

COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01610-2395

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 11, 1991

TO: Faculty and Administration
FROM: John E. Brooks, S. J., President *JEBS, 8-7*
SUBJECT: The College's Statement of Position on Abortion

Late last spring, as most of you are aware, the Student Government Association voted to recognize Students for Choice as an officially sponsored College organization. As is required, the SGA then referred the matter to the College Administration for approval. In response to the SGA's request, the Administration prepared the accompanying Statement of Position on Abortion, which has been approved by the Board of Trustees. I subsequently sent the Statement to the SGA co-chairs in a letter dated 19 November 1991.

I had anticipated that the Statement would be printed in an issue of The Crusader before the fall term ended. Since The Crusader published its last fall issue before it could print the Statement, however, I am mailing a copy to each of you.

As you will see from reading the Statement, the Administration and Trustees have attempted to balance a number of competing claims in making this decision. On the one hand we wish to affirm Catholic teaching on abortion; this requires us to deny official recognition to Students for Choice. On the other hand we affirm the freedom of inquiry that is basic to an intellectual community such as this. No faculty member, therefore, need doubt the College's continuing commitment, as outlined in Chapter VIII of The Statutes, to the principles regarding academic freedom.

College of the Holy Cross

Statement of Position on Abortion

As a Catholic and Jesuit undergraduate liberal arts college in the late twentieth century, Holy Cross attempts to be faithful to two important intellectual traditions. Each tradition values human reason deeply even as it understands reason somewhat differently from the other.

One community derives most recently from the modern Enlightenment. It places human reason at the center of historical reality, affirms its autonomy, and calls upon us to acknowledge, nurture, and preserve such basic rights as freedom of inquiry, of speech, and of religion.

The other community derives from those who have confessed faith in Jesus as the Christ. This community affirms the goodness and dignity of all of creation, including human beings, as a free gift of divine love. In receiving the self-revelation of the divine as a gift, and in discovering the dignity and destiny of human beings in this loving relation with the divine, this community does not take the presence of human beings or human reason for granted. The origins and ends of the human are caught up in the mystery of the divine-human relationship. While this community deeply affirms the dignity and calling of human reason, it does not see reason as autonomous. Reason unfolds, rather, in the context of a dialogue with the divine's ongoing self-revelation. This revelation is not a set of dogmatic propositions possessed and guarded as "the Truth" by some authoritarian institution. It belongs rather, along with reason, to our ongoing experience of the divine-human relationship. Nevertheless, this relationship has a history, and the intelligence of this community respects this history and recognizes its authority even as it continues to search for truth.

Today both of these intellectual communities affirm the dignity of each human being and uphold each individual's basic rights to freedom of inquiry, of speech, and of religion. Indeed, it is an abstraction to separate these communities sharply, since Christian faith has sought understanding in ways that have drawn it into dialogue with both the

Greek and modern Enlightenments. On many of the issues that concern the College, there is no tension between these two communities. On an issue like abortion, however, tensions can and do arise, and the College must find a way to balance the claims made by its commitment to each of them.

As a Catholic and Jesuit undergraduate liberal arts college, Holy Cross affirms the responsibility of any community to examine its commitments intelligently. This kind of self-examination is best carried out in a context where differences are honestly acknowledged and genuine dialogue between peoples with different points of view is fostered. The College, therefore, has no desire to suppress intelligent discussion and debate on issues such as abortion.

Nevertheless, Holy Cross wishes publicly to affirm and bear witness to catholic Christianity's longstanding insight that all of human life is sacred in the mystery of its origins and that abortion thus cannot be condoned. The College understands that the individual has the responsibility to make her or his own conscientious judgment on the issue of abortion. It also asserts, however, that as a community it has a right and responsibility to profess that, in the light of revelation, abortion is morally wrong. The College, therefore, will not grant official recognition to any organization that seeks to or is perceived to advance a right to abortion, nor will it allow College funds to be used to such purpose.

The College makes this affirmation, not as an authoritarian gesture intended to impose upon others a set of "values" that are beyond intelligent questioning, but as an intelligent and responsible affirmation of catholic Christianity's most basic insights about the mystery of human living and dying. As such, it has an obligation, intrinsic to its mission, both to foster deeper understanding of these insights and to bear witness to their truth.