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# Catholicity of Holy Cross College attacked, defended

By Tanya Connor

WORCESTER — There is no meaningful sense in which Holy Cross College is Catholic, a Clark University professor told Holy Cross alumni Friday.

Michael Pakaluk, professor of philosophy at Clark, spoke about Holy Cross and Catholicity at a forum sponsored by the Holy Cross Cardinal Newman Society held on campus during alumni weekend.

"You simply cannot get a

good Catholic education at Holy Cross," such as studies of Thomas Aquinas, apologetics or Jesuit "luminaries," Mr. Pakaluk said. At best, he indicated, students leave with "warm fuzzies" such as a preferential option for the poor.

But Jesuit Father Michael C. McFarland, Holy Cross president, who was not at the forum, said Mr. Pakaluk's statements were very broad and cannot be supported by facts.

Father McFarland said that

Holy Cross encourages discussion of its Catholicity and takes that very seriously. He said he thinks some of the specific attacks are somewhat silly and that the college is more in tune with today's church than some of its attackers are. He said he thinks Holy Cross has a good record of graduates continuing to serve the church loyally and creatively.

Of Mr. Pakaluk's statements he said, "His definition of Catholic is far too narrow and it's not mainstream."

Many people say the preferential option for the poor is fundamental to being a Catholic, he said, and noted that Holy Cross has a course about Jesuits. The catalog also lists a course about St. Thomas Aquinas.

Jesuit Father William E. Reiser, professor in the religious studies department at Holy Cross, who attended the forum, said it was healthy — it gave people an opportunity to voice their concerns. But he said it would be better to get other points of view too.

Concerned alumni formed the Newman Society May 14 as an attempt to renew the college's Catholic identity, according to Vic Melfa, society president, Class of 1957.

David O'Brien, director of the Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture at Holy Cross, distributed a handout Friday in which he said Holy Cross "insists that exploration of fundamental religious and philosophical ques-

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# Forum discusses Catholicity

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tions" is essential and acknowledges its "special responsibility" to enable everyone here to "encounter the Catholic intellectual tradition" and "participate in the life and work of the contemporary church."

No one there believes the curriculum adequately expresses all those commitments, he said, but the faculty is reviewing the curriculum, the president invited people to consider how to strengthen philosophical and religious grounds of liberal learning and the trustees established the new Center.

Speaker Matt Smith, who graduated from Holy Cross this spring, said some religious studies classes at Holy Cross teach things opposed to church teaching, like Jesus having brothers and sisters or Jesus being conceived by Mary being raped.

Some students who do not have a good Catholic education when they come to Holy Cross look for it there and are turned away from the church when they hear things like this, he said. Mr. Smith said later that another student told him about this class.

Father Reiser suggested that probably in this case, as in some others, a student misunderstood what was being said in the class, and Mr. Melfa said that that highlights the need for a core curriculum.

The core curriculum older alumni recall included a number of religion and philosophy courses, whereas now there seems to be only one on Catholicism even offered, Mr. Pakaluk indicated.

Father Reiser said there is more to ~~courses than~~ meets the eye, and that ~~students'~~ doctrinal and spiritual literacy is the responsibility of the whole college, not just the religious studies department.

Mr. Pakaluk said Holy Cross does not even help students who want to grow in faith, but attacks faithful Catholics. He cited as an example a letter Father McFarland wrote to a freshman who objected to the play "The Vagina

Monologues" being performed on campus.

The student wrote that the advertising stripped women of the virtue of modesty and the play "reduces womanhood to...a variety of unnatural sexual identities, and uncontrollable, animalistic sexual drive," and as a Catholic she felt betrayed by the college's endorsement of it.

Father McFarland wrote that he regretted that she felt humiliated, but encouraged her to examine the play's messages, which he suggested included gender-based power relationships, an issue worth exploring at a Jesuit college. He said her disagreement with the play might be right but the real question was whether she could impose her view of what it means to be Catholic on others and that she might be projecting her own feelings in her criticisms.

Father McFarland said Mr. Pakaluk's points were a complete misrepresentation. He said he wrote that he respected and might agree with the student, but indicated that Catholics as good as she is felt the play was not so objectionable that it should not be shown at a Catholic college.

Mr. Smith also raised concerns about moral issues at Holy Cross, saying students - misguided or unguided - spend weekends drinking and having one-night sexual encounters.

Such behavior cannot be totally eliminated, but Holy Cross could do more to encourage students' integrity, he said. He said certain things are subtly promoted: the Women's Forum handed out condoms and sponsored "The Vagina Monologues" and some groups encouraged gays to be open and proud and erected a Gay Hall of Fame in the campus center.

But certain Catholic student groups have trouble getting recognition, he said, clarifying afterwards that he only knew for sure about one he belongs to, the Holy Cross chapter of the national student group Compass, which tries to educate students about Catholic faith, renew Catholic culture on campus and dialog

with the administration.

It took Compass three years to get recognized on campus, he said. He said the chaplains' office told them it was because they were no different from other groups. But he said the other groups focused on social service, not on teaching the faith.

Jesuit Father Gerard McKeeon, assistant chaplain, said Holy Cross is not against Catholic groups and that he worked extensively with Compass and ran into difficulties. He said he sat in on a catechism class in which they used materials from the national group, and he felt he could bring more professionalism to it, but students did not respect him or his knowledge.

Good things like students joining or remaining committed to the Catholic Church and students looking into vocations - one is entering the Jesuits - are going on at Holy Cross, he added.

Kathy McNamara, Holy Cross director of public affairs, said the Women's Forum attempted to distribute condoms in 2001 and that student affairs staff told them this was inappropriate at Holy Cross and they stopped. She said she never saw a Gay Hall of Fame.

She said ABiGaLe, the Association of Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian students, which raises issues and holds events, and Allies, a group of homosexuals and heterosexuals who try to create a more supportive environment for gays and lesbians, both live within the Catholic Church's boundaries.

In his handout Mr. O'Brien said Holy Cross is proud of its liturgy, prayer, retreats and ministry but that "there are problems here as elsewhere with religious literacy, familiarity with and acceptance of Catholic moral teaching, decline of sacramental practice, and resistance to some of the tougher demands of the church, to say nothing of the Gospel." He said they need to think harder about these challenges in collaboration with others in youth ministry.