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**THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND
AND ITS CATHOLIC CHARACTER**

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On August 15, 1990, Pope John Paul II issued the apostolic letter *Ex corde ecclesiae* on Catholic universities and initiated a decade of sometimes anguished discussion and negotiation on the degree to which the letter and the norms for its application would apply to Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States. At the heart of the issue is the question, "What makes a university Catholic?"

In the United States - where most of the world's Catholic universities are to be found - and perhaps elsewhere in the world as well, Catholic universities and colleges, since the foundation of the first one, Georgetown College, by Bishop John Carroll in 1789, have come into being as schools to serve the educational needs of the Catholic community rather than to fulfill some plan as to what makes such an institution Catholic. To be sure, patterns of education developed in Europe were imported into the United States and a philosophy of Catholic education was developed as time went on. But in their beginnings, most institutions that called themselves "Catholic" did so because they were founded by Catholics for Catholics and for whomever else might want to take advantage of what they had to offer.

In trying to identify what constitute the distinguishing characteristics of a Catholic institution of higher education, it should be helpful to understand how particular colleges and universities have identified themselves as "Catholic" in the course of their history. This paper will examine how the University of Portland, known as Columbia University until 1935, has identified itself as a Catholic institution during the first ninety-nine years of its existence. Since the question of the University's Catholic identity was either taken

for granted or never raised for much of its history, statements in the annual catalog or bulletin will constitute much of the documentary evidence as to how the institution understood itself to be Catholic.

The University was founded in 1901 by Archbishop Alexander Christie of Oregon City, Oregon. Christie had arrived in his new see in June 1899 to find that there was no institution under Catholic auspices in Portland, Oregon's largest city, for boys who wished to continue their education beyond parochial school. He resolved to remedy the situation and in the summer of 1901 he acquired a building and twenty-eight acres that had belonged to a defunct Methodist school on the north side of the city. The initial faculty was cobbled together from "an exiled missionary from China, three seminarians, and an attending physician" plus a layman who had graduated from Notre Dame and two diocesan priests. The president was Father E.P. Murphy, the pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Portland and a former Holy Cross priest, who had served as president of St. Edward's College in Austin, Texas, in 1894-1895. Fifty-two boys showed up on opening day, September 5, 1901. By December, there were almost twice that number in attendance.¹

Archbishop Christie's resources in both money and personnel were quite limited and within three months, by November of 1901, he was negotiating with the Congregation of Holy Cross to take over the school. By December of 1901 an agreement had been reached and the first contingent of four Holy Cross religious arrived in Portland in May 1902 to prepare for the following academic year. The Congregation of Holy Cross owned and operated the university from 1902 until 1967, when the assets and direction of the university were confided to a Board of Regents under a deed in trust

¹ James T. Covert, *A Point of Pride: The University of Portland Story* (Portland, Oregon: University of Portland Press, 1976), 34.

which specified that the institution was to maintain its Catholic character or revert to the Congregation.²

The Foundational Years, 1901-1929

While everyone knew that Columbia University had been founded by the local Roman Catholic archbishop and was staffed mostly by Holy Cross priests and brothers, the earliest catalogs seldom used the word "Catholic". The opening statement informed the reader that Archbishop Christie, the founder, had made of Columbia "a generous gift to a community of educators whose success in the management of Catholic boarding schools is altogether unrivaled...."³ This statement was unchanged for the first six years, but in the 1907-1908 *Catalogue*, the word "Catholic" was dropped and the statement was changed to read, "The institution is conducted by the Congregation of Holy Cross, a religious body of men devoted to the higher education and Christian training of young men."⁴ Catalogs for the early years also repeated verbatim a notice that "graded courses in Christian Doctrine are presented for all Catholic students and for others who desire to take such instruction."⁵ The catalog for 1910-1911 was the first to list a Prefect of Religion, the forerunner of today's campus ministry.⁶

Under "Rules of Discipline," the first catalog had declared that, "Students of all religious denominations are received, and they are all required to attend divine service in the University Chapel at stated times."⁷ "Divine service" was not identified as Catholic, but there is no evidence that the service was of any other kind. The 1907-1908 catalog also changed the wording of this prescription slightly to say that although students of all

² Ibid., 2-5, 216.

³ *Columbia University Catalogue, 1902-1903* (Portland: Columbia University, 1902), 6.

⁴ *Catalogue, 1907-1908*, 7.

⁵ *Catalogue, 1902-1903*, 10.

denominations were received, "the University is nevertheless a strictly Catholic institution."⁸ Apparently, Columbia was beginning to attract some students of other denominations because the catalog of 1914-1915 amended the preamble of the section on "Discipline" to read, "The institution is strictly Roman Catholic but admits students of other denominations and respects their conscientious beliefs," and went on to note that Columbia's "underlying principle...is the combination of secular training with positive religious instruction in a constant religious atmosphere."⁹ The 1914-1915 *Catalogue* also dropped the rule on compulsory attendance at chapel, but the *Catalogue* of 1922-1923 restored it "for the sake of good order."¹⁰

After the First World War, Columbia underwent a transformation from a middle and secondary school into a junior college in 1921 and a four-year college in 1927. This was a decade when there was much anti-Catholic bias and Klan activity in Oregon. The catalogs continued to state bluntly that Columbia was a Catholic school and that the great majority of the students were Catholics.¹¹

The Middle Years, 1930-1955

During the years of the Great Depression and into the mid-1950s, many non-Catholic students enrolled at the school, which for most of those years was the only university in the city of Portland. By the fall term of 1933, non-Catholics constituted one-third of the student body. In the fall of 1939, they were about forty percent. In 1941, the president reported that the students were "a few more non-Catholic than Catholic." In the autumn of 1951, the enrollment statistics showed forty-six percent of the students as

⁶ *Catalogue, 1910-1911*, 4.

⁷ Rule #7, p. 9.

⁸ *Catalogue, 1907-1908*, Rule #8, p. 10.

⁹ *Catalogue, 1914-1915*, 14-15.

non-Catholic.¹² The self-descriptive language of the university bulletins in these years reflects the changes in the student body.

The statement that the university was “a strictly Catholic institution”, first introduced in the *Catalogue* of 1914-1915, was completely revised for the 1933-1934 *Bulletin*. A statement on the “Origin and Purpose” of the university declared that Archbishop Christie had founded the school as an “establishment of a school of higher learning under the direction of Catholic authority for the young men of Oregon and principally to satisfy the needs of the city of Portland.”¹³ This somewhat neutral statement of purpose was mitigated by the section on “The Department of Religion” wherein the reader was informed that Columbia was “a Catholic institution whose primary purpose is the inculcating of Catholic ideals, thought and practice during the period that the student is acquiring that secular knowledge which will prepare him to take his proper place in the world.” However, non-Catholic students were assured that they were required to attend “neither the religious exercises nor the classes in Religion prescribed for the Catholic students.”¹⁴ This exemption was printed in bold in the *Bulletin* of 1935-1936.¹⁵

The university *Bulletin* published in the spring of 1941 revised the statements of origin and purpose, replacing the word “Catholic” with “Christian.”¹⁶ In 1949, this

¹⁰ *Catalogue*, 1922-1923, 6.

¹¹ Covert, 64-65, 73.

¹² Louis Kelley to James Burns, October 3, 1933, in Papers of the Provincial Administration of James A. Burns, Indiana Province Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana. Michael Early to Thomas Steiner, November 6, 1939, and Charles Miltner to Thomas Steiner, September 29, 1941, in Papers of the Provincial Administration of Thomas Steiner, Indiana Province Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana. Enrollment Statistics, 1st semester, 1951-1952, in Papers of the Provincial Administration of Theodore J. Mehling, Indiana Province Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana.

¹³ *Bulletin of Columbia University*, 1933-1934 (Portland, January 1934), 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵ *Bulletin of The University of Portland*, 1935-1936 (April 1936), 22.

¹⁶ *Bulletin*, 1940-1941 (April 1941), 18.

statement was entitled "History and Purpose" and was revised to note that Archbishop Christie, the founder, had given the university to the Congregation of Holy Cross, "a Catholic religious society of men dedicated to the work of Christian education."¹⁷

The 1950-1951 edition of the *Bulletin* introduced a statement on "Religious Life" under the general heading of "Student Welfare and Activity," which dealt with a variety of matters, e.g. discipline, health, guidance, etc. This was the statement quoted above that had appeared under "The Department of Religion" in the 1933-1934 *Bulletin* and asserted that the university was "a Catholic institution." The revision added that it prepared students for participation in their home parish and in "the broader activities of the Church" after graduation.¹⁸ This latter statement was revised in February 1952 to reflect that fact that the University of Portland, while still "a Catholic institution," was a pluralist institution with many students who were not Catholics.¹⁹

Thus, during these years the University of Portland was struggling to say in just what way it was a Catholic institution. In effect, there were two tracks in the university, one for Catholics, who were required in the early years to attend chapel and at all times to take religion courses, and one for non-Catholics, who had never been required to take the religion courses and after 1933 were not required to attend chapel. The university was Catholic in that it offered but did not require of all its students the study of theology and that it was under the direction of a Catholic religious community. There were also many Holy Cross priests and brothers on the faculty and many lay Catholic faculty members who constituted a Catholic presence on the campus. This model of what it meant to be a Catholic university would be severely tested in the next twenty-five years.

¹⁷ *Bulletin*, 1949-1950 (May 1949), 20.

¹⁸ *Bulletin*, 1950-1951 (April 1950), 26.

The Ecumenical University, 1955-1978

A significant era for the University of Portland began in 1955 when Rev. Howard Kenna was appointed as president of the institution. Kenna brought with him from Holy Cross College in Washington, D.C., his assistant, Father Paul Waldschmidt. Together they would preside over the university for the next twenty-three years. The university had undergone a severe financial crisis in the years 1950-1955 and its survival was in doubt when the Kenna-Waldschmidt team took over. Under their leadership it would cease to be owned by the Congregation of Holy Cross and it would come close to dropping its identity as a Catholic university.

Kenna inaugurated an ambitious building program with the help of government loans and a few benefactors and Waldschmidt continued it when he became president in 1962 after Kenna was elected provincial superior of the Indiana Province. The new buildings vastly improved the school's facilities, but they also resulted in a large debt that would lead to a financial crisis in 1970-1971. In 1967, the Indiana Province legally separated itself from the two institutions of higher education with which it was associated, the universities of Notre Dame and Portland.

Notre Dame was in the midst of a successful expansion, but Portland was struggling financially. Fearing that the University of Portland could not survive in the Pacific Northwest as a Catholic institution, Waldschmidt proposed to create an ecumenical university on the Canadian model. The University of Portland would become a degree granting body with which various church-related colleges, Catholic and Protestant, would be affiliated. Had Waldschmidt been able to persuade other schools in the region to affiliate with the University of Portland, such an arrangement might have

¹⁹ *Bulletin*, 1952-1953 (February 1952), 18.

come to pass. As it turned out, there were no takers, and Walschmidt left the presidency in 1978 to become auxiliary bishop of Portland with his plan unrealized.

The move toward the ecumenical university can be traced in the statements in the University's official *Bulletin* in which it describes itself. An earlier statement on "History and Purpose" describing the University of Portland as "a Catholic institution"²⁰ was replaced in 1966 with a statement on "Aims and Objectives" that described the school as an "independent, Catholic, cosmopolitan, coeducational, campus-centered institution." In the explanation that followed for each of these characteristics, the University was said to be "Catholic" in terms of the opportunities that it provided for Catholic students.²¹

The September 1971 edition of the *Bulletin* dropped the word "Catholic" from this list of characteristics altogether, but added a paragraph under "Independent" that said that a "special characteristic" of the University was that it recognized "the study of theology as a valid academic discipline and as an integral part of the body of knowledge which the fully educated person should possess." The word "Catholic" never appeared in this paragraph. In a section on the "Special Objectives of the Undergraduate Curriculum" it was stated, "In sum, to develop within a Judaeo-Christian context, a full knowledge of man as man in all his relationships to himself, to his society, and to God."²² This edition of the *Bulletin* purged any reference to the University of Portland as a Catholic institution or having a Catholic connection other than the note that many students came from Catholic families.²³ This statement on "Aims and Objectives" was unchanged until 1977

²⁰ *Bulletin*, 1957-1958 / 1958-1959 (February 1957), 26.

²¹ *Bulletin*, 1966-1967 / 1967-1968 (September 1966), 3.

²² *Bulletin*, 1971-1972 / 1972-1973 (September 1971), 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

when the phrase "Roman Catholic in tradition" was added to the list of characteristics, although it was not explained.²⁴

In the early 1970s, the University's campus ministry was described in ecumenical terms with a proviso that Catholic students could attend Mass daily and on Sundays. In 1976 a phrase was added to the effect that "a special chapel is provided for students of other religious affiliation."²⁵ The Theology Department dropped the words "Catholic Theology" from the department's statement of objectives in the 1970 *Bulletin* but nine credit hours in theology were now to be required of all students, Catholic and non-Catholic: Introduction to Theology for first-year students, Judaeo-Christian Culture for second-year students, and a third course to be chosen from the electives offered.²⁶ Thus, the ecumenical university, while dropping "Catholic" from its identity, made the study of theology an obligation for all.

Oregon's Catholic University, 1978-2000

Paul Waldschmidt was succeeded as president in 1978 by Brother Raphael Wilson, C.S.C., and the attempt to create an ecumenical university quietly came to an end. The new president stated at his inauguration, "At a Catholic university, Catholicism must be perceptively present and effectively operative. This includes sound ecumenical activities consistent with making the university really Catholic, in the true meaning of the word."²⁷

The word "Catholic" began to work its way back into the University's *Bulletin*. The Summer 1980 edition of the *Bulletin* revised the statement on "Aims and Objectives"

²⁴ *Bulletin*, 1977 (September 1977), 27.

²⁵ *Bulletin*, 1976 (September 1976), 33.

²⁶ *Bulletin*, 1970-1971/1971-1972 (September 1970), 55.

²⁷ *University of Portland Alumni Bulletin* (May 1979), 3.

so that it now began, "The University of Portland is a Catholic, co-educational institution...." Theology would still be required of all students, and the task of the college theology program was said to be "the academic study of the sources, teachings, values and traditions of Christianity, in Catholic and ecumenical perspective."²⁸ The 1982 *Bulletin* expanded this opening statement to say that the University was "a Catholic university open to students of all races, nationalities and religions...(following) the Judaeo-Christian tradition."²⁹

Several other events in the 1980s underscored the change in the University of Portland's identity that was under way. In an address to the faculty in January 1980, President Wilson noted that "private witness is not what defines a Catholic university. By definition a Catholic university must be a corporate moral person committed totally to the mission of the church...." He went on to announce that faculty contracts would henceforth be more specific in this regard. "Faculty," he said, "need to be more fully aware of the nature of the expectations of their institution. There is an obligation imposed with the recognition of the Catholic nature of the University of Portland.... This essentially means that in doctrinal matters, the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church prevails."³⁰

A second event that underscored the University's reclaiming of its Catholic character was the construction in 1987 of the Chapel of Christ the Teacher at the south end of the academic quadrangle on the campus. The building of a university church had long been a project of several Holy Cross religious who had begun to raise money for a Chapel Fund that was not under the control of the University administration. The

²⁸ *Bulletin*, 1980 (Summer 1980), 3, 65.

²⁹ *Bulletin*, 1982 (Summer 1982), 1.

Waldschmidt administration had opposed building a Catholic church on the campus, but Wilson supported the project and engaged a well-known Portland architect, Pietro Belluschi, to design the building. Wilson's successor, Rev. Thomas Oddo, C.S.C., saw the project to completion.

When a new president, Rev. David Tyson, C.S.C., was inaugurated in 1990, following Oddo's tragic death in an auto accident, he was in a position to not only assert but also to aggressively market the University of Portland as a Catholic university. The edition of the *Bulletin* that appeared in the summer of 1990 carried a mission statement for the first time. It began with the words, "The University of Portland is an independently governed Catholic university...."³¹ The new president informed the faculty that his goal was to make the University of Portland "the premier Catholic teaching university in the West." The following year, the motto, "Oregon's Catholic University," began to appear on all the University's literature and promotional material. Despite the strong reassertion of the institution's Catholic connection, forty-nine percent of the student body were not Catholics in the fall of 1999.³²

Thus, although it backed away from identifying itself as a Catholic university in the late 1960s and for most of the 1970s in hopes of insuring its survival, the University of Portland reverted to an ever more overt identification of itself as Catholic in the 1980s and 1990s. In so doing, it may just have found its niche in the market in its part of the country. Is it a Catholic university, though?

The University of Portland's mission statement identifies it as a Catholic university. The president, the vice presidents and four of six deans are Catholics.

³⁰ *The Beacon* (University of Portland), January 17, 1980: 1.

³¹ *Bulletin*, 1990-1991 (Summer 1990), 1.

Although information on the religious affiliation of faculty members is not available, fifty-one percent of the students identify themselves as Catholics. The study of theology is required of all students. Pastoral ministry by Catholic clergy and laity is provided for the university community. The average observer would probably perceive the University of Portland as a Catholic institution, even though all the specific requirements of *Ex corde ecclesiae* may not be satisfied.

George Bernard Shaw once quipped that a Catholic university is a contradiction in terms. Therein lies Portland's quandry: too Catholic to be a university by Shaw's reckoning; too independent as a university to be Catholic by the pope's standard.

³² *Upbeat* (University of Portland), November 1, 1999: 1.