

**AN ORIENTATION
TO
THE CATHOLICITY AND DOMINICAN NATURE OF
DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

Background: the Founding of Catholic Colleges and Universities in the United States by Religious Orders and the Transition to Lay Boards of Trustees *Material drawn from Philip Gleason's essay in T. Hesburgh's *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University* (1994, University of Notre Dame Press) and David O'Brien's book, *From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture* (1994, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York).*

During the early part of this century and well into the 1950s Catholic colleges were unequivocally Catholic. Their faculties and administrations usually included a substantial number of members of their founding religious orders, and these individuals quite unselfconsciously infused the spirit of the Church and the founding order into the planning of curriculum and formulation of policy. These colleges were founded to educate primarily the children and grandchildren of Catholic immigrants, to hand on a distinctive set of beliefs, and to foster an outlook on life that followed on those beliefs. This was during a time when religious belief was still strong. However, several trends changed this picture.

As Catholics moved into the mainstream of American life educationally, economically, and politically, they were caught up in the prevailing culture and began to question some Catholic teachings. Such questioning and diversity of thinking within the Catholic community was further intensified because of the cultural revolution of the '60s—the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the sexual revolution.

A third trend was initiated in 1955 when John Tracy Ellis in "American Catholics and the Intellectual Life" criticized Catholic colleges and universities for a failure to produce notable scholars and leaders in research and publication. He blamed their failures on a "Catholic ghetto mentality" and authoritarianism. Catholic educators accepted the challenge and "devoted themselves to 'the pursuit of excellence'" as defined at the great secular institutions. This pursuit of excellence led to a new sensitivity to academic freedom and a corresponding distancing of the institutions from the influence of the superiors of the founding institutes and local bishops. The pursuit of excellence also led to hiring practices that looked almost exclusively at excellence in one's academic discipline without giving much thought to the candidates' sharing or not sharing of the values of the founding religious community. The effect of this trend was intensified as fewer and fewer members of the founding religious orders were available for positions in teaching and administration at the institutions which they had founded.

The fourth trend leading to the concerns about institutional identity stemmed both from the increasing complexities of administration of institutions that were becoming more diverse in faculty, staff and students, and from opportunities for state and federal aid. The increasing complexity required a range of expertise at the board level that could not be found within the founding religious orders, and so boards were expanded to include lay men and women who could bring their experience and insight to the institutions. The opportunities for federal and state aid to education further reinforced the distancing of colleges and universities from their founding orders. In 1969, Dominican's Board of Trustees, composed of five sisters, changed the by-laws to allow inclusion of lay members. As the Board has expanded, the proportion of sisters serving on the Board has decreased. It has become increasingly important for all Board members to understand what it means for Dominican to be Catholic and Dominican. Faculty, the longest term members of a college

community, trustees and staff, too, must understand and care about what makes Dominican College Catholic and Dominican.

Dominican and other Catholic colleges must find ways of honoring their Catholicity and the spirit of their founding religious communities. This is a significant challenge, not only because of all the changes discussed above, but also because of the continuing diversity of points of view within the Catholic community.

Brief Overview of the Early History of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael and the Founding of Dominican College of San Rafael

Mother Mary Goemaere, O.P. (1809-1891) was a novice at the Dominican Convent of the Cross in Paris, when in 1849 the first Archbishop of San Francisco, Joseph Sadoc Alemany, visited the convent in his search for sisters to come to California to establish schools in his diocese. Mother Mary responded to the call, and came with Archbishop Alemany and two other young sisters to the United States. While the two young sisters settled in Ohio, Mother Mary sailed to Panama, crossed the isthmus by foot, canoe and mule, and then sailed to San Francisco and Monterey. She was later joined by two English-speaking sisters from Ohio.

They established Santa Catalina School in Monterey and were soon joined by new recruits, including Dominica Arguello, made famous by the story by Bret Hart. In 1854 the school was moved to Benicia, at the time a possible capital of the new state, and became St. Catherine's Academy. But when politics and fame bypassed Benicia, the sisters had a very difficult time bringing to Benicia enough students to survive. Mother Louis O'Donnell, then prioress general, appealed to the Archbishop, and the Sisters moved to the present location in San Rafael in 1889. The sisters who moved to San Rafael had in mind the establishment of a college for women and incorporated their new campus in 1890 under the name of Dominican College. The sisters operated Dominican Convent Lower and Upper Schools (now San Domenico School in San Anselmo), and growth toward becoming a college was gradual.

The College formally became a fully functioning junior college in 1915. The sisters were soon encouraged to extend the operations to become a 4-year college by the University of California, then its accrediting association. Faculty from the University assisted in designing the upper division curriculum and a number of them served as part-time faculty at the College when in 1917 it received approval to offer the bachelors degree.

Roots of the Dominican Order and Its Affiliation with the Universities of Paris, Oxford and Bologna

Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221) was founder of the Dominican Order. Historians believe that Dominic was a risk-taker, flexible, gentle, spontaneous, and compassionate. He had a love for all nature and simplicity of life, was zealous for truth and concerned that preaching be founded on lifelong study. He engaged in debate and persuaded by example rather than coercion.

In 1205, returning to Spain from a journey to Denmark, Dominic spearheaded the effort to draw back to the Catholic faith the Albigensians, who believed that all things material were inherently evil. In 1216 Dominic founded the first convent of Dominican sisters, converts from the Albigensian movement, at Prouille in Southern France.

Dominic had already begun to attract a following of men interested in his work of preaching and teaching, and he traveled in 1215 to Rome to seek approval from the Pope to establish a new religious order, the Order of Preachers (O.P.), dedicated to study and preaching. It was a very bold request because until then preaching had been strictly the province of bishops. Having obtained approval, Dominic sent his followers in small groups to various university centers—Paris, Oxford, Bologna—where his men could study to become well-informed, well-trained preachers. Some became renowned teachers at the universities.

In 1220 Dominic summoned representatives from all his foundations to the first General Chapter of the order. The work of chapter was to formulate the first constitutions of the order. Simon Tugwell, O.P., writes, “The salient characteristic of Dominican legislation was its flexibility....Everything was in principle open to subsequent modification, and no rules were allowed to stand in the way of the order’s work of preaching. Superiors were to have complete freedom to dispense the brethren from any obligation or observance which was likely to impede their work.” Dominic at this chapter tried to resign as the head of the order but the brethren would not hear of it. Dominic died in 1221 just after the second general chapter of the order.

The Dominican Spirit

The Dominican spirit is based on a love of truth and an effort to interrelate pieces of truth coming from many disciplines. It is not that Dominicans claim to have any corner on truth, but only that they care deeply about seeking it and refuse to be satisfied with simplistic answers to complicated questions. Along with this love of truth comes a love of the intellectual life: study, discussion, analysis, synthesis. This study is combined with a reflective, prayerful attitude, looking at God and creation, which “leads us to question, to probe, to search, to learn, and to allow ourselves to be changed” (Sister Mary O’Driscoll, O.P.) The Dominican spirit includes a joy stemming from faith and confidence in God’s love. Dominicans are eager to share with others the fruits of their prayer, study and contemplation. Contemplation, which includes openness to the Spirit, leads not only to new understandings and insights but also to the love of God and one’s neighbor.

Dominicans have a strong sense of community which is combined with a respect for each individual and his gifts and which listens to the voices of colleagues. “The Dominican quest for truth is not done in isolation, but in community. It makes claims on our lives. It demands some congruence between what’s inside and what’s outside.” (Sister Kay Ashe, O.P.) Finally, the Dominican spirit includes an appreciation of the arts and a sensitivity towards aesthetics.

Mottos of the Dominican Order reflect the above spirit:

“To praise, to preach, to bless”

“Veritas” (Truth)

“To contemplate and to give to others the fruits of ones contemplation”

Note: The University shield with its motto, “Veritas fax ardens” (Truth, a burning torch) reflects the same concern for truth and stems from a dream Jane d’Aza, Dominic’s mother, had before his birth. She saw him as a small dog running through the world with the torch of truth in his mouth. (*Domini canes*—the hounds of the Lord, a play on words and the name Dominican)

The Catholic Identity Statement

Dominican University of California is an independent, Catholic, international, learning-centered university which derives its identity from the tradition of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, who founded it as Dominican College of San Rafael. This tradition traces its elements to its 13th century founder, St. Dominic Guzman, who, in response to the contemporary needs of the Church and society, established his Order of Preachers. The tradition is committed to a theological view of reality, a view that sees human destiny ultimately worked out within a context which is transcendent and eternal. This tradition, which expresses itself within the spirituality, doctrine and moral values of Catholic Christianity, is no less committed to a profound intellectual and practical understanding of and service in the world, in all its social, political, scientific and cultural manifestations. The Dominican tradition, respecting as it does the integrity and freedom of the individual conscience, does not impose itself but reveals itself through the lives and practices of those who share it.

In the long Dominican tradition, human nature is seen as essentially constant; commitment to intellectual inquiry is central; a deep respect is given to individuals and to whatever they study. This search for truth involves the whole person, is more likely to be collaborative than competitive, and is meant to lead to clarity and empathy, to knowledge and action. Dominican study on this campus, historically grounded in the Western and Judaeo-Christian traditions, is not only open to but enriched by an increasingly diverse historical awareness and a contemporary global perspective.

When we speak of the Catholic identity of Dominican University of California, then, we do so with the insights of a specific religious tradition and educational philosophy. Dominican education, which sees knowledge as virtue, is dedicated to fostering mutual respect, enhancing beauty, and creating change in the world beyond college, where ideas born of study can have practical consequences. We wish to assure that University plans, policies, decisions and allocation of resources in all spheres of operations are consistent with this Catholic and Dominican identity.

Dominican Vision of Education

St. Dominic Guzman's vision of reality was one of wholeness: integration of the human with the divine, and affirmation of the goodness in all creation. The Dominican vision of education, therefore, seeks to reconcile seeming opposites: the religious and the secular, individuality and community, the body's potential and the aspirations of mind and spirit. It aims to develop an appreciation of creation in all its forms through the study of the sciences, arts, and works of the imagination, while fostering a reflective attitude combined with social commitment. It is hospitable to multiple cultural traditions and teaches a respect for the human person, with concern for individual human rights and social justice.

In the curriculum and in student life, the University emphasizes the importance of integrity and of freedom of individual conscience along with its corollary, the importance of developing an informed conscience. To this end faculty are encouraged to include consideration of ethical issues and application of ethical principles within disciplines, and to cultivate in students a habit of reflection. The University, as a Catholic university, and individual Catholics within it, recognize and live with the tension between the primacy of the individual conscience, honestly informed and responsible for making moral choices, and the teaching of the Church, responsible for preserving the truths of faith and interpreting and applying them to the changing circumstances of human history.

The Catholic Identity Study Group

Practical implications of the above statements.

1) The curriculum should reflect the Dominican Vision of Education:

- a) interdisciplinary, liberal arts emphasis in general education
- b) strong component of theology available in the religion program
- c) openness to the spiritual dimension of life
- d) concern for ethics and ethical behavior
- e) concern for social justice

2) Orientation of prospective members of the University community--students, trustees, administrators, faculty and staff--to our institutional philosophy and values and our Catholic and Dominican identity.

Persons associated with the college as students, faculty, staff, administrators, trustees or other volunteers may be of any faith, or none. However, in order to participate in the community as fully as possible, they should have a sensitivity to Catholic issues and to those who consider important a religious/spiritual dimension of life.

Persons being considered for employment or volunteer association with the University should receive early in the inquiry process a statement of the University's Catholic/Dominican identity and its broad implications. Reflecting on this statement will allow them to consider whether this is a campus culture in which they could feel comfortable.

3) Maintenance, for individuals of all faiths, of an active campus ministry program that will nourish faith and foster generous lives—opportunities for liturgy, reception of the sacraments, prayer, building community, counseling, lectures on current topics, and opportunities for community service

4) Consistency of message: “A university that desires to be a great Catholic university must seek excellence in all it does...one does not honor God with mediocrity...and not swerve from the path it has taken for any expediency. Similarly the message it conveys to its faculty and students must also be conveyed to its friends, alumni and the world at large. All entities with whom the Catholic university interacts must hear the same message, must know that the university is engaged in the search for truth and knowledge that includes the truth about, and knowledge of God.” William D. Gray in T. Hesburgh, 1994, *The Challenge and Promise of a Catholic University*.

5) Sensitivity in communications and facility use: Official spokespersons for the College need to be very sensitive to the issues of Catholic identity, neither publicly advocating positions opposed to Catholic Church teaching nor seeking to impose church teaching on others. Those responsible for facilities need to be sensitive to our Catholic identity when contracting with individuals or organizations to use our facilities.