

The Context in Which *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* Was Written

The Catholic college and university in the United States comes out of a totally different “rational framework” from what one would find in Europe, where the educational systems trace their history back to the thirteenth century when the Christian orientation of the schools was simply a given (e.g., Paris, Prague, Bologna).

A number of recent authors have commented how the history of higher education in the United States is frequently associated with strong Christian roots. Harvard, for example, was founded primarily so that there would “not be an uneducated clergy.” If one were to examine the curriculum of Miami University at Oxford, Ohio, in 1840, one would find a curriculum that focused on the “classical languages” of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and included studies in the Bible. Many of Miami’s graduates became ordained clergymen.

These same contemporary commentators provide a history of how many institutions that originally had a strong Christian character have departed from it, and in some instances have rejected that character base. For example, George Marsden, now a history professor at the University of Notre Dame and author of *The Soul of the American University*, has explained how the influence of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has affected higher educational institutions especially with the organization taking as axiomatic that an authentic seat of higher education must be free from any religious or ideological restraints. Marsden believes that this is an unfair and outdated point of view. Some contend that the AAUP’s actions have historically treated religious colleges as second-class.

The historical background to *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* focuses on the following events:

- 1949: Catholic higher education leaders from around the world formed the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) in collaboration with the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation of Catholic Education.
- In 1965, IFCU began developing a statement about Catholic universities, using as its point of departure the Vatican II document, “The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (*Gaudium et Spes*), the largest document issued by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. On July 20-23, a regional IFCU meeting in Land O’Lakes, Wisconsin, worked on that statement. The Land O’Lakes text asserts that a Catholic university needs to be a “university in the full modern sense of the word.” It also declared “the Catholic university must have a true autonomy in the face of authority of whatever kind, lay or clerical, external to the academic community itself.” However, at the same time, the position paper said that a Catholic university must be a community “in which Catholicism is perceptibly present and effectively operative.”

- 1972: “The Catholic University in the Modern World” statement was issued by the IFCU in Rome. The document discussed the nature of a Catholic university in general terms, and listed four defining characteristics:
 1. a Christian inspiration of both individuals and community;
 2. reflection of human knowledge in the light of the Catholic faith;
 3. fidelity to the Christian message that comes from the Church; and
 4. commitment to the service of the people of God and the human family.

This document also suggested that “faculty members who belong to the Christian and Catholic tradition can bring to their research a further dimension of reality which often needs to be emphasized,” and that the department of religious studies should be “pre-eminent in scholars of the Christian and Catholic tradition.”

- April 15, 1979: Pope John Paul II issued the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*. This document was regarded as his most extensive statement on Catholic education. Its thinking prefigured *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in many ways. The document applies, however, only to “ecclesiastical universities and faculties” that have a special charter from the Holy See. In our own country, such ecclesiastical universities and faculties would be limited to The Catholic University of America and to some very select bodies, such as the Pontifical College of the Josephinum in Ohio, the two Jesuit Schools of Theology, and, in our own area, the University of Saint Mary of the Lake. In *Sapientia Christiana*, the Pope reflected that in higher education the Church carries out her mission of evangelizing by advancing human culture. He stated rather strongly in this document that “those who teach matters touching on faith and morals are to be conscious of their duty to carry out their work in full communion with the authentic Magisterium of the Church, above all, with that of the Roman Pontiff.”
- 1980: The document “Catholic Higher Education and the Pastoral Mission of the Church” was issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It came as a result of continuing discussions between the U.S. Bishops and American Catholic higher education leaders.
- August 15, 1990, Pope John Paul II issued his text on Catholic higher education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (From the Heart of the Church). The document outlines in general terms the papal vision of the identity and mission of Catholic universities and sets forth specific norms to accomplish this. From the viewpoint of this document, Benedictine University is an institution that is a Catholic university and the principles of the Apostolic Constitution do apply. This was published in English October 4, 1990.
- On May 3, 2001, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* The Application to the United States” – the General and *Particular Norms* for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in the United States.

History of Work on *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* at Benedictine University

Many Benedictine University faculty have attended and participated in “Collegium, A Colloquy on Faith and Intellectual Life” summer institutes (Lisa Townsley in 1993, John Kloos in 1994, Don Taylor in 1995, Ted Jelen in 1996, Pat Flynn in 1997, Elizabeth Kubek and Stuart Noble-Goodman in 1998, Kevin O’Connor and Peter Sorensen in 1999, John Stachniak and Alicia Cordoba Tait in 2000).

In Summer 1995, Tom Byrnes, Barbara Grabowski, Laurel Jeris, Phyllis Kittle, Ralph Meeker, Peter Sorensen, and Fr. David Turner attended and participated in a week-long Midwest Collegium workshop at Lake Lawn Lodge in Delevan, WI on the Catholic intellectual tradition, the meaning of a Catholic University, and the differences in Jesuit, Benedictine and other traditions. Fr. David Turner was one of the organizers, and gave presentations on *lectio divina* (meditative praying of the Scriptures) and *opus Dei* (the Divine Office).

In Spring 2001, Fr. Philip Timko organized a faculty seminar on “The Catholic Intellectual Tradition”, reading Cernera and Morgan’s *Examining the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*. The participants were John Cicero, Mary Daly-Lewis, Pat Flynn, Joseph Herbst, Jim Ludema, Al Martin, Ralph Meeker, John Mickus, Sue Mikula, John Stachniak, Alicia Tait, Monica Tischler, Martin Tracey, and Fr. David.

In Spring 2002, Fr. Philip organized another faculty seminar on “The Catholic University and the Catholic Church”, reading *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and commentaries on it. This work followed from the previous year’s faculty seminar, and built upon the learning from it. The participants were About Hugh Anderson, Kevin Doyle, Julie Dugger, Pat Flynn, Jim Ludema, Ralph Meeker, John Mickus, Sue Mikula, Ethel Ragland, Dave Sonnenberger, Monica Tischler, Martin Tracey, and Fr. David.

In the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 academic years, various sometimes cooperating campus groups and a brand-management company worked on the University’s vision, which ultimately included the phrase “a Catholic University in the Benedictine Tradition”.

In the 2002-2003 academic year, Fr. Philip and Alicia Tait chaired Focus Group 1, a subgroup of the Benedictine University Vision Taskforce, in investigating how to enhance the reality behind the statement that Benedictine University is a “Catholic University in the Benedictine Tradition”. This work followed from the previous years’ faculty seminars, and built upon the learning from them. Focus Group 1 produced a statement on the Catholic character of the University which was approved by the Board of Trustees and is now included in the University catalogs. The participants were Keara Conness, Kevin Doyle, Ralph Meeker, Jon Miller, Sue Mikula, Laura Sramek, Monica Tischler, Bernie Toussaint, Martin Tracey, and Fr. David.

In the 2003-2004 academic year, Kevin Doyle organized and led a team in assessing Benedictine University vis-à-vis the expectations of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and preparing recommended action areas. This work followed from the previous years’ faculty seminars and Focus Group 1’s work, and built upon the learning from them. The participants were Abbot Hugh, Ralph Meeker, Martin Tracey, and Fr. David.

In the 2003-2004 academic year Bill Carroll shared this assessment with Bishop Imesch and Cardinal George and the presidents of other Chicago area Catholic colleges and universities.

In the 2003-2004 academic year, Fr. Philip Timko and Alicia Tait chaired Focus Group 1, a subgroup of the Benedictine University Vision Taskforce, in investigating how to enhance the reality behind the statement that Benedictine University is a “Catholic University in the Benedictine Tradition”. This work followed from the previous years’ faculty seminars, and built upon the learning from them. Participants were Keara Conness, Kevin Doyle, Ralph Meeker, Sue Mikula, Jon Miller, Laura Sramek, Monica Tischler, Bernie Toussaint, Martin Tracey, and Fr. David Turner. This group was transformed (essentially by fiat) to an AQIP group. Focus Group 1 formally endorsed the recommendations of the “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and Its Application to Benedictine University” group.

In the 2004-2005 academic year, Kevin Doyle and Alicia Tait are chairing Focus Group 1. The participants are Keara Conness, Joan Hopkins, Isobel Lobo, Ralph Meeker, Sue Mikula, Jon Miller, Laura Sramek, Fr. Philip Timko, Monica Tischler, Bernie Toussaint, Martin Tracey, and Fr. David Turner.

In the 2004-2005 academic year, the “*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and Its Application to Benedictine University” group is working with Bill Carroll, Charlie Gregory and Dan Julius to assist them in implementing the recommendations from the group.