

## Holy Cross: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

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I recently received a copy of a letter sent by four Holy Cross alumni from the late 1940s to all members of the classes of 1930 to 1970. As someone from the peer group of those writers (approaching 71), as a member of the Holy Cross faculty for 22 years (English Department), and as a member of the Society of Jesus for 52 years (Detroit Province), I felt compelled to respond to their concerns about the religious well being of the College of the Holy Cross.

The letter consists of two parts. It first expresses concern about the absence of an "intense core curriculum of religion and philosophy" and secondly about the presence of a growing secularization in the College. The second part of the letter lists six "indications" of this growing secularization. I wish to address each of these parts; but before I do that, I must point out something that anyone who studied minor logic here between 1941 and 1948 would be well aware of.

In minor logic we learned that any argument or debate must begin with a clear definition of terms. The term "secularization" as used in their letter is not at all clearly defined. First one must distinguish between "secularism" and "secularization." "Secularism is commonly defined as "a secular spirit, views, or the like; especially, a system of doctrines and practices that rejects any form of religious faith and worship." It can also refer to "the belief that religion and ecclesiastical affairs should not enter into the functions of state, especially into public education."

Their use of the term "secularization" seems to be refer to the first of the above meanings. In fact, "secularization" has multiple meanings. For example, (1) "a conversion from religious to civil ownership or use." (2) "freeing of a priest or religious from vows and rules." (3) "The depriving of any religious, character, significance, or influence." There is a fourth meaning current in theological and religious studies circles. Secularization (4) can refer to a de facto process in which sacred and secular roles are separated with no disparagement to either. Church and State, sacred and secular, each have their legitimate sphere of authority and influence.

I point this out because, although both words can mean the diminishment of sacred presence and values, "secularization" need not imply this. Holy Cross initiated a process of secularization when the Society of Jesus handed over the ownership and governance to a lay board of trustees in 1970. Another aspect of de facto secularization is the increasing number of faculty and administrators who are not Jesuits, priests, or members of other religious orders. To suggest that this "secularization" is "secularism" in the negative sense is to impugn the moral and religious integrity of the lay members of the faculty. Yes there is a change, but change is not in and of itself bad. Perhaps there has been no greater effect of Vatican II than the recognition of and promotion of the role of the laity in the Church. In fact a number of the new faculty hired this past year are Catholic, and several of that number attended Jesuit colleges and universities.

Having defined one's terms, the arguer or debater must next check the logic of his argumentation. I suggest here that the writers of the letter have used faulty logic. They assert the phenomenon of secularization and then suggest that the examples they give are

the result of that secularization. In logic we learn that one cannot logically conclude: post hoc, ergo propter hoc (after this, therefore because of this). I would suggest that most the points enumerated would have come about whether or not Holy Cross had maintained its core of theology and philosophy.

Unless I misread their letter, they seem to be implying that an "an intense core curriculum of religion and philosophy" is the reason the Holy Cross of their day was more religious than it is today. Merely listing examples does not of itself establish a cause and effect relationship. In citing Father Peter Hans Kolvenbach they rely on inuendo. They quote him as saying "For some (Jesuit) universities, it is probably too late to restore their Catholic character." Perhaps, but again this does not refer to any particular Jesuit school. There are many other reasons why Catholic and non-Catholic colleges are what they are today. There have been enormous, cosmic shifts in our cultural and intellectual worlds over the past forty years; and they are mirrored in our educational institutions.

As for the idea of a core curriculum itself, apart from the role philosophy and theology should play in it, I assured them that over the past twenty-two years the faculty has address the issue endlessly. The open market approach of the 70s gave way to the distribution requirements of the 80s and 90s; and we are currently engaged, under the direction of Father McFarland, is a long-term assessment of our curriculum and what it should be at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

I would now like to address individually the "indications" they enumerate.

1. The secularization of the faculty. This is inevitable and there is nothing wrong with it. There is one Jesuit in the philosophy department and three in the religious studies department. Both of those departments have several outstanding Catholic professors, yet by your definition, they are "secular." But without them there would be no departments. So in a very real sense this indicates nothing, not even symbolically. Would we call parishes "secularized" when lay persons officiate at church services in the absence of a priest?
2. Their claim that Father McFarland "faces faculty opposition to his hope of re-emphasizing courses in philosophy and religion, establishing a real core of studies for the 95% Catholic student body." Anyone who has ever been a faculty member you would know that initially faculty oppose most administrative initiatives, and that for a multitude of reasons. Secondly, they would be on safer ground to say "some" faculty oppose a change. I personally have heard few vocal complaints.
3. The MTV disc jockey. Maybe by getting into the industry rather than just complaining about it, some positive influence might result. And what about the social awareness he manifests in other areas of his life? Apart from the nature of that person's show and performance, one must simply ask: Is one person an indication of a trend? What about the fact that Holy Cross has the highest numbers (both absolute and percentage) of graduates entering the Jesuit Volunteer Corps of any Jesuit college or university in the United States? We have students in Mexico, Appalachia, and elsewhere helping build homes for the poor during spring break when other kids are off drinking in Florida.
4. The question of homosexual and bisexual groups needs some unraveling. First of all, these groups are not funded by the College. The modest financial support such groups

receive comes from the Student Activity fees students pay apart from tuition and other College costs. The students themselves allocate these funds through the Student

- 5. Government Association. Secondly, official Church teaching on homosexuality and bisexuality refers exclusively to a person's sexual practice not his or her sexual orientation. Such organizations play a vital role on a campus that is pervasively and often cruelly homophobic. The Knights of Columbus chapter is part of an independent outside national organization as is the Alcoholic Anonymous chapter on campus. Neither receives support from student activity funds.
- 6. Former Harvard University Law School Professor Harold Berman has said he and his colleagues have been disappointed in their discussions with Catholic universities about moral issues. This is pure inuendo and so general as to defy response. Have they visited Holy Cross? What schools have they visited? Why assume Holy Cross is one of these schools?
- 7. The sheet distributed by Kim McElaney, Director of the Chaplain's Office reveals the sorry state of religious life on campus. The profile of students presented in the column on the top left of the sheet is indeed sobering. But again, you can't argue post hoc ergo propter hoc. Holy Cross does not create such students; it inherits them from their families, just as it inherits the drinking problems students bring to college. The Chaplain's Office, the Administration, the Jesuit Community and many Catholic faculty members are deeply concerned with religious life on campus. But it is not exclusively a Holy Cross problem; it is the problem of the universal Church. The solution to this pervasive turn away from worship and sacramental life will not be found in the knowledge gathered in philosophy and theology classes (although these can play an ancillary role). They must be found in home life before coming to college and in genuine self-discovery through retreats and other religious activities while at college. I suspect that the daily Mass attendance that our generation experienced had far more to do with what we have become than did any formal introduction to philosophy and theology. Furthermore, why not focus attention on the splendid signs of religious interest among the students listed in the other two sections of the sheet?

John Henry Newman, in my opinion the patron saint of the modern church, wrote an essay on the limitations of book knowledge in making a person spiritually and religiously better. His reflection bears quoting: "The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion. . . . Logic makes but a sorry rhetoric with the multitude; first shoot round corners, and you may not despair of converting by a syllogism." The kind of conversion our culture needs will not be found primarily in philosophy and theology but in prayer and service. "Men and women for others" and "Faith in the service of justice" are not watered down versions of "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam" they are the translation of an Ignatian ideal into the realities of the age in which we live. Anyone who has made the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius knows the famous colloquy prayer in which we ask Christ that we may know him in order to love him, and love him order to serve him. This is still the guiding spirit of the College of the Holy Cross.