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**Cardinal Dulles to Catholic Colleges:
 Be Truly Catholic**

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Education Interview
 by **KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ**



Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., speaking at the Cardinal Newman Society for the Preservation of Catholic Higher Education's annual conference in Washington, D.C., last month, called on Catholic colleges and universities to stop being on the defensive about their Catholicity.

"The time has come for them to regain their confidence and proudly proclaim the faith that animates them," he said. "Shifting the burden of proof to the secular institutions, they should challenge the other universities to defend themselves and to show how it is possible to find and transmit the fullness of truth if they neglect or marginalize humanistic, philosophical and theological studies."

Register correspondent Kathryn Jean Lopez spoke with Cardinal Dulles, the Fordham University theologian who was named a cardinal last spring by Pope John Paul II.

At the Cardinal Newman Society dinner a few weeks ago, you said that Catholic colleges and universities today are often "apologetic, almost embarrassed" by their Catholic identity. Can Catholic schools be both committed to orthodoxy and respected in the larger world of academia - on a par with a Yale or a Dartmouth?

I think the answer is Yes. It will take a little education for the rest of the world, though.

What do those in Catholic higher education have to do to educate the rest of the world?

I suppose the first thing they have to do is to educate themselves.

Many members of the institutions have been indoctrinated by the idea that religious knowledge is not really knowledge, that it is more of a feeling. They consider it more like poetry or a taste for music, [something that] really cannot be made academically respectable since it isn't scientific.

I think the American universities are modeled on an Enlightenment view of knowledge, as something deducible from self-evident principles or else imposed on us by experience or empirical data. Religion doesn't fit into either of those categories.

Christian religion is based on faith.

Catholics themselves have to come to understand that Revelation is a real source of knowledge and then we can build theology into the university and have a genuinely Catholic university.

Are there any schools you can point to today and say, Yes, they are doing it right; they should be examples to the others?

Many of the smaller universities are able to affirm their Catholic identity more energetically than some of the larger ones. It is harder to turn a battleship around than a PT boat. So they have made the turnaround faster, I think. Many of the larger universities are working to restore or emphasize their Catholic identities more than they were 30 years ago. They are working at it, but they have to proceed with prudence in order not to alienate the existing administration and faculty. Even presidents have limited powers, so we have to have patience.

Who, or what, is going to renew Catholic higher education - the administrations? the faculties? pressure from students? from alumni? from parents?

A combination of all of these. Certainly trustees are very important. Alumni are very important. On the whole, the alumni of the larger Catholic institutions have been very concerned that the universities have been drifting away from their Catholic moorings and I think their voices have been heard. So I am optimistic about the future.

What is a mandatum and why does a Catholic theology professor need one?

The mandatum is an authorization to teach as one who is in communion with the Catholic Church. The requirements for gaining or losing the mandatum have not been very specifically spelled out yet, so we'll just have to see how it works out.

Some bishops are inclined to give the mandatum to practically anyone who asks for it, or even people who don't ask for it. Others might be a lot more stringent in terms of orthodoxy.

To put it in context, it is important to say that the mandatum is not the main thing. The tone of the university is set by a lot of things other than the theology department. The theology department has its importance, but at present it is a minor thing at most universities. I think the mandatum is a fairly minor element in the whole picture.

Do you think more than theology professors should have to have some kind of mandatum, or at least sign onto some specific mission?

I don't put a lot of confidence in loyalty oaths. I think people can be extremely loyal without taking any kind of oath, and people who take oaths can manage to work out variant positions and seem to justify themselves. I think the main thing is to have an atmosphere in which people are proud of their Catholic identity and have confidence in it. If so, the mandatum won't raise any problems.

As you well know, it took the U.S. bishops 10 years to come up with their guidelines after the papal apostolic constitution on higher education came out. Are your brother bishops not as enthusiastic as they should be? Is that hurting schools?

Many faculty members are jealous of their autonomy and their freedom; they think that the magisterium should have nothing to do with what they are teaching in the classroom.

That may be putting it too extremely, but it does tend in that direction. They feel that the magisterium is interfering in the autonomy of the university by insisting on something like a mandatum. So there has been some resistance on the part of the universities. Faculty members want the freedom to teach whatever they feel like teaching. That is not universal, but it is true of some members.

During your career as an educator, have you seen things get better or worse in Catholic higher education, in terms of Catholic identity?

I think both. There was no problem about Catholic identity back in the 1950s. Then,

after the Second Vatican Council, or in the mid-'60s, there was a sudden shift. The universities decided to open up to all kinds of views; they invited large numbers of non-Catholics onto the faculty and the Catholics on the faculties took pride in asserting their independence of the magisterium. There was a period of confusion about what it meant to be a Catholic institution. Since about 1980, there has been a move in the other direction. There has been greater clarity about what it means to be a Catholic university.

I think most universities have been anxious to reaffirm their Catholic identities.

Some have suggested that part of Pope John Paul's motivation in giving you this honor earlier this year - elevating you to cardinal - was so that he could continue to send a message to Catholic higher education by having you say the kinds of things you have said in this interview and at your speech to the Cardinal Newman Society dinner. Do you see speaking out on these issues as part of your mission as a cardinal?

I don't think that what I have been saying has been affected very much by me now being a cardinal, although I would think that a cardinal would be expected to support the Church and the papacy. I would be inclined to do so anyway.

Whether that entered into the reasons why I was selected, I have no idea. I wasn't part of the process or consulted in advance.

You'd have to ask the people who were responsible for the decision.

I suppose they would not have selected me if I had been an outspoken dissenter on central Catholic teaching.

Kathryn Jean Lopez is executive editor of National Review Online (www.nationalreview.com).

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