, “Fides et Ratio,” sec 79 as cited in “Catholic Identity,” 3. For “Fides et Ratio” in its entirety, see http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html.

[I]f you open the tent flaps of the university to change, it is very important to have the truth nailed down in at least one corner, have at least one peg of orthodoxy lest the whole tent blow away. Richardson did not let me finish the thought. *'I'd never buy that,'* he interjected. *"No, [I] had no fear that open learning is going to conflict with the tenets of faith. Never had any fear."* (Italics in original)³⁴

Strain later commented on this remarkable affirmation:

There is a sublime irony here of which Richardson was fully aware. The confidence radiated by Thomistic philosophy ("the only philosophy I ever studied," Richardson said) in the ultimate harmony of reason and faith was the source of inspiration that made it possible to let go of Thomism as *the* peg nailing the university's curriculum to a preconceived orthodoxy. Openness to curricular change stemmed from a religious confidence in the catholicity of truth; that is, the ubiquity of the divinely scattered seeds of knowledge.³⁵

As one of DePaul's most pivotal leaders, Richardson embodied this religious confidence. The palpable presence of such confidence in Catholic universities is the strongest possible response to the Jeremiahs who balk at the reality that many faculty, staff, and students within Catholic universities, Catholics as well as non-Catholics, do not accept current formulations of Catholic doctrines and moral teachings. In the face of such resistance, Phan's indirect approach (as developed in the *Catholic Engagement* model which searches out shared understandings at a deep level) offers a preferable strategy.

The final two principles (The Promotion of Social Justice; A Compassionate Commitment to the Poor and Marginalized) convey a stance that neither blesses nor exclusively opposes dominant cultures but seeks, at the deepest level, cultural transformation. *Ex corde Ecclesiae* sees as a central task of a Catholic university "the promotion of 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."³⁶

³⁴ Charles R. Strain, "We Ourselves are Plural: Curricular Change at DePaul, 1960-1997," in *DePaul University: Centennial Essays and Images*, ed. John L. Rury and Charles S. Suchar (Chicago: DePaul University, 1998), 297-98.

³⁵ Strain, "We Ourselves are Plural," 298.

³⁶ Pope John Paul II, "Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities," sec. 32, as cited in "Catholic Identity," 3. For "Ex corde Ecclesiae" in its entirety, see http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae_en.html.

This transformative vision presents quite an agenda. Yet, as indicated earlier, large majorities of faculty and staff show remarkable coalescence around the Vincentian mission of DePaul University, a mission that coheres in many respects with the agenda articulated by John Paul II. Ironically, this agenda is not widely recognized as also part of the University's *Catholic* mission and identity. Catholicism, all too frequently, is associated with what divides the University community. From the standpoint of the *Catholic Engagement* model, the bridge-building task is to articulate that ethos, those habits of heart and mind, and those modalities of framing experience that are held in common at deep levels and, as such, are rooted not in a single tradition but in multiple traditions.

The Ongoing Task of Engaged Conversation

"Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience" is not an official document. It is a distillation, at one point in time, of an ongoing conversation. It is not chiseled into stone but has served to initiate conversations among various constituencies within the university. During the 2006-07 academic year, facilitators used the "Catholic Identity and the DePaul Student Experience" concept paper as a conversation starter in a series of departmental and unit in-service sessions. On five different occasions, deans, office assistants, public safety officers, vice-presidents, staff from all levels, and full- and part-time faculty were brought together with the primary intention of discussing DePaul's Catholic identity. In the 2007-08 academic year, three more sessions were held. The units involved were as follows:

- Office of Advancement
- Enrollment Management
- Facility Operations
- Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity (2 sessions)
- Joint Council (Deans, Vice-Presidents, Executive Leadership)
- Theatre School Faculty
- Treasurer's Office

In addition, the paper was used at an inaugural meeting of the Vincentian Higher Education Mission Institute, which brings representatives from DePaul, St. John's, and Niagara universities together to address mission-related issues. At DePaul, the discussion was met with a good deal of apprehension and skepticism. For years, faculty, staff, and administrators always seemed comfortable with the University's

Vincentian identity, but many never seemed to embrace or to understand the University's Catholic identity. One tenured faculty member's comment was indicative of this widely-held sentiment: "I think the whole school, like most of the University, embraces Vincentianism 100% but gets nervous and is concerned when the discussion turns to '[W]hat does it mean to be a Catholic institution?'"³⁷

Frequently, the question of whether or not the concept paper was an "official" document of DePaul arose. (For some reason, when Catholic identity is handed down in an official way or when the boundaries that Morey and Piderit speak of appear to be imposed, many individuals bristle.) Just as many cultures and many strains within cultures, coupled with a rich religious, ethnic, economic, and racial diversity comprise DePaul's identity, a similar nonhomogenous community expresses DePaul's Catholic identity. In many respects, the underlying consensus of the pluralistic DePaul community gives expression to DePaul's Catholic identity. There was a small minority who wanted this document to be the official statement on DePaul's Catholic identity. In reflecting upon the in-service, one staff member wrote, "I think the points about how our Catholic/Vincentian (*sic*) heritage sets boundaries for us as an institution, as it defines what we are and what we are not, and what these boundaries might be were interesting points."³⁸

Four of the seven principles resonated with everyone: *The Dignity of the Human Person*, *The Goodness of Community*, *The Promotion of Social Justice*, and *A Compassionate Commitment to the Poor and Marginalized*. This may be because of the association of these four principles with the Vincentian tradition and character. Whether by making sure access to the economically disadvantaged remained a reality at DePaul or by creating a campus environment that was conducive to a diverse community, people easily identified how their work furthered at least one of these four principles. DePaul employees have long prided themselves on *Vincentian personalism*—the giving of one's time, energy, and respect to each and every student and coworker at DePaul. Recognizing the connection between *Vincentian personalism* and *The Dignity of the Human Person* is an easy step, and engenders a deep structure that all may affirm. Likewise, DePaul has a long tradition of service to the community, particularly to those who are in need. The underlying ethos of Catholic teachings on social justice and a commitment to the poor is

³⁷ Anonymous staff member, personal communication. Comments cited in this text appear in evaluation forms submitted at the conclusion of the in-service workshops.

³⁸ Anonymous staff member, personal communication.

embraced by virtually all members of the community but grounded in different visions of the common good.

Other aspects of the concept paper were not as readily accepted. Some people feared that the concept paper suggests (though it strives to avoid this view) that “DePaul is in some way an arm of the Catholic Church” and “espouses institutional beliefs and values.”³⁹ For some, the concept paper’s repeated reference to official documents of the Catholic Church seemed to get in the way. When participants were asked what they would change about the in-service and/or concept paper, one responded, “The need to filter every comment through Vatican II or liturgical/sacred language.”⁴⁰ Such comments could well lead to pessimism that any proposal regarding Catholic identity can be persuasive in an institution as pluralistic as DePaul. Our espousal of a *Catholic Engagement* model must transit the narrow straits between Morey and Piderit’s sharp rocks of defined boundaries and distinguishable content as well as the all-consuming whirlpool of those who see any mention of Catholic identity as an alien imposition. It may be important to emphasize that the *Catholic Engagement* model stresses a process, not a fixed identity to be lost or restored.

The reader may have doubts about the efficacy of this model. We have doubts as well, but contend that the *Catholic Engagement* model represents the DePaul context more accurately than any of the four models proposed by Morey and Piderit. The *Catholic Engagement* model requires constant attention to and efforts toward cultivating the seven principles articulated above. Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and benefactors are in ongoing conversation regarding the Catholicity of the university. Such conversation requires diligence, patience, and mutual respect. As proponents of this model, we remain not sanguine, but hopeful.

One participant articulated a more sophisticated stance:

DePaul is only Catholic, in my mind, because it is a fully pluralistic community which has embraced a particular set of values which are consonant with aspects of the Catholic tradition. We’ve not embraced those beliefs *because* they are Catholic but rather because we have chosen them.⁴¹

³⁹ Anonymous staff member, personal communication.

⁴⁰ Anonymous staff member, personal communication.

⁴¹ Anonymous staff member, personal communication.

These comments can be read in two opposing ways: first, as confirmation of Morey and Piderit's thesis that Catholic universities are engulfed in a crisis in which any distinctive identity is lost and what remains, while it may be labeled "Vincentian" or, alternatively, "Catholic," is really a secular ethos; or second, as indication that a necessary condition for any modern culture to flourish is that *it must be chosen*. To be sure, our university has a great deal of work to do to communicate the ways in which certain deep structures with roots in the Catholic tradition can be widely shared within the university's pluralistic culture. In a prevailing "culture of choice," those who commit themselves to the content, symbols, and actions presented within the university culture do so on their own terms, exercising a "reflexive spirituality." What Roof says about our religious commitments can be applied to how individuals engage with the university's polycentric culture: the self, recognizing a plurality of possibilities, "cobble[s] together a religious world from available images, symbols, moral codes, and doctrines, thereby exercising considerable agency in defining and shaping what is considered to be religiously meaningful."⁴²

This concept of "reflexive spirituality" can be applied to institutions as well. Morey and Piderit's analysis is thoroughly modern in the sense that institutions may choose among multiple models of being Catholic. Presumably, they might even mix and match models. Within such institutions, individuals choose to embrace a communal ethos but do so in varying degrees and always on their own terms. Respecting the agent-self who takes responsibility for her choices while articulating those deep structures of Catholicism that create bridges connecting disparate worldviews and value systems requires an ongoing conversation and persistent engagement. Rather than focusing on the preservation of a presumed Catholic identity that pivots on what separates it from other cultural streams, the *Catholic Engagement* model creates a new form of Catholic identity within a pluralistic and polycentric context, an identity that is still in its infancy.

⁴² Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 74, 94-97.